

PAKISTAN-AFGHANISTAN Relations

A Pakistani Narrative



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Printed in Pakistan

Published: March 2011

ISBN: 978-969-558-210-7

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Published by



Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency - PILDAT
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Abbreviations & Acronyms

APTTA	Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
GDP	Gross Domestic Production
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organisation
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Countries
MPs	Members of Parliaments
NWFP	North-West Frontier Province
PTV	Pakistan Television
PoR	Proof of Registration
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission on Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

PREFACE

Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: a Pakistani Perspective, a paper authored by **Mr. Rahim Ullah Yousafzai**, Executive Editor, The NEWS International at Peshawar bureau and a prolific writer on security issues, provides an overview of the state of Pak-Afghan Relations and analyses different issues that affect the relations between two Islamic neighbouring states. Some of the issues covered in the paper include terrorism, narcotics control, water resources issues, media and Afghan refugees, etc. as well as provide an overview of some promising developments in the context of relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

This paper has been especially commissioned by PILDAT to serve as a background to Pakistan-Afghanistan Parliamentarians Dialogue.

Acknowledgements

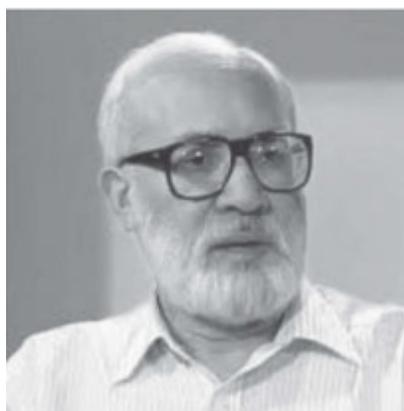
PILDAT would like to acknowledge the support provided by the British High Commission, Islamabad in publishing this paper.

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Islamabad
March 2011

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Introduction

The Pakistan-Afghanistan Parliamentarians Dialogue is taking place at a time when the governments of the two countries are preparing to implement a landmark agreement to facilitate the transit trade largely meant to meet the needs of landlocked Afghanistan via Pakistan.

Though the new Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) did not come into effect on February 12, 2011 as planned, this would happen sooner rather than later. It is indeed a positive development in the sometimes uncertain relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The agreement became possible after months of negotiations backed by the United States of America. It showed that the two neighbouring Islamic countries were capable of overcoming differences and resolving issues that bedevil their relations. The APTTA came in place of the 1965 Afghan Transit Trade Agreement, which needed improvements due to the changed situation after serving the needs of the traders and the two governments for over four decades. Like the Indus Waters Treaty that has benefited both India and Pakistan for years despite their troubled relations, the APTTA and the earlier agreement on the Afghan transit trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan are inspiring examples of mutually beneficial accords.

However, successes in achieving the full potential of the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have been few and far between. While a few long-standing issues continue to haunt the governments and people of the two countries, new ones have been added to the list over a period of time. It would be prudent to highlight those issues because ignoring the disputes could make them intractable and let off the pressure on the two governments to try and find workable solutions.

History of Relationship

Afghanistan and undivided India had historic ties since ancient times. When British India was partitioned in 1947, the independent Islamic Republic of Pakistan became a neighbour of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Fate and geography brought the old and the new state together. As they say, you can change friends but cannot change neighbours. Their multiple trade and economic ties and the largely free movement across the 2,560-kilometres long Durand Line border were further evidence of the unbreakable nature of the bonds of friendship between the

people of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Afghan President Hamid Karzai's memorable description of the two countries as conjoined twins aptly explained that the two countries are inseparable and are thus required to co-exist.

Beyond their geographical closeness, Afghanistan and Pakistan also share history, religion, culture and certain races and languages. They have had a troubled relationship at times, but have nevertheless managed to overcome disputes and maintain un-interrupted political, diplomatic and trade ties.

Many Pakistanis cannot forget the fact that Afghanistan was the only country in the world to oppose Pakistan's membership in the United Nations after becoming an independent state. But it is also a fact and many Pakistanis remember with gratitude that Afghanistan gave no cause of concern to Pakistan during its three (3) wars with India. In fact, during the 1965 war, Kabul gave an assurance to Islamabad not to worry about its western border with Afghanistan.

