

# Kashmir and the peace process

*Dante's Kashmir*  
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By Mahdi Masud

THE resumption of the composite Pak-India dialogue at the Foreign secretaries' level in Delhi on June 27 and 28 provides an opportunity to review the progress of the peace process since the path-breaking Musharraf-Vajpayee statement of January 6, 2004, on the sidelines of the Saarc summit in Islamabad.

Over a hundred cross-border goodwill visits by civil society and political figures, numerous CBMs and a few substantive agreement notwithstanding, there has been no discernible move forward on the Kashmir issue. Over a thousand people have been killed in occupied Kashmir since the Islamabad Declaration of January 6, 2004.

The joint statement issued by the foreign secretaries at the end of the Delhi meeting reiterated the commitment of the two sides to the principles and purposes of the UN Charter and their determination to implement the Simla agreement in letter and spirit.

The new Indian government has, thereby, confirmed its intention, as earlier indicated by Foreign Minister Natwar Singh, to treat the Simla agreement (concluded in the wake of the debacle of 1971), as the basis of dialogue with Pakistan. The Lahore Declaration is conspicuous by its absence in the joint statement. The only reference to the Islamabad Declaration (described by the Pakistan president "the basis of *ditente*") occurs way down (clause 4) only in the context of President Musharraf's assurance on of terrorism.

Although the composite dialogue resumed in New Delhi on June 27 and 28, with the sole

of the Indian authorities.

It was agreed that the New Delhi meetings on the six remaining subjects of the composite dialogue (Siachen, Sir Creek, Wuller barrage, terrorism and drugs, trade and economic cooperation, exchanges in cultural and other fields) would be completed by early August, to enable the foreign secretaries of the two countries to review progress in the dialogue process and prepare for the next meeting of the foreign ministers, which, according to a Pakistan foreign ministry spokesman, would mark the culmination of the current phase of the composite process.

Since the joint statement does not reflect any tangible advance on Kashmir, one hopes that further ground would be covered on the subject between now and the foreign ministers' meeting due for August.

The measures relating to nuclear CBMs proposed by the experts meeting of the two countries, confirmed by the foreign secretaries at the Delhi meeting, covered provisions of the Lahore memo of understanding (such as prior notification of missile flight tests and unilateral ban on further nuclear tests) and procedural improvements such as a hot line between the foreign secretaries. There was also a substantive decision to finalize a formal agreement on prior notification of missile flight tests.

The hope is that as confidence and cooperation develops, significant suggestions for nuclear restraint, proposed by Pakistan and some by Indian agencies would be seriously considered. These include avoidance of an anti-ballistic missile system likely to threaten the other side and

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item of peace and security CBMs and Jammu and Kashmir on the agenda, the reference to Kashmir is contained only in one clause of the joint statement. Reiterating the usual pious intentions, the statement refers to "the hope that the dialogue will lead to peaceful settlement of all bilateral issues, including Jammu and Kashmir, to the satisfaction of both the parties. They held detailed exchange of views and agreed to continue serious and sustained dialogue to find a peacefully negotiated final settlement".

Although no one expected any breakthrough at this early stage, there was not even a hint of any relaxation of India's rigid position on Kashmir. Foreign Secretary Khokhar was being honest when he cautioned against any "hype" about the outcome of the meeting, though he described it as a good beginning.

President Musharraf has told Indian and world opinion, time and again, that "there has to be a linkage/simultaneity between the CBMs and the composite dialogue, and that the CBMs could not be allowed to take the place of a composite dialogue on Kashmir. This is, however, precisely what is likely to happen in the absence of any move forward on Kashmir, contrasting with the rush of events and exchanges in numerous fields in line with Indian priorities.

In spite of repeated Indian professions of peace and goodwill, not once has any Indian spokesman, political or bureaucratic, spoken of the possibility of a change in the status quo of Kashmir.

The soft Indian line is represented by the suggestion for freezing the problem, to be taken up later, as stated by the Indian High Commissioner in Pakistan during a talk in Lahore in May. The traditional position is an insistence on retaining the LoC as the international border with minor adjustments.

With reference to peace and security, the joint statement states that "the two sides proposed a comprehensive framework of conventional CBMs aimed at initiating and enhancing communication, coordination and interaction". It is not known whether the dangers in the increasing conventional imbalance resulting from India's augmented arms build-up (and the impact of the imbalance on the nuclear threshold) are receiving serious consideration

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destabilize the basis of *ditente*. Pakistan has stressed the advisability of a minimum level of nuclear deterrence. Suggestions have also been made for avoiding the deployment of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles within a specified range of the common border.

While the dialogue on Kashmir could be stretched indefinitely by India as a sop to Pakistani susceptibilities, the rapid change in ground realities resulting from the numerous CBMs and exchanges in various fields may effectively consign Kashmir to a back-burner of public consciousness. With exchanges in many fields, the situation may become irreversible, irrespective of what happened on the negotiating track on Kashmir. In the developing situation, the desired linkage between the CBMs and the composite dialogue on Kashmir is likely to be overtaken by events.

Nothing stated above is meant to detract from the importance of the peace process, for nothing is more important for India and Pakistan than economic and social development, for which durable peace in the subcontinent is indispensable. However, in relations with India and on the issue of Kashmir, there is only one way that Pakistan can reconcile the dictates of realism with the demands of popular will and historical obligations. This is by treating peace with India as indispensable and linking full normalization in India with discernible progress on Kashmir.

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