



When people meet, they shatter stereotypes

Last week, students from Pakistan visited Mumbai. And in an unrelated visit, journalists from Mumbai travelled to Karachi and Hyderabad

Pakistani students visiting Mumbai voice peace plea

By Yogita Rao

"Pakistanis can feel the pain of the victims of 26/11. We have also gone through similar terror attacks. We have also lost our own people. Our heart reaches out to victims of terror attacks, especially when it comes to our neighbouring nations. Youths in Pakistan strongly condemn these attacks. We value peace as much as any Indian," said Sitara Jabeen, a Pakistani student who was in Mumbai to promote cross-border dialogue and to try to change the stereotypical image of women and youth in Pakistan.

Sitara a university student was

Indians are not exposed to enough of Pakistani culture. Pakistani society does not support extremism. There needs to be more such dialogues between both nations, or we will be stuck in our history. We come here with a hope and desire to have peace between the countries."

Talking about Indian culture, Professor Arshi Hashmi, who was part of the delegation said that Indian designs in clothing are very popular. "We love watching shows like Indian Idol, and Bollywood movies (are) released in Pakistan on the same date as in India," she added.

On a lighter note, Jabeen said that for youth in Pakistan, after Lata

'How journalists can promote enduring peace'



Except for Fawzan Hussain and myself, the other 20 journalists in our delegation were first-time visitors to Pakistan. There was great excitement amongst them — only natural given our shared history of thousands of years. I think the visit helped the Mumbai journalists to understand Pakistani society better and how common people think about the socio-economic-political scenario prevailing in their society and region. The common people are clearly for enduring peace.

This visit was unique in many ways. It will help Mumbai journalists in future when write about regional issues and Pakistan. It helped sensitise them. We need to use moderate language and such visits contribute towards this. We are expecting a delegation from the Karachi Press Club to visit Mumbai in March. We need to see how journalists can promote enduring peace between India and Pakistan.

— Jatin Desai, freelance journalist, coordinator of The Mumbai Press Club visit

To Karachi with love



I am completely overwhelmed by the love and affection shown to me by the people of Pakistan, a country that does not look or feel any different from my own. Throughout my week-long stint in Karachi, I felt that I could well be in any Indian city.

Your country is so close to mine, and yet it feels so far away. The flight from Mumbai to Karachi took just over an hour. That's less than the time it takes to fly from Mumbai to Delhi. And yet I felt as if I were traversing many mountains to reach a far-away land.

On reaching Pakistan, I never felt that I was in a foreign country. You look the way we do. You dress the way we do. And you speak the same language as us. Except that we call it Hindi and you call it Urdu.

Having grown up hearing about Pakistan being the

"enemy country" I was completely bowled over by the mehmaan nawazi (hospitality) shown to me by Pakistanis. Landing in Karachi I was moved to tears by the warmth with which our delegation of visiting Indian journalists was received at the airport. We were garlanded with rose petals and welcomed with a huge banner held up by half a dozen people.

I never knew how much the common man on the streets of Karachi loves India. While shopping for clothes at Saddar Bazaar, a middle-aged chaat wallah overheard us say we were Indians and insisted on giving us free cold-drinks "because we were guests" in his country. A branded showroom gave me a discount on a kurta because I was Indian.

I will always cherish these very special memories of a very special place that feels so much like home.

— Anahita Mukherji
Special Correspondent, The Times of India

THE MUMBAI PRESS CLUB VISIT TO PAKISTAN – I

Some of the journalists who visited Karachi and Hyderabad recently as part of The Mumbai Press Club delegation share their impressions

'People are connected already'



The first reaction that I got after announcing that I'm actually going to Pakistan was in extremes: "Array waah, Pakistan..." and "Array baap re, Pakistan?"

But for someone who spent his teenage years with Ali Haider's Purani Jeans aur Guitar, this call from his land was something I could not afford to miss.

As a broadcast journalist, I have always had great respect for my Pakistani colleagues. In India, it's relatively easy for us to pursue investigative stories. But the situation in Pakistan demands more than courage to do an investigative story. I remember post 26/11, how Geo News went all the way to Kasab's village, spoke to the villagers and did a story on

Kasab's origin. At a time when the world was watching, this TV channel dared to do something that could invite the wrath of their establishment and system and also the people at large. Journalistic principles don't get better than this. So for me it was always "array waah, Pakistan".

