Bentley makes play for peace

By IRA KANTOR

Peace between India and Pakistan can come from interconnected business relationships and opportunities for their citizens, according to academic leaders from both nations who gathered at Bentley University this past week.

"Such initiatives have been there. The problem is, once the initiatives are over it's the end of the story," said Hashir Ibne Irshad, assistant professor at the FAST National University in Pakistan. "We're talking about writing papers, conducting workshops, creating student exchange programs. Otherwise (peace) is not going to happen. Politicians cannot make it happen. Governments cannot make it happen. People can only make it happen."

Jerome Joseph, senior professor at the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad, India, said he and his contemporaries hoped to launch such post-conference activities as a management development program for executives from both nations run by joint faculty teams, and entrepreneurial development programs for students at management schools looking to start their own businesses, not only in the individual countries, but also maybe as partners," Joseph said. "There is nothing like business to get a whole host of intended and unintended benefits to both nations."

Robert E. McNulty, director of programs at Bentley's Center for Business Ethics, invited Irshad, Joseph and two other Indian and Pakistani scholars to the campus to participate in a State Street Foundation-sponsored panel discussion and teaching workshop centered on advancing peace between both countries, which have experienced ongoing conflict since 1947.

"You get two businessmen together on both sides and say, can we trade with each other, can I invest in your country because I have a product I think your people would love and both people on both sides end up making money, and their lives are improved," McNulty said. "Their lives are improved and they end up having valued relationships because of this business encounter they have."

Huma Baqai, associate professor at the Institute of Business Administration in Karachi, Pakistan, said the United States "in so many ways is trying to patch relationships" with her country.

Simrit Kaur, professor of public policy at the University of Delhi, said a better business environment between India and Pakistan would create more employment and economic development, especially for youth who may be motivated toward unrest.

"This movement has started. It's not the revolutionizing movement, but it is a step in the right direction," Kaur said. "It is going to be wonderful in the future."