

## Pitching for 'Hind Pak dosti' and peace

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By Sarwar Kashani

New Delhi, Jan 10 (IANS) Predictably, the questions were many when speakers from India and Pakistan got together and talked about whether and how the neighbours could shed decades of distrust and live in harmony. Is peace possible between the twoneighbours? If so, then how, when and why? And the answer was one: Why not?



“Hind Pak dosti, Zindabad”, they shouted the slogan many times in the brightly lit auditorium, with a huge bright yellow banner in the backdrop with the words ‘Peace’ between India and Pakistan scribbled in bold.

Peaceniks of the two nuclear armed neighbours came together Sunday for a three-day conference at the India International Centre (IIC) to lay a road map for resuming the stalled India-Pakistan talks.

There were many doubts and confusions, grievances and complaints from the two sides, but all speakers, howsoever divided they appeared in their perspective, seemed united in pitching for peace.

It was a wish of the common people across the border, they said and underlined “some vested interests” were benefiting from keeping the India-Pakistan conflict cauldron burning.

“They are military industries in third countries that are benefiting from our stupid actions,” said India’s formal chief of naval staff, Admiral L. Ramdas.

Ramdas in his short speech dotted with humorous punches said: “You keep the flame burning.... otherwise a hell of a lot of people will be out of work, out of business.” Without naming any nation, he was referring to Western countries from whom India and Pakistan buy their military equipments “in an arms race to outdo each other”.

Then came former minister and senior Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar — who is known for his witticism and spontaneous sarcasm. Amid bouts of

laughter Aiyar joked a lot but sounded serious about India resuming its peace talks with Pakistan, which stalled in the aftermath of the Mumbai terror attacks.

“We have an excellent relationship with Paraguay but don’t know what to do with Pakistan,” said Aiyar tongue-in-cheek. He was an Indian consul-general in Karachi before shifting to politics.

Taking a dig at the bureaucratic and political wrangling on both sides, Aiyar strongly pitched for resuming talks. “We talk to Pakistan when it is least needed and we don’t talk to Pakistan when it is most needed.”

“Dialogue is possible,” he said even as he highlighted India’s concerns about terror sanctuaries in Pakistan.

“But I don’t think that (making dialogue conditional) is the way forward. Do we expect Pakistan to say ‘Hi, sorry! Look we sent Mr Kasab to attack India. He should have been killed but got arrested by you.’”

India and Pakistan need to “talk about talks, at least”, he said.

The former diplomat suggested: “Inter governmental dialogue should become uninterrupted and uninteruptible. Let’s have our foreign secretaries routinely meeting at a table laid on the Attari-Wagah border, literally. Both sides are in their own countries and nobody has a chance to leave. Let them meet once a week or twice a month even without an agenda. This will keep the communication channels on because meeting each other is critical.”

Barrister Aitzan Ahsan, one of the activists who spearheaded the movement for restoration of “independent judiciary” in post-emergency Pakistan, said India should not doubt the “credentials” of his country.

“We in Pakistan love India and Indians,” he said.

He mentioned the Mumbai terror attacks, which India blames on terrorist organisations based in Pakistan.

“Bombay (Mumbai) was our grief, it was a South Asian grief. They (terrorists) are a possessed minority. They are also hitting at our men and women. Let the terrorists not tear us apart,” he said.

And when you talk about India-Pakistan peace, can we ignore Kashmiris. As separatists Sajjad Lone and Yasin Malik stood among the audiences, their colleague from the other side of the political divide, Mehbooba Mufti shared the dais with the speakers.

Though not as impressive as her co-speakers, Mufti in her written speech raised the issue of solving the Kashmir dispute to allow Kashmiris live in peace. “Without changing borders can we unify the divided Kashmir?” she asked.

The conference by 11 organisations from India and Pakistan will see in the next two days eminent personalities from both countries deliberating on a host of issues concerning them. It was thrown open by veteran journalist and a known peacenik Kuldip Nayar, who has long led the movement for India-Pakistan peace.

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