

Kashmir
21/11/04

Troops reduction in Kashmir *The News*

The recent announcement by the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to reduce troops in the disputed territory of Kashmir is indeed a step in right direction. It would certainly provide the desired boost to the peace process. According to him the situation in Kashmir has considerably improved which enabled the Indian government to opt for reduction of troops deployed in the disputed state. The increased economic activities along with continuously increasing tourists reflect a general sense of security among the people.

The announcement was welcomed by the Pakistani leadership and was acknowledged as a constructive move that could certainly strengthen the onward movement of the peace process. While welcoming the move the Pakistani Foreign Office spokesman stated that Islamabad would be looking forward to its physical manifestation in terms actual troops withdrawal. Similarly the military spokesman also welcomed it as a confidence building measure (CBM).

Given the general perceptions that it is positive move, the announcement itself deserves to be subjected to some discussion. The general perception of its being a good move is primarily the product of two factors. First, the overall prevalent cordial atmosphere in which the talks between India and Pakistan are conducted needs to be maintained and if possible further strengthened. In this direction both sides are cautiously making moves that do not in any way damage the overall atmosphere. Second, the positive general perception is also reflective of overall desire of Indians and Pakistanis who appears to be convinced that time has come to forget the past and get down to the business of resolving all their disputes.

Three other linked aspects of the move need to be mentioned here. Many assessments of the move at this

time clearly highlight that the announcement of troops reduction has been timed before Prime Minister Singh's scheduled visit to Kashmir. Since his visit to the disputed state has been postponed couple of times before, the move is meant to gauge the reaction of the Kashmiris and particularly that of the APHC (All Parties Hurriyat Conference). To assess how the APHC leadership would receive the move. If positive, he would go ahead with the planned visit. If negative, he may have to revise his decision.

The APHC reaction has been both negative and positive. While many within the APHC saw it a good move and welcomed it, there are others who did not look at it so sympathetically. They argued that move must be made meaningful by ordering the Indian troops to stop human rights violation that has been persistently practised by the Indian security forces. Rape, torture, arbitrary arrests, destruction and burning of property are known to be the most commonly employed tactics by the Indian forces while handling of the Kashmir's freedom struggle. In addition, they argue, that the Kashmiri political prisoners should also be released.

The second aspect that deserve to be mentioned here is that move can also be viewed as a continuation of the expressed sincerity that was demonstrated on 24th September statement in New York. The statement that was read after the meeting of President Musharraf and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New York assured both sides would work sincerely towards the desired culmination of the peace process. The move can be seen in congruence with the expressed desires of the leaders of two countries.

Finally this move can also be seen as another useful Kashmir related CBM. It is perhaps the first Kashmir related CBM. The term CBM covers a very large canvas ranging from a sim-



Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema

The writer works for Islamabad Policy Research Institute
picheema@ipripak.org

ple unwritten understanding between the two adversaries to a treaty. A journey from a simple understanding to the signing of treaty could be viewed as part of the CBM process provided confidence is generated between the adversaries at various stages of progression. However it can be defined as a bilateral or multilateral measure that build confidence, arrests the un-

The announcement was welcomed by the Pakistani leadership and was acknowledged as a constructive move that could certainly strengthen the onward movement of the peace process. While welcoming the move the Pakistani Foreign Office spokesman stated that Islamabad would be looking forward to its physical manifestation in terms actual troops withdrawal. Similarly the military spokesman also welcomed it as a confidence building measure (CBM)

desirable drift towards open hostilities, reduces tensions, and encourage the adversaries to make contact for negotiations and if the negotiations have already started, then to further facilitate the process.

Undoubtedly the announcement of troops withdrawal is another welcome CBMs though doubts were expressed about when and how many would be withdrawn and whether or not the initiative was indigenous or product of outside pressures. It is a well-known fact that international community has been closely watching the Indo-Pak peace process and has also been injecting useful doses periodically. Ever since the two countries acquired de facto nuclear weapon status, the international community has been taking ac-

tive interests in South Asia.

As far as the level of troops withdrawal is concerned, the print media has already reported the number of troops to be withdrawn. Most Pakistanis do not anticipate that substantive number of troops would be withdrawn. Reports published so far indicate that around 40,000 troops be withdrawn. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has already stated, 'we cannot afford to relax our vigil. We are aware that infiltration attempts from across the border and the LOC continue and the infrastructure of terrorism in the shape of training camps

Another aspect of this development is that move came in the wake of President Musharraf's proposal that he put forward for initiation of a debate. Again it reflects the earnest desires of both leaders to take the process forward. The initial Indian reaction to President Musharraf's proposal was somewhat cool. However the recent reports clearly indicate that India appears to be willing to consider President Musharraf's proposal if it is formally made through diplomatic channels. Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh said, 'A proposal made at Iftar cannot be accepted as a formal proposal. If such a formal proposal is made, we will look at it'. President Musharraf had made it clear that he wants to initiate a debate. Not only the Pakistanis have welcomed the latest Indian response but also the Pakistanis have already started an intense debate on various options regarding the Kashmir's solutions.

The next round of Foreign Secretaries talks is scheduled to be held in December in which it is expected that substantive discussion on various aspects of the ongoing Kashmir would take place. Already it has been reported that India and Pakistan are likely to exchange non-papers regarding proposals to resolve the Kashmir dispute soon. Indeed the exchange of non-papers would take place on mutually agreed time frame.

The recent moves emanating both from Pakistan and India augur well for the process. The momentum of positive approach needs to be maintained. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz's scheduled India visit in his capacity of SAARC Chairman is expected to take the process forward. During his visit he is likely to discuss all issues. So far both sides appear to be maintaining positive attitude towards the peace process. It is indeed useful to have leaders on both sides express periodically and consistently their determination to take the process forwards.

and launching bases remains intact'.

Whether or not the move is a mere tokenism or a substantive still remains to be seen. Perhaps the best way to look at it is to view it as a step in the right direction. Admittedly leaders of APHC would be very happy if all the troops are withdrawn to their cantonments and the all the political prisoners are released, but if one looks from Indian government's viewpoint such developments would appear to be little too early. Even a tiny contribution made by any constructive move towards the overall goal of securing the resolution of the disputes needs to be viewed as positive development. However it needs to be highlighted that India maintains over 700,000 thousand troops in Kashmir and to reduce them to normal requirement, it would still take quite sometime.