

Pugwash Meeting no. 303

Jammu and Kashmir and the India-Pakistan Dialogue: The Prospects Ahead 11-14 December 2004, Kathmandu, Nepal

Media Coverage

Daily Times, from http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_17-12-2004_pg3_1

EDITORIAL: Milestone Kathmandu conference

The Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs has recently concluded a meeting in Kathmandu that brought together experts from India, Pakistan, the United States and some other countries. Even more significantly it had some leaders and analysts from the two sides of Kashmir — Azad Kashmir and Indian-Held Kashmir. This was a milestone conference for many reasons.

The stimulus for Pugwash came from a Manifesto issued in 1955 by eminent scientist Albert Einstein and philosopher Bertrand Russell. The manifesto “called upon scientists of all political persuasions to assemble to discuss the threat posed to civilisation by the advent of thermonuclear weapons”. The forum got its name from Pugwash, a small village in Nova Scotia in Canada, birthplace of the American philanthropist Cyrus Eaton, who hosted the first meeting. Since that day, Pugwash has expanded to cover various areas of security and conflict resolution. It brings together, “from around the world, influential scholars and public figures concerned with reducing the danger of armed conflict and seeking cooperative solutions for global problems”.

During the Cold War, Pugwash provided a forum to antagonists on both sides of the East-West divide to talk to each other candidly in private. This is why Pugwash meetings work on the principle of non-reporting. While the Einstein-Russell Manifesto sets the ideal goal, much of Pugwash’s success — for instance, in relation to preventing the spread of nuclear weapons — was owed to its policy-oriented approach. In 1995, it got the Nobel Prize for Peace in recognition of the work it had done towards non-proliferation and arms control.

For the last four years, Pugwash has also been involved in reducing the risk of war between India and Pakistan — following the nuclearisation of the two countries — and has recently also joined efforts to try and work out a solution to the Kashmir problem. The Kathmandu conference was a follow-up on at least two earlier conferences in Geneva and New Delhi. However, this was the first time it managed to bring together leaders and opinion makers from both sides of the Line of Control.

What is good is the fact that the meeting was facilitated by the governments of India and Pakistan, though there were anxious moments when bureaucrats on both sides tried to throw a spanner in the works. Pugwash was also a little concerned about some press coverage in the run-up to the conference, some of which hinted at its (Pugwash) being part of the American efforts to work out a solution. That is wrong, as Pugwash was at pains to point out. It simply provides a forum for frank and candid exchange of ideas which, most would agree, is important as part of ongoing efforts to improve the atmospherics between India and Pakistan and keep the normalisation process on the rails. Additionally, this particular meeting proved significant because of the interface between Kashmiri leadership from AJK and IHK. It has been a longstanding demand of Pakistan as well as the All Parties Hurriyat Conference that Kashmiris on both sides should be allowed to meet and work out a joint strategy. Therefore, it makes eminent sense for Pakistan to support all initiatives, whether official or unofficial, which seek to do just that.

Given that the UN resolutions on Kashmir have become mostly moribund in the backdrop of India’s

refusal to accept them, it is important to come up with creative solutions. Also, no solution of Kashmir is likely to stick unless it is generally acceptable to the majority of Kashmiris. This is also the official position of Pakistan and General Pervez Musharraf has reiterated it consistently. A good upshot of the recent meeting has been the committees set up to intensify contacts between leaders on both sides and provide them the space to flesh out ideas discussed at the Kathmandu meeting. That is why this development should be welcomed by India and Pakistan. Both can use the Kashmiris to climb down from their maximalist positions without losing face. *

EDITORIAL #2: Kidnappings are a blot on Sindh CM

Upper Sindh is once again in the clutches of dacoits and gangs of kidnapers. On December 3, a gang of criminals kidnapped three additional sessions judges, one of whom managed to escape but not before he was severely beaten up. The other two, Abdul Wahab and Farooq Ahmed Channa, are still missing. All three were travelling from Ratodero to Shikarpur when they were kidnapped.

But this is not the only incident. Ten other people including three Hindu boys have been kidnapped in Shikarpur alone in less than a month. There have been other reports of similar incidents from the districts of Jacobabad, Sukkur, Ghotki and Larkana. While the Citizen-Police Liaison Committee in Karachi has extensive records on kidnapping-for-ransom cases in urban Sindh, rural Sindh is largely a matter of conjecture. Rough estimates put the number of recent incidents across Sindh at nearly 100 cases. There is also a discrepancy between records held by the police and estimates given by the CPLC and other NGOs working with citizens. Invariably, in rural Sindh, the kidnapped person has had to buy his freedom.

An interesting observation regarding these cases is that the dacoits either target officials or people from less powerful clans and tribes. Most known Baloch tribes have generally not faced this problem. Another pattern relates to the rise in kidnapping cases whenever there is a political government in Sindh. Many observers have noted the nexus between dacoits and politicians in the province. That is why it is important for the Sindh government to capture the culprits and take to task the politicians involved in it in any way. The Sindh chief minister has generally showed off as a “tough” administrator. But he might be a better chief minister if he could take time off from private tableegh to look after the welfare of his public constituents. *

From http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_17-12-2004_pg3_1