

Tuesday, March 22, 2011

Indian delegation plants 'Tree of Hope'

Myra Imran
Islamabad

Peace between India and Pakistan is vital to end poverty, hunger, exploitation and violence against marginalized sections in the region. This was an agreed statement by the Indian peace delegation and their host civil society organizations, which met the civil society representatives and media at Potohari Art and Craft Village on Monday. Before talking to media and civil society, the delegation planted a tree in Potohari Village and named it as "Tree of Hope." Some of the civil society representatives termed the planted tree that is called 'Peepal' in local language as a symbol of people-to-people interaction that is perceived as one of the solution to end tension between the two countries.

The Indian peace delegation is hosted by some members of the Inshani Haqooq Itehad (IHI), namely SUNGI Foundation, SPO, Aurat Foundation, SDPI, PILER, SAFMA and Pakistan-India Peace Peoples Forum for Peace and Development (PIPPFPD). The delegation members said that although there are anti-peace forces in both countries, there is a growing realisation among masses and even among the fanatic forces that a stable and prosperous Pakistan is in India's as well as in South Asian region's interest.

"We, the forces of peace and stability, have significantly defeated the forces of fanaticism and extremes," said Janin Desai, an activist-journalist and National Joint Secretary of Pakistan India Peoples Forum for Peace and



ISLAMABAD: Kuldip Nayyar addressing a press conference during the visit of Indian peace delegation at the Potohari Art and Craft Village, Shakarparian. — Hanif Khattak

Democracy, and bureau member of South Asians for Human Rights.

Chauhdry Manzoor PPP MNA said that he and his party (PPP) believes in the words of Benazir Bhutto who once said that both the government should let the peoples meet freely, and that would bring peace. He supported the idea that visa condition between Saarc countries should be abolished. Karamat Hussain from PILER said that the member of Saarc have already ratified a Convention in 1987 which calls for "suppression of terrorism" between the Saarc countries. But so far no mechanism has been developed for implementation of the convention. The delegation and the host civil society

organizations demanded that the Saarc members must create a mechanism for the convention to end terrorism in the region. They also urged the Saarc countries to make the convention effective.

They said that all Saarc countries should give MFN status to each other, which is obligatory under WTO regime. India has given this status to Pakistan but Pakistan has not given such status to India. They said that no-war pact is also necessary to seriously pursue the peace agenda in the region.

De-nuclearisation is must in the region since three generation's development prospects have been destroyed with the persistence of status quo adding that we should not spoil the future of

our fourth generation. They demanded that basic human principles have to be realized and practiced and both countries should fulfil their commitments with regard to social sector allocations especially in education and health. They lamented that military and intelligence establishments of both countries have ruined the peace prospects and both the countries have been wasting their numerous resources on defence and security expenditures. They underlined both the countries to cut their defence expenditures and divert those resources for social sector development to bring positive changes in the lives of people especially poor and marginalized. They said that political parties' in both countries pursue their political

agenda in the process but people's pressure can help to positively engage the political parties to peruse a peace and people-centred agenda. However, media has played instrumental role so far and will have to play a key role in future, they urged. They were of the opinion that pro-people and pro-stability people should cooperate and strengthen each other in both countries to help cooperation and friendship prevail between these two countries to ensure people's real freedom from hunger, poverty, exploitation, marginalization and discrimination. "The pro-peace forces should make the masses aware, mobilise them and provide them different platforms to raise their voices of friendship and peace. In order to positively influence and make the dialogue process meaningful between the two governments, it is necessary that people on both sides put pressure on their governments so that the governments make decisions and make policies according to peoples wishes and aspirations." During their informal discussion with the students of Qaid-e-Azam University, Shahid Siddiqui, former member of Indian parliament, said that anti-peace elements in both the countries are interrupting the peace process repeatedly. "We need to fight out these anti-peace forces through mass-movement of people." He also said that we the Indian people and parliamentarians want stronger Pakistan and not the weaker. Stronger Pakistan would benefit not only Pakistani people but peoples of all SAARC countries.