Trade Ties

Statistics may not fully explain the depth and the unavoidable nature of Pak-Afghan relations, but certain figures would be useful to quote for highlighting the benefits of this relationship for the two countries. (Some of these figures were mentioned by Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan, Mohammad Sadiq Khan).

1. Pakistan continues to be the largest trading partner of Afghanistan.
2. On its part, Afghanistan is the third largest export market for Pakistani goods after the US and China.
3. In the financial year 2010, Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan reached US \$ 1.2 billion.
4. For 2011, Pakistan is hoping to export goods worth US \$ 1.7 billion and is well on course to achieving the figure as the exports in the six-month period from July 2010 to January 2011 have already reached US \$ 875 million.
5. The big increase in Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan could be judged from the fact that goods worth US \$ 26 million only were exported in 2001 when the Taliban were in power.

Pakistan is far ahead of other neighbouring countries in terms of exports to Afghanistan. Iran is distant second with annual exports of US \$ 600 million. Due to proximity with

Afghanistan and familiarity of its products used by the Afghans, Pakistan enjoys an edge over countries competing for the Afghan market. In particular, the Afghans who migrated to Pakistan due to the Afghan conflict became accustomed to Pakistani products.

If one were to include the unofficial exports from Pakistan to Afghanistan, the annual trade figures for both formal and informal trade would be around US \$ 4 billion. Efforts to regulate the border trade could increase the official trade figures and bring more revenue to the public exchequer in both countries.

Hosting Refugees

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan at one time hosted almost five million Afghan refugees. There have been different stages of influx of migrating Afghans into Pakistan and repatriation of the refugees to Afghanistan. Presently, there are around 1.7 million registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan and, according to most estimates, another one million unregistered ones. The Afghan refugees have enjoyed an unprecedented freedom of movement and work and are to be found in all four provinces and even in the federal capital, Islamabad, and Azad Kashmir.

One is yet to come across a similar example in the world that such a large number of refugees have lived in peace for so long in a host country. It was and still is a remarkable example of goodwill and tolerance for uprooted people even though the presence of so many Afghan refugees in Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), has been a burden on the already scarce local resources and civic services. Some of the Afghan refugees' camps are now being used to accommodate Pakistanis displaced by the conflict in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA.

Travel Ties

Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan are unique and could be judged from a few more facts:

1. Around 50,000 Afghans enter Pakistan daily without any travel documents via the Torkham and Chaman border towns, the two official crossing points on the long and porous Pak-Afghan border.
2. Besides, Pakistan's embassy in Kabul and its consulates in Jalalabad, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif and

Kandahar on a daily basis issue 1,200 multiple-entry visas to Afghans. There is no other country to which the Afghans travel in such large numbers with or without visas.

It is not strictly a one-way traffic because a large number of Pakistanis, mostly tribal people living in the border areas, are able to cross over to Afghanistan without visas. And in recent years, over 70,000 Pakistanis have found well-paid jobs due to the construction boom and reconstruction projects in Afghanistan. It is probably the first time that people from the subcontinent, or Pakistan to be precise, are going to Afghanistan for employment and not always the other way round.

Route to Central Asia

That the situation has undergone a change is also borne out by the fact that Pakistan is now in need of the overland route via Afghanistan to do trade with the Central Asian states. In the past, landlocked Afghanistan needed to use the overland route through Pakistan to reach the Karachi seaport and the Arabian Sea and conduct trade with India and beyond. Afghanistan certainly is still dependent on Pakistan for bulk of its transit trade. But Pakistan too needs Afghanistan to reach out to the Central Asian republics for trade and commerce.

Terrorism

Pakistan continued to suffer from violence in 2010 even though the militant attacks registered an 11 per cent decrease compared to the previous year. Still there were 2113 acts of terrorism linked to religious, sectarian and ethnic militancy in which 2913 people were killed in 2010, according to a report released by the Islamabad-based think-tank, Pak Institute for Peace Studies.

A recent report prepared by military and civil authorities in Pakistan said 9,147 people were killed and 18,343 sustained injuries to date in acts of violence in the ongoing "war on terror" operations and terrorist attacks. Among the dead were 5,520 civilians, 2883 soldiers, 666 policemen and 78 employees of Pakistan's premier spy organization, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The list does not include the militants killed in operations carried out by the security forces.

