

# Now comes the crucial part

**T**he most sensitive part of the present peace process between Pakistan and India is to begin in New Delhi tomorrow. This meeting of the foreign secretaries of the two countries, which would take up issues of peace and security and Kashmir, and would review the whole process of negotiations in the composite dialogue that have been held so far in various meetings between the officials concerned of the two countries. The two foreign secretaries are expected to finalise these recommendations for their foreign ministers, who would hold the final meeting of this process in August this year. The present meeting is part of the eight-point agenda for the composite dialogue that was finalised between the two foreign secretaries Riaz Khokar of Pakistan and Shashank of India when they met in Islamabad on Feb 18 this year. To recall, this process started rolling as a result of a meeting of the former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee with President General Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali on the sidelines of the Saarc Summit in Islamabad. The two governments on January 6 of this year then issued a joint statement. It pledged to discuss all issues between the two countries, including Kashmir.

This meeting is particularly significant because in it not only the whole gamut of issues in the composite dialogue will be discussed but the most important subject, at least from Pakistan's point of view, the dispute of Kashmir that has bedevilled relations between the two countries since almost their coming into separate existence, would come up for the first time in the composite dialogue process.

Now before this meeting, there has been a highly significant development that is likely to have a great impact on the meeting. Foreign Ministers of the two countries, Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri and K. Natwar Singh have met in the city of Qingdao in China on the sidelines of an international conference. It was the first high-level interaction between the foreign ministers of the two countries after the new coalition led by the Congress, and known as the United Progressive Alliance took power in India. Many things including all aspect of relations between the two countries were reviewed in this one on one meeting that the two foreign ministers held in this Chinese town. The two leaders termed their meeting as 'very positive' and 'constructive'. They hoped that there would be considerable progress in the secretaries-level talks towards normalisation of relations between the two countries. As a result of this meeting, one of the decisions, for instance, has been announced on the opening of the consulates of the two countries in Mumbai and Karachi.

In the meanwhile, a number of meetings scheduled in the composite dialogue process have already been held. The general sentiment (it is perhaps more appropriate to call it a sentiment than fact because final decisions have not been announced), as exhibited by the interlocutors after the meetings point to positive directions. The press statements at the end of these meetings exhibit signs of

## All that matters

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hope. The seven point joint statement at the end of the talks on nuclear risk reduction, for instance, spoke of some significant decisions like establishing a new hotline between the foreign secretaries of the two countries, and sprucing up the already existing one between the directors-general (DGMOs) of the two countries. A draft proposal to formalise arrangements to notify each other before missile tests has also been presented. Both countries have called for regular working level meetings to be held among all nuclear powers to discuss issues of common concern. The two countries agreed that neither of them would conduct further nuclear tests explosions unless in exercise of national sovereignty, any one of them decides that

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extra-ordinary events have jeopardised its supreme interests. The statement said that both countries recognised that their respective nuclear programmes were based on their national security imperatives.

In between, also came the talks on the Baglihar Dam, and the secretaries of both the countries were upbeat about the outcome of the deliberations. Although it appeared that some differences remained, the two delegations, perhaps in a spirit generated by the peace process, give the feeling of trying to overlook the differences. They give the impression as if everything went on very smoothly. Similarly, in the meeting on combating drug trafficking Pakistan and India agreed to share information and operational intelligence to combat the menace.

Now comes the meeting on Kashmir, the real issue (it will also review all other matters and also discuss issues of peace and security). President Pervez Musharraf, in an interview to the Sunday Telegraph recently said that CBMs and peace process would

prove a futile exercise if there is no move forward on Kashmir. He said that there was no doubt in his mind that the core issue bedevilling relations between India and Pakistan is the Kashmir dispute. He said: "But if this core issue is not being addressed and if India is intransigent and they say that is all, we are not moving forward, and this core issue is out, then all the issues are out". Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali, talking to newsmen in Parliament on Thursday reiterated the same sentiments when he said that Kashmir was the core issue, which had to be resolved on top priority for durable peace in the region.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in his speech on Indian TV on Thursday said India will actively pursue the composite dialogue with Pakistan and is sincere about discussing and resolving all issues including Kashmir. Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman welcoming the statement said New Delhi will find Islamabad sincere in seeking resolution of all issues, including Kashmir in accordance with the wishes of the Kashmiri people, and hoped the engagement with India in composite dialogue would be result-oriented on both sides.

**N**ow all this comes about in spite of some snags and jerks that were felt when the new Congress-led coalition, came to power in India. This atmosphere was created because of some entirely unnecessary comments on Kashmir by the Indian foreign minister K. Natwar Singh that made one feel as if the Congress government, in whose rule earlier, Kashmir issue remained a festering sore between the two countries, seemed to be following the same path. However, later the Indian Foreign Minister seems to have come back on the original position on the issue in the present peace process. After his meeting with his counterpart in China, it seems as if everything is back on track.

So now the talks starting on Sunday between the two foreign secretaries would not only be watched with interest but people would hope for some real progress (how little that may be) in the direction of the solution of the problem. They are tired of the usual foreign office phraseology which in order to conceal the failure on the issue most of the times puts up a bunch of circumlocutory half sentences to confuse the people. For a large number of Pakistanis the main stumbling block has to be removed if we have to reach the kind of peace scenario that is being advocated for South Asia, the scenario of everlasting and durable peace. The real test would lie in the outcome of discussions on Kashmir. Kashmiris would also have to be associated with the whole process soon, and the solution, of course, could not be one sided. All the three parties to the dispute (Pakistan, India and Kashmiris) will have to come out with a workable solution, the framework for which has been given by United Nations resolutions. The results of the present foreign-secretary level meeting on the issue should come out with a result that takes the issue in that direction.