The first day at Karachi Press Club, entering the gate, I heard "Kem Chho". I turned back curiously... two gentlemen talking in Gujarati. Around 10 per cent of Karachi's population speaks Gujarati. And you have two full-fledged Gujarati newspapers Watan and Milan, the former started by none other than Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah himself. As a part of the erstwhile Bombay Province, Karachi had around 25,000 Marathi families, reduced now to 117 families.

Seventy per cent of the people I met had an India story to tell... born in Mumbai's Sabu Siddiqui hospital, patang and

maanja in Bhindi Bazar, coming to Karachi on the Jal Durga Ship. We didn't encounter any animosity towards Indians. In fact, people go out of their way to be hospitable. Everywhere they spoke of increasing people to people contact, but I feel people are connected already. It's for both the establishments now to take corrective steps. As I said at a programme hosted by Sharmila Farooqui, a beautiful young politician and media advisor to CM of Sindh, the next generation is rebellious, they will ask for Peace and Love as their RIGHT... And mind you, they will not only question the political class, they will seek answers from us as journalists, what did we do for their right? And if we don't have an answer, there couldn't be anything shameful than that.

— Kamlesh Sutar, Special Correspondent, Headlines Today, Aaj Tak TV

Winds of change



Besides the common man, the business community in Pakistan seems to be enthusiastic over the possibility of reestablishing trade relations with India. Many merchants and industry captain we met say that the politicians from both sides are playing vote bank politics by raising Kashmir and other issues. "Let us leave politics to politicians," they say, urging the media to play a positive, constructive role in ensuring that India and Pakistan live in peace and contribute to each other's prosperity.

Pakistan has good coal reserves that can help us set up joint venture power plants on the borders; India and Pakistan could share the electricity produced. Shaan is a huge masala brand in Pakistan, but the irony is that it's made from spices imported from India. Similarly Pakistan textiles, linen in particular, are of a high quality and linen is very expensive in India. We can do wonders if we collaborate.

— B N Kumar, CEO, Concept PR



India, Pakistan university students with their professors and Women without Borders' team.

part of a Pakistani delegation of five women from Lahore and Islamabad, most of them students, who were at Mumbai University for a seminar on 'Breaking down barriers to cross-border dialogue'. The event organised by the university's sociology department also focused on discussions about women and youth in India and Pakistan against violent extremism. The Pakistani women were part of the delegation from Sisters Against Violent Extremism (SAVE), an organisation working for the welfare of women across borders.

Sitara Jabeen's grandfather was with Mumbai police before the Partition and her family members were excited to know that she had a chance to visit India to promote peace.

Sidra Tariq, a student from Islamabad who is pursuing her MPhil in international relations, said, "Pakistanis know a lot about Indian culture through the movies and television channels. However, I believe,

Mangeshkar, it is Shreya Ghoshal, who is popular.

SAVE is a platform for terror victims, especially women, who have lost their family members in terror attacks, enabling them to come forward and narrate their experiences. "We thought of this concept after the 26/11 attacks," said Edit Schlaffer, the chairperson of SAVE. "Two days ago when we met 10 women from families of victims, we realised they have been isolated here. In the US, people meet victims of terror attacks and allow them to share their experiences."

SAVE is also working on a five-nation study, including Pakistan, to meet women from families of youth who have joined terror outfits. "We are doing this study to understand what forces youth to take such extreme steps. We will be speaking to their mothers who fear that the child is moving in the wrong direction," said Edit Schlaffer.

— Times News Network

A historic visit and greater understanding

Journalists from both sides agreed that India and Pakistan need to end their war-like relations, increase cultural exchange and trade and most importantly, allow journalists to cross the border more easily

By Sidrah Roghay and Ammar Shahbazi, The News International

Dressed in a *kurta* pyjama, Prakash Akolkar, chairman of The Mumbai Press Club and deputy editor of *Maharashtra Times*, a leading Marathi newspaper in India, landed at the Karachi airport and walked his tall thin self through Customs. Worried about his poor Urdu, he asked an immigration officer, "Sir Hindi chalega?" (Sir will Hindi do?).

The officer replied, "No Sir, only Urdu or English."

"I told him I do not know Urdu," said Akolkar, narrating the incident to a packed audi-

ence at the Karachi Press Club. "The officer looked bemused and replied, 'But sir you are speaking Urdu!'"

It was then that Akolkar realised that his concerns about language before arriving in Pakistan were unfounded, and the language spoken in Karachi and Mumbai are pretty similar.

Akolkar was a member of the 22-journalist delegation visiting Pakistan from Nov 14-21, 2011, at the invitation of the Karachi Press Club and the Pakistan Institute of Labour Research (PILER).