The situation was even worse in neighbouring Afghanistan where a count based on official figures released by the

Interior Ministry and an independent website tally showed that more than 10,000 people, about a fifth of them civilians, lost their lives in 2010. Obviously, Afghanistan and its people have suffered much more because the conflict there has been longer compared to the one in Pakistan where violence registered a sharp increase in 2003-2004 when Pakistan's security forces launched operations against homegrown militants and their 'guest fighters' associated with al-Qaeda and belonging to a number of countries.

The above figures may not fully explain the gravity of the situation that Afghanistan and Pakistan are facing, though it can help understand the intensity and complexity of the problem. The fact that this violence has a transnational character transcending the mostly unguarded borders between the two countries reinforces the need for jointly tackling the challenge. However, past grievances and mutual suspicions have kept Islamabad and Kabul from cooperating on issues critical to their security and well-being and realizing the full potential of their relationship.

Rocky Relations

Afghanistan and Pakistan are both Islamic republics and part of a number of international and regional organizations including OIC, SAARC and ECO. However, their relations have been troubled by issues such as the Durand Line border, Pakhtunistan, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan's support for the Afghan mujahideen and the Taliban, the ongoing conflict in the Af-Pak region involving world and regional powers and non-state actors such as al-Qaeda, Taliban and jihadi groups, the low-level insurgency in Balochistan and India's role in Afghanistan. At times the acrimony in their relationship is subdued as is the case nowadays, but tensions resurface in the event of a major act of terror when accusing fingers are pointed at real or perceived perpetrators of such crimes.

In context of past grievances, the problem is rooted in Afghanistan's support for Pakhtunistan, which was to be carved out from Pakistan as a state for the Pakhtun people inhabiting Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), now renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan. The Afghan Government's opposition to newly independent Pakistan's membership in the United Nations was also on account of its argument that the Pakhtuns, and also the Baloch, were not given the right to decide their future at the time of the independence from British rule and the partitioning of India. Successive Afghan

governments, including those led by the pro-Pakistan Afghan mujahideen and Taliban who ruled the country during the 1990s, never formally recognized the Durand Line border between the two countries. The border has not been demarcated at a few places and on occasions the Afghan and Pakistani border guards have clashed due to disputes on the status of the boundary and other divisive issues. Luckily though, the occasional border skirmishes never got out of hand to cause any major act of hostility by either country.

Though the Pak-Afghan border is a reality, Afghanistan has yet to formally recognize the Durand Line as an official border between the two countries. President Karzai was once quoted as saying that the border was "a line of hatred that raised a wall between the two brothers." The Taliban also declined to endorse the border and some of their leaders used to remark that there should be no borders between Muslims. Pakistan, on the other hand, considers the issue closed because it believes the Durand Line is an international boundary between the two countries. The Pakhtunistan issue never enjoyed any popular support among Pakistan's Pakhtun population and has receded from public memory over the years. The Durand Line issue also is not a hot topic as it becomes topical on occasions such as the one when the then Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf's proposal for mining and fencing the border to prevent infiltration of militants into Afghanistan met strong resistance not only from the Afghan side but also by nationalist politicians in Pakistan and tribal people in FATA.

The issue of cross-border infiltration of Taliban and other militants from Pakistan has become a major irritant in Pak-Afghan relations. To it has been added Pakistan's allegation that fighters and weapons from Afghanistan are entering Pakistan and destabilizing its tribal areas. Pakistan is also increasingly concerned over the presence of Pakistani Baloch separatists in Afghanistan under the protection of the Afghan Government. Many Afghans suspect that Pakistan's support for the Taliban is part of its design to install a government of its choice in Kabul. Though this theory is now largely discredited, there also still many who believe that Pakistani military viewed Afghanistan as providing "strategic depth" in the event of war with India.

Pakistan needs to allay Afghanistan's concerns on these issues and also with regard to Kabul's allegations that the Afghan Taliban use sanctuaries in Pakistan's tribal areas and Balochistan to launch attacks in Afghanistan. Tackling al-Qaeda, however, is an international concern and it

cannot be accomplished alone by Islamabad, Kabul or their other allies.

There are other irritants as well in Pak-Afghan relationship. Pakistan is concerned about the growing Indian influence in Afghanistan and has often complained about the use of Afghan soil by New Delhi to destabilize Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, where Islamic militants and Baloch nationalists are challenging the writ of the state. In the past it was worried that the Northern Alliance, which was made up of Afghan warlords and politicians known for their hostility to Pakistan, monopolized power in the Afghan Government until President Karzai started sidelining its leadership. There is no love lost between Pakistan and components of the now disbanded Northern Alliance.

