

# Indian prank

**P**rime Minister Manmohan Singh has come up again with the usual Indian prank. He told the Indian parliament that he had agreed in his meeting with President Musharraf to explore all possible options for peaceful negotiated settlement of the Jammu and Kashmir issue. But he had told him that "we would not agree to any redrawing of boundaries or another partition of the country". Then what is it for which he wants to explore the options? For, India may say whatever it likes. But the fact stands that the occupied Kashmir is India's no integral part. The UN resolutions on Kashmir clearly recognise it as a disputed territory and so does the international community. So, the question here is not of redrawing of boundaries or of another partition but of granting the right to self-determination to the disputed Jammu and Kashmir State's people, as mandated by the United Nations. India has gone back on its commitment after accepting the world body's decree and is instead keeping part of the disputed state under its illegal occupation. And for the last 15 years, the people of the occupied Kashmir are up in arms to secure their inalienable right. In the face of such a compelling reality, how can he keep harping on a fallacious line, touting up occupied Kashmir as India's integral part?

But if he is refusing to see a reality, why has our own foreign office bureaucracy also turned blind. The other day foreign minister was livid with those contending that the composite dialogue has got stuck in India's intransigence. Are they blind; he angrily asked. Can't they see the progress on the ground? But what progress is he talking of? The first round of the dialogue came a cropper. And no tangible result has come to the public fore from the meetings held in the second round so far. And on Kashmir, the Indians have visibly not budged an inch. If he is talking of people-to-people contacts, the chequered history of the two countries' relationship has not been verifiably devoid of times when such exchanges of the privileged and the select groups took place. Granted, this country's people are blind. But he cannot say this of the president. He has been very thick in the things, indeed thicker than him. He has been very courageously and sincerely pursuing the peace process with India. Even he has spoken of negative vibes emanating from India. And he has been very plausibly stating repeatedly that flexibility is no one-way traffic. It has to be reciprocated by India.

The foreign minister may be the only one gifted with eyesight in this nation of the blind. But he should not distort the history. If it is the first time, as he contends, that India has recognised Pakistan as a party to the Kashmir dispute, then why were those half a dozen sessions of talks were held between ZA Bhutto and Swaran Singh? Why was the Kashmir dispute mentioned in the Simla agreement? Why were the Indians talking on the issue with Pakistani leaders in the 1990s? He should employ his divine gift to tell the world community of India's intransigence. It now wants as never before this dispute to be settled. He should not fritter away this opportunity by using his oratorical skills on his own people to convince them of what it is not. This is no time for self-aggrandizement.

## Kashmiris face-to-face

THE meeting of the Kashmiri leaders from both sides of the Line of Control in Kathmandu, the first of its kind, should give a fillip to the on-going India-Pakistan composite dialogue for peace. Arranged by the US-based Pugwash Foundation, which organizes behind-the-scenes moots to bring contenders together for conflict resolution, the conference in Nepal was of great significance because it would pave the way for an integrated Kashmiri approach on the future of the disputed state. The solution which had been initially suggested by the UN provided for the self-determination of the people of Kashmir through a plebiscite. It is now tacitly agreed that the UNCIP resolutions are no longer plausible. But common sense demands that the Kashmiris be inducted into the dialogue in one way or another when it comes to deciding the future of their state. Even if India and Pakistan manage to agree on a formula for the settlement of the dispute, its successful implementation would be possible only if the Kashmiris participate in the negotiations and accept the final outcome.

Pakistan has always stood for a participatory role for the Kashmiris and, ever since the talks began earlier this year, has asked for the Kashmiri leadership to be included in the process. When Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz visited New Delhi in November, he made it a point to invite the Kashmiri leaders from the Valley for a talk. This gesture was well appreciated and it goes to the credit of India which had previously obstructed such contacts that it did not make any attempt to discourage the meeting. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has also spoken about opening talks with all Kashmiri leaders who do not support violence.

It logically follows from this that Kashmiris from Azad Kashmir should also be included in the intra-Kashmir dialogue. Without some exchanges between the leaders from the two sides of Kashmir, they will not be able to speak with one voice, in view of their varied political experience of the last five decades. So far this exchange has not been easy because of the legalistic issues brought up by the two sides. In that context, Pugwash has played a positive role by providing them the opportunity to come together face to face.

The Kathmandu conference has set up committees to take this intra-Kashmir dialogue further. While one committee will seek to bridge the differences among the Kashmiri leaders, another will discuss confidence-building measures that can be adopted to promote the Kashmir cause. The third and the most important of these committees is the one which is to explore the next stage in the quest for a solution of the Kashmir dispute. These are positive moves and if the Kashmiri leaders can jointly manage to work out a formula which they find acceptable, India and Pakistan should willingly accommodate it and not reject it on grounds of their own narrow nationalistic or strategic interests. The moot point is that the Pugwash committees on Kashmir have been welcomed by the two governments and their working facilitated by Islamabad and New Delhi. If the leaders are not allowed to move freely and meet, the discussions will not proceed any further. One hopes that both India and Pakistan will not only allow the Pugwash process to go on, they will also encourage it. Besides, Pugwash allows quiet diplomacy to take place, which is the need of the hour.