Besides acquiring a deeper understanding of the city and the state of media through conferences, workshops, and meetings with political leaders, the visit achieved a historic feat: A

memorandum of understanding signed between Karachi Press Club and The Press Club of Mumbai pledging to use acceptable language while reporting events regarding each others' countries and try to eliminate words which propagate hate and create mistrust among the nuclear neighbours.

The presidents of the Karachi and Mumbai press clubs, Tahir Hasan Khan and Prakash Akolkar, respectively, agreed that certain measures must be taken to improve cooperation between journalists from India and Pakistan, like exchange programmes between journalists of Karachi and Mumbai every alternate year, internships for young journal-



ists, and exchanging literature to strengthen the ties.

"The people who are there to protect the borders should do their duty. We are here to extend our friendship and do our duty," said Tahir Hasan Khan in his welcome speech at Karachi Press Club. He emphasised that there are "extremists and fundamentalists on both sides" and this should not be a reason to subvert the potential to build a lasting relationship.

The Mumbaikars, who dress, eat and talk much like most Karachiites, had several preconceived notions about the city. Some were conscious about keeping their blackberry phones out of sight because "everyone gets mugged", others thought all Pakistani women were forced to wear *burqas* and live in the four walls of their houses. They were curious about the freedom of press here, whether the man on the street was a religiously extremist, and if Pakistanis are as war-obsessed as the television news projects us to be.

Although bogged down with conferences and seminars, Vinod Mahanta, a reporter for *The Economic Times*, was excited about the visit and itching



to get out to the man on the street. "I will buy a *kurta* now, and pay attention to my 'qafis' and 'khays'. Then I'll roam around in a rickshaw and pass for a Pakistani," he laughed.

Journalists from both sides agreed that the two countries need to end their war-like relations, increase cultural exchange and trade and most importantly, allow journalists from both sides to cross the border more easily.

"The Maruti-Suzuki which is made in India, goes to Dubai, and then is imported to Pakistan. Imagine how much foreign exchange is lost because of our sour relations," said one finance reporter from India.

Surendra Gangan of DNA was curious about how the Pakistani youth perceive India, and their stance on Kashmir and extremists. He was pleasantly surprised by both the overwhelming welcome he received and the vibrant life in Karachi.

What most Indians don't get at home is a soft image of the Pakistan. As one journalist said, "Bollywood crosses the border, and brings people like Shahrukh Khan and Amitabh Bachchan to Pakistan. What is needed is cultural export from



The pen is mightier: A warm welcome for Indian journalists at Karachi airport; Prakash Akolkar, Chairman of The Mumbai Press Club and deputy editor of Maharashtra Times addressing a seminar at Karachi Press Club with Pakistani journalists Ghazi Salaudinn, Tahir Hasan Khan and Moosa Kaleem; Indian journalists at the seminar. Photographs by Zahid Rehman

Pakistan (beyond the musicians and singers), so that people see the other side of the story, that the news media fails to bring to them."

Talking about divided families across the two countries, Anahita Mukherji of *The Times of India* said that she lived in a Sindhi neighbourhood of Mumbai. She knows families with relatives in Rajasthan and Karachi, who cannot meet because of visa issues.

"When I was coming here my friends and family told me I'll have problems finding vege-

tarian food here, but it's been no issue so far," she said, excited about seeing Mohatta Palace and Jinnah House, for this is where heritage and history lies together.

Jyoti Shelar of the *Mumbai Mirror* admired the Karachi Press Club's Victorian-era building that she compared to The Mumbai Press Club. "That is a trendier one-story building with a bar as soon as you enter. We have dance classes and sports events for journalists; it is a very happening place."

Despite their tight schedule, the Mumbai journalists managed to visit the National Museum and the beach, and spend time at the Hyderabad Press Club, three hours drive from Karachi, where they were regaled with a musical programme that had many of them up and dancing. Between conferences and seminars, they took time to go shopping on their own — the female journalists broke the security protocol and took off in a rickshaw. Local retail therapy *zindabad!*



THE FIRST STEP LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK

Feedback, contributions, photos, letters:
Email: amankiasha@janguangroup.com.pk
Fax: +92-21-3241-8343
Post: aman ki asha c/o The News,
I.I. Chundrigar Road, Karachi



aman ki asha

A peace initiative whose time has come...

'Destination Peace': A commitment by the Jang Group, Geo and The Times of India Group to create an enabling environment that brings the people of Pakistan and India closer together, contributing to genuine and durable peace with honour between our countries.