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A joint venture for peace is the way to go

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In the most gloomy atmosphere around us in Pakistan, we had no reason to celebrate New Year's Eve. The morning of Jan 1, 2010, however, gave us a pleasant surprise when we read that the editors of the Jang group in Pakistan and of the Times of India group have taken a bold initiative to join hands for promotion of peace, economic prosperity, education and health much needed by the one-and-half-billion people of our two countries.

This was not the only good news on Jan 1. The civil society in Pakistan, realising the importance of peace had also observed a solidarity day under the banner of "Aman Ittehad" and took out rallies in more than 35 cities of Pakistan, attended by exuberant citizens despite a hartaal in Sindh and fear of the terrorists. These demonstrations once again vindicated the burning desire of the people for peace.

I can state with confidence that the ordinary people of India equally desire peace with the same keenness, desire and spirit. It is for this reason that supporters of peace in India have once again convened a conference in New Delhi on Jan 10 in search of "A Road Map Towards Peace." We greatly appreciate this initiative of the intellectuals, leaders, human right activists, NGOs, journalists and other people, including former Indian PM I K Gujral and Kuldip Nayar, a former member of the Rajya Sabha, who are two of the hosts of this meet.

The vast majority of the people do agree that war is not the solution. Over the past 62 years, the three wars with India and two battles of Siachen (1987) and Kargil (1999) couldn't help in any way. Pakistan is already at an unending war for the past over three years, with the worst enemies — the terrorists within. I hope all thinking sections of the public in India would appreciate that, now or in future, Pakistan cannot afford to indulge in any aggressive designs or adventurism against India. Hence, there is nothing to fear from Pakistan.

Not only were the wars in the past six decades destructive, but equally counterproductive and destructive was the strategy to promote jihad and jihadi organisations in Pakistan, on the pretext of keeping the Kashmir issue alive. The activities of the jihadis and extremist militant religious terrorist in the past three decades have only resulted in further loss of life, places of worship and properties not only of the Kashmiris but more so in Pakistan. The so-called jihad could not force India to budge an inch or motivate any country, including our closest allies, to pressure India to resolve the issue peacefully. Nor was the Indian economy or its image damaged by the jihadis in any significant manner. On the contrary, it is Pakistan that is bleeding profusely on account of the undeclared, endless war unleashed from within by the terrorists.

Indeed, the people of India have suffered many terrorist attacks, including the attack on the Houses of Parliament of India, the tragedy of Nov 26 in Mumbai and bombing of the markets in Delhi are some of the most heinous, condemnable crimes against the state and people of India, I share the grief of the people of India and join them in condemning these terrorist forces. I would however, draw the attention of the people in India to the fact that the people of Pakistan are suffering such disasters and barbaric incidents of far worst terrorism almost every day in every nook and corner of Pakistan, where several thousands innocent citizens have lost their lives and properties. Hence, peace is our need not only for our country but also for the entire region. We can only succeed in eradicating the terrorism with concerted efforts and joint line of action between our two countries, without any further loss of time. Not only the people but also the governments of the two countries agree that all disputes can be resolved through dialogue, with sincerity of purpose.

In the first place, dialogues between the two countries must resume unconditionally and with the sincere commitment to resolve the issues. There is no harm if both the countries agree to accept the Line of Control, with some necessary adjustments, as the international border, at least for the time being. It would be in the best interest of all the people if the two agree to establish visa-free borders and free exchange of economic, cultural, academic, intellectual groups and access to the electronic/print media.

I am conscious of the fact that such bold decisions cannot be implemented without mobilisation of the opinion of the public and the leaders. Here I see the most vital positive role that can be played by the media of the two countries. We are fortunate that the two biggest groups of publications — the Jang group and the Times of India group — have come forward to save one-and-a-half billion people from wars, prejudices, terrorism and poverty.

The writer is a senior advocate of the supreme court in Pakistan, and the co-chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. The column was written for Jang.

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