The issue of the Afghan transit trade through overland routes in Pakistan continues to cause friction when containers and trucks bound for Afghanistan are held up at Karachi seaport as was the case recently or goods are smuggled back into Pakistan causing it revenue losses and damaging its industry. Demands by both Kabul and New Delhi that Islamabad should allow Indian goods to pass overland through Pakistan to Afghanistan is a new addition to the contentious issues concerning the Afghan transit trade.

Then there is the long-standing issue of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Islamabad wants the refugees to be repatriated but it cannot force them to leave as such a move would cause adverse reaction worldwide. Donors are no longer helping Pakistan to share the burden that the Afghan refugees are exerting on its economy. Another concern in Islamabad is Kabul's patronage for Pakistani tribal elders as a counterweight to Islamabad's support to Afghan dissidents.

However, all these irritants are the fallout of the mistrust that has characterized the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It would be easier to overcome the distrust and resolve most of these issues once the excellent people-to-people contacts between the Afghan and Pakistani people are used to build and strengthen the official relations. Lately, Pakistan has done well to invest in the Afghan people and undertake projects for the welfare of the common man. It has also taken steps to befriend all Afghans instead of a particular ethnic group. Pakistan now needs to play a greater role to help bring the Afghan conflict to an end because it would benefit the most if Afghanistan becomes a peaceful and stable country.

Narcotics Control

Though Afghanistan and Pakistan have agreed to carry out joint operations to crack down on drug-trafficking, the two governments and their narcotics control authorities have not really done enough to cooperate on the ground. Meetings have been held at the ministerial level and below and decisions have been taken in coordination with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), but implementation has not proceeded at the desired level. A 12-point declaration was issued at one such meeting between the counter-narcotics ministers of the two countries 2010 to enhance cooperation and carry out simultaneous operations to tackle drug-traffickers. At the time, officials were hoping to conduct joint operations every two months, but no dates were given and the process has yet to begin.

Afghanistan and Pakistan already carry out separate operations with Iran to counter drug-trafficking. A regional approach for tackling the challenge has also been discussed and stressed. In fact, Afghanistan is the pivot in the narcotics issue because it produces more than 90 per cent of the world's opium from which heroin is manufactured and much of these drugs are smuggled through Pakistan and Iran. Cooperation and joint operations involving the three countries would be, therefore, vital in controlling the narcotics trade and trafficking.

Afghanistan's narcotics industry has been variously estimated to be worth almost three billion dollars and it is often alleged that the war-ravaged country was on course to becoming a narco-state in case remedial measures are not taken.

Studies have claimed that narcotics account for 30 per cent of the GDP in Afghanistan. The nexus between drugs and crime is not only weakening state control but also enabling drug-traffickers, Taliban militants and other insurgents and criminal groups to forge relationships that threaten the stability of Afghanistan and the neighbouring states.

Though precise figures are not available, a third of Afghanistan's opium is stated to pass through Pakistan to cater to local needs and for onward smuggling to lucrative markets in other countries. Pakistan managed some years ago to bring down its poppy-cultivation to almost zero level through constant and often painful efforts as it meant depriving farmers of a major source of livelihood without providing them enough alternative earning opportunities, a

recurrence of the problem is being reported in certain border areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and the FATA primarily due to the low-level insurgency and weakening of the state's writ.

Fresh campaigns to eliminate the standing poppy crop were recently launched and success achieved without encountering much resistance. However, the fact remains that the Afghan opium and heroin pose the biggest challenge to Pakistan as it does not have the means and the resources to plug the smuggling routes across its long border with Afghanistan.

Weak enforcement measures in Pakistan and sometimes the connivance and even involvement of government officials in facilitating drug-trafficking also pose challenges and so do the rising domestic demand for drugs due to an increase in the number of addicts. Drugs have a direct impact on the security in Afghanistan and its neighbourhood because the opium and heroin trade is a source of funding for armed opposition groups, warlords and criminals defying state authority.

Water Resources Issues

Presently, there is no water treaty between Afghanistan and Pakistan even though they share the waters of the river Kabul. Pakistan's case is unique in context of the river Kabul because one of its major tributaries known as Kunar River originates in its Chitral district and then flows into Afghanistan's eastern Kunar province. Thus Pakistan has the status of both upper and lower riparian. Afghanistan, on the other hand, is the middle riparian.

