

S Asia Neighbours' Linked Destinies

By Fatima Bhutto and Ghinwa Bhutto



Pakistan has given little assurance that peace prospects with India will improve [GALLO/GETTY]

Something is rotten in South Asia.

After the Mumbai attacks in late November that killed 170 people, the onus for answers has been placed on India's long-time nemesis, Pakistan.

Whether this is fair or unfair remains to be seen.

The Mumbai attacks, gruesome in nature and planning, have already been given a 9/11 nomenclature - 11/26. That is how many in Mumbai now refer to the violent siege of their city.

While the world watches and waits for answers, and for those responsible to be condemned, Pakistan's government has provided little assurance that peace will prevail between the two countries in the coming year.

Yousef Raza Gilani, the prime minister, has insisted that Pakistan is not only working to track down those who may have had links to the attacks, but also promised that if India's allegations prove true, the perpetrators will be put on trial.

"We will try the militants in Pakistan. We have our own courts, our own regulations and laws here," he said.

Lack of faith

Given the government's track record, one can understand India's lack of faith in Pakistan's justice system.

Gilani's government came to power in February amid talks of deals with the military and on a wave of sympathy following the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the former prime minister, in a country that has long orbited around the cult of its politicians' personalities.

During their time in government, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), headed by Asif Ali Zardari, now the president and Bhutto's widower, and his young son, has put the kibosh on the lawyers' movement, headed by Iftikhar Chaudhry, the former chief justice, lest it overrules the national reconciliation ordinance.

The ordinance is an odious piece of legislation that has removed 20 years' worth of corruption cases against members of the PPP, allowing them to return to power.

It is also the only law passed by the government so far.

The Pakistani government's other major achievement has been to sit by as US drones travel through its sovereign airspace and attack Pakistani targets at their own discretion.

Linked destinies

The Mumbai attacks mean Pakistan is no longer the only country in the subcontinent paying the price of the so-called War on Terror.

Now our neighbours suffer the consequences of their government's total support of Washington's jingoistic policies in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The mood in Pakistan has been one of sombre commiseration as the rampage demonstrated just how clearly our destinies, India and Pakistan's both, are linked.

Geopolitical realities make our two nations inseparable in facing any attacks on our region.

Even though our governments may choose to be enemies, the people of India and Pakistan share a history, one deeply rooted not only in our similarities, our languages and religions, but also in our differences, notably Kashmir.

It is those similarities, rather than the differences, that led both countries to covet that one piece of land, and it is our joint refusal to deal with the Kashmir issue that brings violence to both our doorsteps.

The imperially induced conflict, led by the belief that Kashmir is only Indian, not Pakistani, only Hindu, not Muslim, is defunct.

Autonomy desired

Now Kashmiris, exhausted by 61 years of political tug of war, want autonomy.

They did not find justice on either side of their borders.

Justice for Mumbai and for those killed by unmanned drones in Waziristan is interlinked and the link is inexorably Kashmir.

Beefing up security apparatuses in capital cities like Dehli and Islamabad is not enough; it is in fact too little.

Our governments have proven, in India and Pakistan both, that they cannot give us justice, while our intelligence agencies have shown us that they can no longer be the solution. Rather they are more often a large part of the problem.

The solution then is an autonomous, demilitarised Kashmir.

The only force, and it is a force, that can push for peace between the two sibling countries, is the Indian and Pakistani people.

It is in their hands that South Asia will ultimately find its peace, but until then, the longer our governments ignore their population's calls for peace, the longer India and Pakistan will both suffer more violence.

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The views expressed by the authors are not necessarily those of Al Jazeera.