



# Long road home

Posted at: 21/12/2018

## **Long road home-India and Pakistan should adopt a more humane approach to each other's prisoners**

- The return to India of Hamid Nihal Ansari, an engineer from Mumbai who spent six years in a Pakistani prison, is cause for cheer on the otherwise bleak landscape of India-Pakistan relations.
- The plight of the young man, who had crossed over into Pakistan from Afghanistan in 2012 on a mission to save a woman he had befriended online and been arrested for espionage, had caught public attention in both countries.
- Subsequent investigations proved his innocence on all charges other than entering Pakistan illegally, but even so, the authorities there put him through a trial in a military court.
- In December 2015, the court sentenced him to three years in prison. All through his ordeal, Mr. Ansari's parents kept alive the struggle to bring him back.
- Above all, credit goes to citizens' groups in both countries that helped the family, particularly lawyers and human rights activists in Pakistan who worked pro bono to ensure Mr. Ansari's release.
- Both India and Pakistan must dedicate themselves to freeing hundreds of other prisoners who remain in each other's jails, many of whom have completed their sentences but await long processes of identification and repatriation.
- According to government figures, Pakistan holds 471 Indian prisoners while India holds 357 Pakistani prisoners, a large number of them fishermen who inadvertently trespassed into each other's waters.
- The two countries must also revive the biannual meetings of the Joint Judicial Committee on Prisoners as agreed to a decade ago; the committee has not met since 2013.
- Its last recommendations, that women and children as well as prisoners with mental health issues be sent back to their countries on humanitarian grounds, are yet to be implemented.

## **Conclusion**

- There is little to be gained by holding these prisoners hostage to bitter bilateral ties and prolonging the misery of their impoverished families.
- There needs to be a more humane approach.

The Hindu



SAHAYA IAS  
www.sahayaias.com