Afghans, however, may insist that Afghanistan is the upper riparian because the river Kabul flows into Pakistan downstream of Jalalabad city and irrigates part of the fertile Peshawar valley before joining the river Indus near Khairabad and Attock.

There is concern in Pakistan about its share of waters from river Kabul once a more stable and peaceful Afghanistan is able to build dams on the Kabul River for irrigation and hydel-generation. Some Pakistani analysts have pointed out that absence of a water treaty between the two neighbouring countries would be more harmful for Pakistan because the upper riparian states enjoy the upper hand in sharing waters of joint basins in case of a conflict.

It would be in the interest of both Islamabad and Kabul to

focus on this issue before it gets out of hand so that Pakistan's historical rights on river Kabul are protected and Afghanistan is also enabled to benefit from the waters of this river. A Kabul River Waters Treaty in line with the spirit of the Indus Waters Treaty ought to be the goal of the two governments and for this purpose negotiations should be initiated sooner rather than later.

It has been suggested that the issue of sharing of Kabul River waters should be de-linked from the historic grievances harboured by Afghanistan and Pakistan against each other and also tackled separately from the matters of terrorism, militancy and border disputes because water-sharing concerns the agricultural economy and well-being of the people on both sides of the border.

As proper data about the flows of Kabul River particularly on the Afghanistan side is not available, the first step and also a confidence-building measure would be to jointly and preferably under international supervision study the trends of the water flows in the river.

On the Pakistan side, it has been reported that sharp decline in annual flows of Kabul River based on historical data was recorded. It could be due to climatic variability or changes, persistent drought or enhanced use of water by Afghanistan or in the Peshawar valley. Timely studies and corrective measures would help prevent a conflict on sharing of waters of river Kabul in future between the two basin states.

More importantly, the India factor should be kept out of the issue of river Kabul. There is already some concern that India, which has a dispute with Pakistan over damming of the river Indus in the Kashmir valley, was convincing and helping Afghanistan to build a dam on the river Kabul and also set up a hydro-electric project. Any such project affecting the flows of waters from river Kabul into Pakistan would have serious repercussions. Instead of interjecting India into the equation and causing concern in Pakistan, it would be wise to ask the United States to become involved in the matter and ensure that Afghanistan and Pakistan agree to joint management of the Kabul River Basin for mutual benefit.

Afghan Refugees

Pakistan is home to around 1.7 million registered Afghan refugees, mostly living in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces. However, there are also Afghan

refugees in Sindh and Punjab provinces and in Islamabad, the federal capital. Many refugees are still to be found in the FATA bordering Afghanistan even though almost all their camps in the tribal borderland were closed down in recent years due to security concerns and on account of reports that Afghan Taliban and their supporters were able to find refuge there. Some Afghans were forcibly removed from their makeshift homes in places close to Landikotal in the Khyber Agency.

Four major camps for Afghan refugees namely Katcha Garhi and Jallozai in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Jungle Pir Alizai and Girdi Jungle in Balochistan were closed down in recent years and their inmates returned to Afghanistan, relocated to other camps in Pakistan or settled in some city, town or village in the country. Many refugees complained that the Pakistan government pushed them out of the camps to force them to repatriate to Afghanistan.

Complaints of harassment by the Pakistani police are frequent, but more Afghan refugees come up with such complaints nowadays because the police and other law-enforcement agencies exercise greater powers now in view of the rise in acts of terrorism in Pakistan. Majority of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan now live outside the camps. Most Afghan refugees, more than 80 per cent according to past surveys, are Pashtuns.

The registered refugees are lawfully staying in Pakistan, which for more than three decades now has been hosting one of the world's largest refugee populations. The unregistered Afghan refugees, whose exact numbers are not known and could be around one million, are not legally staying in Pakistan, but there has not been any major crackdown to apprehend and send them back.

Pakistan has been generally generous in allowing the Afghans to cross over to Pakistan, stay in camps of their choice and live outside in the cities, towns and villages, move around the country and do business and find work. Pakistan's treatment of the Afghan refugees has been praised and termed much better when compared with Iran and other countries.

