

# Kashmir dispute today

By A. G. Noorani

Kashmir

SOME Indians and Pakistanis behave like stragglers running around in the forests as if the Second World War had not ended.

Indians foam at the mouth if "the UN resolutions" are mentioned or if any one uses the D-word for the Kashmir dispute. Pakistanis harp on those resolutions, clamour for settlement of the dispute, and seek foreign mediation. Both are pitifully outdated.

It can be said with slight exaggeration that Kashmir is all but settled. Were it not for the blasts in Mumbai's trains in 2006, the prime minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh, might have arrived in Islamabad to give a fillip to the process, if not, indeed, tie up the loose ends with President Pervez Musharraf.

He might have come to Pakistan in mid-2007 were it not for the crisis in Pakistan's judiciary that erupted in March that year.

President Musharraf uttered a *crie de coeur* in an interview to Aaj on May 18, 2007. "First, let us resolve the situation here, the internal issue, so that we can focus on Kashmir properly." He revealed that it was a "fairly fair" assumption that the broad outlines of a solution to the Kashmir issue had been worked out between the two countries. "We have made progress on the Kashmir dispute, but we have yet to reach a conclusion." His foreign minister Mr Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri confirmed this in New Delhi.

A settlement requires concessions on both sides the president said: "And when both give up, then in both countries there is opposition and a hue and cry. Every body says develop a consensus. *Arrey bhai*, how to develop a consensus?" He further revealed that the solution was "moving forward on the same lines that I've proposed — along the lines of demilitarisation, self-governance and joint mechanism". That is the status of the Kashmir dispute today.

The formulations and slogans of old have become irrelevant. The president and the prime minister's public pronouncements converged. The back-channel, comprising Messrs Tariq Aziz and Satindra Lambah, filled in the details. We should be proud of this

achievement. We owe nothing at all to the reports produced in the United States; though some of their authors, endowed more with vanity than competence would detect the stamp of their genius on any accord.

On Dec 25, 2003, President Musharraf "left that [UN Resolutions] aside". In New Delhi on April 18, 2005, he said "the LoC cannot be permanent. Borders must be made irrelevant and boundaries cannot be altered. Take the three together and now discuss the solution". On May 20, 2005: "Self-government must be allowed to the people of Kashmir" and "we do understand India's sensitivity over their secular credentials". So, "it cannot be, may be, on a religious basis". On June 14, 2005: "Autonomous Kashmir is my earnest desire, but its com-

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plete independence will not be acceptable to both India and Pakistan."

Thus, both, plebiscite and independence are ruled out. What of the LoC? On Oct 21, 2005, he suggested: "Let's make the LoC irrelevant. Let's open it out." On Jan 8, 2006 he amplified that the quantum of self-governance will be defined by both sides. He stipulated demilitarisation of Kashmir. Lastly, he said: "Joint management would be a solution which we need to go into. There have to be subjects which are devolved, there have to be some subjects retained for the joint management."

On Dec 4, 2006, he indicated clearly that it was not territory that Pakistan was after; Pakistan was "prepared to give up its claim" to Kashmir provided the four-point formula he set out precisely in his memoir *Line of Fire* was accepted — define the regions; demilitarise them; introduce "self-governance or self-rule", and "a joint management mechanism" comprising Indians, Pakistanis and Kashmiris.

On March 24, 2006, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said "borders cannot be

redrawn but we can work towards making them irrelevant — towards making them just lines on a map". He was prepared for "institutional arrangements" between both parts of Kashmir. It would be foolish and wantonly destructive to throw out the baby of this achievement with the bath-water of partisanship. Fifty years ago, on Feb 10, 1958, Prime Minister Feroz Khan Noon met the US envoy to the UN, Henry Cabot Lodge, in Karachi. Ambassador James M. Langley recorded: "Noon made no mention of a plebiscite and it seemed to me that he was clearly thinking of a compromise which would provide for a territorial division between India and Pakistan."

By then plebiscite was dead. Nehru offered an accord on the basis of the ceasefire

line to Liaquat Ali Khan in London on Oct 27, 1948; to Ghulam Mohammed on Feb 27, 1955; to Mohammed Ali Bogra at the Delhi summit on May 14, 1955; at a public meeting in New Delhi on April 13, 1956; and to Ayub Khan at Murree on Sept 21, 1960. In 1963, Z.A. Bhutto

and Swaran Singh parleyed on various partition lines.

President Ayub Khan was prepared to drop plebiscite if India offered a good alternative. In a speech at Lahore on March 23, 1962, he said that if plebiscite "was not the best solution" for Kashmir "then let us have another solution satisfactory to all". This is what the four-point formula accomplishes. It assures Kashmir's de facto reunification and self-rule to both its parts. It gives Pakistan a say in the state through the joint mechanism while ruling out a plebiscite. Both countries will make significant concessions. Never before had the Kashmir dispute reached so closely the outskirts of an accord as it has now.

What is required of all is a constructive critique of the details to improve the scheme. This is an accord which India's leader can sell to the people from the Red Fort in Delhi; Pakistan's leader from the Mochi Gate in Lahore; and Kashmir's leader from the Lal Chowk in Srinagar. ■

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