

April 07, 1978
Hungarian Embassy in Pakistan, Report, 'The visit of DPRK Vice-President Pak Seong-cheol in Pakistan'

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Summary:

Pak Seong-cheol seeks Pakistan's support for North Korea's position on Korean unification, while Pakistan wants trade and arms shipments.

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On 10 March 1978, Pak Seong-cheol, the vice-president of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, arrived in Pakistan for a three-day state visit. This was the first high-level meeting between the two countries since the visit that Bhutto had paid to Pyongyang in the summer of 1976. According to the available fragmentary information, the primary objective of the visit seems to have been to maintain the political contacts which had been elevated to a considerably high level in the recent years. Pak Seong-cheol brought a message from Kim Il Sung, which he handed over to General Zia ul-Haq; its content has not been made public, but on the basis of certain available information, it can be taken for granted that the Korean leader asked the new Pakistani leadership to continue providing the same political support to the DPRK that had become a characteristic [of DPRK-Pakistani relations] in the Bhutto era.

In Islamabad, Pak Seong-cheol and his entourage—the delegation included Ro Tae-sok, the vice-chairman of the Economic Commission of the DPRK—was received with a hospitality that visibly exceeded the usual elements of protocol. His negotiating partner was General Zia ul-Haq, the leader of the Pakistani administration, with whom he talked on two occasions, altogether for more than three hours. The general received and saw him off at the airport in Islamabad, and during the three days, he gave a banquet on his honor not only once but twice. The Pakistani press also covered the visit and the negotiations in an unusually warm tone and in great detail, which was monitored by the South Korean diplomatic mission (consulate-general) with undisguised irritation.

According to the official and direct information we received from an official of the local North Korean embassy, the agenda of the negotiations was as follows: "The two sides informed each other about the domestic situation of their respective countries." In accordance with the news published in the press, the Korean diplomat stressed that Pakistan gave unequivocal support to the DPRK's standpoint on the question of Korean reunification. In contrast, some views based on other sources suggest that the Pakistani leadership is unwilling to provide wholehearted support to the northern standpoint under the [present] conditions, for among the Asian non-socialist countries, [Pakistan] is virtually the only one that has no embassy-level diplomatic relations with South Korea.

In other fields of international activity, the two sides could declare a more evident identity of views. The Pakistani side regards the DPRK as an outstanding advocate of the cause of the Third World, [a country] striving for the New International Economic Order, and an example of economic self-sufficiency. They pointed out that the DPRK had consistently supported Pakistan over the Kashmiri question, and, for instance, during the Indo-Pakistani conflict of 1965 it was inclined to support the Pakistani standpoint. During the negotiations, they discussed the developments of the last two years as far as bilateral relations were concerned, and noted that various delegations had been exchanged, and agreements had been concluded in several fields (culture, science, air transport, and so on).

Although the local DPRK ambassador and his subordinate did not confirm this [claim] during the conversations we had with them, the information that certain disagreements also emerged in the course of the negotiations does not appear to be unfounded. The Pakistani side would like to increase the volume of economic relations in general, and the pace of Korean arms shipments in particular. The trade between the two countries has been stagnating for several years (its volume is as follows: Korean supplies worth approx. \$3 million versus Pakistani exports worth \$1 million), which is evidently caused partly by that the DPRK cannot grant credit, and partly by the fact that it is not particularly interested in importing goods from Pakistan. The bilateral trade balance carries a heavy deficit on the Pakistani side, and no progress can be expected until this [problem] is remedied. In general, the increased political support that the Pakistani side offers in exchange of the arms supplies for which it is strongly pressing [the DPRK] seems to be "insufficient" for the Korean side.

The program of Pak Seong-cheol's visit was in accordance with the character of the negotiations. He visited the Tarbela Dam and the heavy industrial combine in Taxila, and spent a particularly long time in the ordnance factory in Wah.

During the visit, issues of culture, ideology, or information policy, or the specifics of cooperation in these fields, were not discussed. (Let us note that the negotiations held during the recent visit of a DPRK information and television delegation in Pakistan revealed that the Pakistani side clearly refuses to broaden the opportunities provided to Korean propaganda.) On the contrary, Zia ul-Haq's toast laid special emphasis on that the development of friendship between the two countries was not hindered by their different systems of ideology.

According to the information received from the 2nd secretary of the DPRK embassy in Islamabad, during the talks General Zia ul-Haq strongly urged Pyongyang to receive him within April. Pak Seong-cheol evaded giving a final answer by remarking that this needed to be approved by Kim Il Sung, but in principle he agreed with the idea. However, after the publication of Bhutto's death sentence [Pakistan] informed the Korean side through diplomatic channels that due to this "peculiar" situation, the general wanted to postpone his visit in Pyongyang to a later date.

In the opinion of the Korean diplomat, it is unlikely that Kim Il Sung will send a message to Zia on behalf of Bhutto.

Kálmán Dóczé

ambassador