However, the challenge of finding a sustainable solution of the Afghan refugees' problem in Pakistan is compounded by the fact that Pakistan is not a signatory to the UN's 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees. Only in 2007 after the census and registration of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan was jointly carried out by the UNHCR and Pakistan government did the refugees become entitled to receive the

Proof of Registration (PoR) cards to legalize their stay in the country.

The Afghan conflict, which has become more serious and intractable in recent years, is another factor in prolonging the stay of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, displacing more Afghans and delaying rehabilitation and reconstruction activities.

Since 2002, the UNHCR has assisted 4.6 million Afghan refugees including 3.6 million from Pakistan and around one million from Iran to repatriate to Afghanistan. The voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan resumed in March 2011 from two centres in Peshawar and Quetta and would continue until October this year. As an added incentive and due to increased transportation costs, the UNHCR has raised to US \$ 150 per refugee the repatriation money that it is now giving to the returnees. The number of repatriating families has certainly dropped due to a host of factors including the rising insecurity in parts of Afghanistan and also on account of the fact that many Afghan refugees as a result of their long stay in Pakistan are doing well in the host country. Besides, many Afghan refugees in Pakistan have been termed as 'economic refugees' who do not have any incentive to return to Afghanistan. Also, the younger refugees were born in Pakistan and are more at home here than in Afghanistan.

The devastating summer floods in Pakistan in July-August 2010 also affected Afghan refugees as dozens of their camps and villages mostly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were submerged. According to the UNHCR, more than 12,000 dwellings in Afghan refugees' villages were washed away leaving almost 70,000 people homeless. In the Azakhel camp for Afghan refugees in Nowshera district, 23,000 families lost their homes. Many uprooted refugees preferred to repatriate to Afghanistan. Some of the camps vacated by Afghan refugees in recent years are now being used to accommodate the internally displaced persons (IDPs) uprooted from Pakistan's tribal areas, Malakand region and other districts due to militancy and military operations.

Under an agreement signed by Afghanistan, Pakistan and the UNHCR in March 2009, the Afghan refugees in Pakistan were allowed to stay until the end of 2012. The extension in the voluntary repatriation of the Afghan refugees from Pakistan was given keeping in view the situation in Afghanistan, which was overwhelmed by the return of a large number of refugees from abroad in recent years and

was finding it difficult to resettle and rehabilitate the returnees.

Parliament's Role

Though Members of Parliaments (MPs) from Afghanistan and Pakistan have exchanged visits and met at bilateral and international conferences in Kabul, Islamabad and other places, no real effort has been made to institutionalize their interaction to enable them to meet and exchange ideas regularly.

The Parliaments in Afghanistan and Pakistan have different life-spans and many MPs who met in the past and developed understanding are no longer members of the Parliament. Institutional arrangements would ensure that contacts between MPs remain intact on a regular basis. One effort was also made to bring together women parliamentarians from the two countries. Such initiatives should remain a one-time affair. The standing committees of the two Parliaments could forge more closer and meaningful cooperation on specific issues.

Media

There have been sporadic attempts to facilitate cooperation between the state media and journalists in Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, not much headway could be made on this count. In recent months, more organized efforts have been undertaken to initiate and strengthen cooperation between the private media of the countries, arrange trainings of journalists and organize visits of media persons. International organizations have played an important role in this context.

It is matter of concern that no Pakistani journalist is based in Afghanistan despite the fact that events in that country have major fallout on Pakistan. Neither the state nor the private media is willing to spend resources on keeping correspondents in Kabul. In fact, this was the case in the past as well and the Pakistani media always depended on the Western news agencies and correspondents for their coverage of happenings in Afghanistan. It is important to report Afghanistan from the Pakistani perspective and, by the same yardstick, cover Pakistan from the Afghan perspective by posting Afghan and Pakistani correspondents in the two countries.

Afghans fare better on this count because Afghan journalists who have lived and studied in Pakistan now

report for some of the Afghan television channels and cover happenings in Pakistan from their perspective. Afghan refugees who have repatriated and speak Urdu tend to watch Pakistani TV channels broadcasting in Urdu and Pashto and available in Afghanistan.

The Afghan TV channels broadcasting in Pashto and Dari (Afghan Persian) were available in the past in Pakistan, but they were closed down for not having PEMRA licensing.

The TV channels in the two countries should be facilitated instead of placing curbs on their broadcasts as a means of promoting better understanding among the Afghan and Pakistani people.

Conclusions

There are some bright and promising developments in context of relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Listed below are steps aimed at strengthening their ties and setting the stage for further cooperation.

1. The Afghan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) was inked in October 2010 by Pakistan's Commerce Minister Makhdoom Amin Fahim and Afghanistan's Anwarul Haq Ahadi. It is an improvement on an earlier agreement signed in 1965 and would provide access to landlocked Afghanistan to the outside world and facilitate Pakistan's overland trade links with the Central Asian states.
2. Afghanistan and Pakistan signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in July 2010 for building rail link between the two countries. There have been delays on this score as work on the project, which has been in the works since 2005, was to start in four months.
3. A joint chamber of commerce was set up by Afghan and Pakistan traders in November 2010.
4. Pakistan has granted around US \$ 330 million to Afghanistan for a number of reconstruction and development projects in education, health, communication and other sectors. Some of the important projects include the Jinnah Hospital Kabul, Sir Syed Post-Graduate Faculty of Sciences, Nangarhar University, Jalalabad, Liaquat Ali Khan Engineering Faculty, Balkh University, the Torkham-Jalalabad Road and Rahman Baba High School,

Kabul.

5. Pakistan is establishing an institute for management, business administration and faculty training in Afghanistan.
 6. Pakistan has offered assistance to Afghanistan in setting up new capacity building institutions and upgrading the existing ones.
 7. Afghanistan and Pakistan are considering creation of a food bank to strengthen food security and initiate joint research in agriculture and crop substitution programmes.
 8. The two countries have initiated dialogue on environmental issues to reduce the impact of climate change.
 9. Pakistan has doubled the number of scholarships for Afghan students in educational institutions in Pakistan from 1,000 to 2,000. Pakistani universities on an individual basis also offered new scholarships to Afghan students during a recent visit of deans and vice-chancellors of Afghanistan's universities to Pakistan. Besides, children of Afghan refugees in Pakistan continue to receive education in both public and private educational institutions.
 10. A number of initiatives have been taken to strengthen people-to-people contacts between the two countries and delegations of Afghan and Pakistani Parliamentarians, businessmen, poets and writers, academics and journalists have exchanged visits.
 11. The visas that Pakistan issues to Afghans on a daily basis are more than the rest of the world combined. No visa fee is charged from the Afghans. On an average Pakistan issues 1,200 multiple-entry visas to Afghans daily, while more than 50,000 Afghans also cross into Pakistan every day without any travel documents.
 12. According to a conservative estimate, more than 70,000 Pakistanis now work in Afghanistan. They include both skilled and unskilled workers, mostly working in the construction industry, and professional bankers, chartered accountants, IT experts and others.
 13. There are plans to set up a Silk Route CEO's Forum and Pakistan-Afghanistan Reconstruction Consortium to jointly use public and private sector corporate resources for reconstruction and development activities.
 14. Another ambitious plan is to establish a Joint Investment Company for undertaking development projects, particularly for exploiting the vast mineral and hydel potential in Afghanistan and Pakistan. If all goes well, economic and industrial zones would be set up.
 15. Pakistan has been offering to train Afghan military and police officers. Some headway is expected on this count if Afghanistan finally gives the go-ahead with regard to this offer.
 16. Pakistan's state-owned Pakistan Television (PTV) is collaborating with Afghanistan's state-run Ariana TV under an accord to establish close links between the electronic and print media of the two countries and promote cultural exchanges. Pakistani plays, music and other programmes would be telecast in Afghanistan with Pashto sub-titles.
 17. The Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS) and the Killid Group in Afghanistan have joined hands for enhancing bilateral media co-operation between the electronic and print media of Pakistan and Afghanistan and arrange training for journalists to improve the media's capacity to cover complex issues. The International Media Support (IMS) offered support and training expertise for the initiative, which was launched in a conference held in Kabul on February 21-22, 2011. An Advisory Board with seven members each from the two countries was formed to supervise the planned activities under this initiative.
- There have been other initiatives as well even though some are on paper and progress on most has been slow. There is great potential to make progress in every field to bring Afghanistan and Pakistan closer, but the biggest hurdle now is the lack of peace and security on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border. The conflict began in Afghanistan and spilled over to Pakistan. It is in the interest of both countries to jointly make efforts to bring the conflict to an end and ensure a better future for their coming generations.



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