

Pak. F.R. Yndia  
13/1/04 The News

# Joint statement and after

## Inayatullah

**T**he postponed and much-awaited Saarc Summit provided the occasion and the opportunity. Could it ever be held without Vajpayee, the head of the largest South Asian state? If suspense is an essential part of a drama, there was plenty of it here. Will he or won't he come? And if he does, will he talk to his counterpart and General Musharraf, one to one? Will he or won't he?

He came. He attended the Saarc Summit. And he met the General. Not merely a courtesy call. The meeting lasted more than an hour. More suspense. Did they speak about the issues bedevilling India-Pakistan relations? Was Kashmir discussed? The follow-up Press conferences of Foreign Ministers Yashwant and Khurshid concealed more than what they mentioned. Next morning changed all that. The two big ones talked again, this time on the telephone. The joint statement was finalized. Did Jamali and Kasuri know what was cooking? What Brajesh Mishra and Tariq Aziz were hobnobbing about?

Now the Joint Statement itself. It is terse and to-the-point. It announces the commencement of a composite dialogue next month. Both leaders welcomed the recent steps towards normalization of relations between the two countries and expressed the hope that positive trends set by the CBMS (confidence building measures) would be consolidated. The two leaders said that they were confident 'that the resumption of the composite dialogue will lead to peaceful settlement of all bilateral issues, including Jammu and Kashmir, to the satisfaction of both sides'. They agreed that constructive dialogue would promote progress towards the common objectives of peace, security and economic development of our peoples and for future generations. The Joint Statement also contains a few observations of Mr. Vajpayee and General Musharraf, which to some extent are inter-related. Vajpayee said that in order to take forward and sustain the dialogue process,

'violence, hostility and terrorism must be prevented'. Musharraf reassured Prime Minister Vajpayee that 'he will not permit any territory under Pakistan's control to be used to support terrorism in any manner'. Saarc Declaration clauses under the head 'Combating Terrorism' need to be read along with this part of the Joint Statement. The relevant clauses are: 'We condemn terrorist violence in all its forms and manifestations and note that people of South Asia continue to face a serious threat from terrorism. We are convinced that terrorism, in all

had surrendered to the dictates of India over Kashmir. He added that the struggle of the Kashmiris had been compromised and dubbed as terrorism. The Hizbul Mujahideen commander, Syed Salahuddin was sceptical about the Indian intentions. He felt that India wanted to buy time to complete the fencing of the Line of Control on the one hand and crush the freedom struggle in the occupied territory on the other. Maulana Abbasi of the larger faction of the Hurriyyat was unhappy with the omission of Kashmiris as a party to the issue and voiced his

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its forms and manifestations, is a challenge to all states and to all of humanity, and cannot be justified on any ground, whatsoever. Terrorism violates the fundamental values of the United Nations and the Saarc charter and constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. We agree to fully implement, the relevant international conventions to which we are parties. We reaffirm our commitment to Saarc Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, which among others recognizes the seriousness of the problem of terrorism as it affects the security, stability, and development of the region. The signing of the Additional Protocol to the Saarc Regional Convention on Combating Terrorism to deal effectively with financing of terrorism, is a further manifestation of our determination to eliminate all forms and manifestations of terrorism from South Asia'.

First the adverse reactions. The strongest criticism has come from the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front Chief. Mr. Amanullah has termed the joint statement, a 'sell out' on the Kashmir issue. He said that Pakistan

apprehensions about the dialogue being confined to only India and Pakistan. The MMA, and particularly the Jamaat-e-Islami too have been critical of the wording of the Joint Statement, as to them Pakistan appears to have abandoned its support to the Kashmiris' struggle for self determination.

There are two ways of looking at the Saarc Declaration and the Joint Statement.

**F**irst the positive view of the new developments. Two points stand out. One, the Declaration - SAFTA and the Social Charter (linked as it is to measures relating to reduced poverty in the region). Two, according to the Joint Statement at long last the dialogue has been agreed to commence, next month.

Viewed from another angle there is no denying that India has succeeded in securing Pakistan's agreement to following the route of first confidence-building-measures, plus breaking the barrier to freer trade and cultural relations prior to taking up the Kashmir issue and that too as a part of a composite agenda. It has already without recourse to formal talks put in its

pocket, Pakistan's yes to unconditional air flights, plying of Muzaffarabad-Srinagar bus, opening up of the Rajasthan land route, ferry service between Bombay and Karachi, as also the opening of a consulate in Karachi. More than that, it has been able to extract a statement from Musharraf that the UN Resolutions could/would be set aside. And now in the Joint Statement, a foolproof assurance that no support would be permitted to be provided to the Kashmiris from any part of the territories of Pakistan. Also, the Indian understanding that the Kashmiris struggle has been implicitly accepted as terrorism.

Vulnerable as Pakistan is on many counts, including the nuclear issues and charges about involvement with the Taliban and because of Musharraf's own personal insecurity, one can well imagine how much pressure he could take and how and why Pakistan has been yielding ground.

No doubt in the changed and fiercely competitive world we live in today, peace and rapid economic growth are absolutely the top priority and regional cooperation and grouping a most desirable objective. These, however, have to be related to vital national interests particularly considering that the yesterday's enemy and today's 'friend' is disproportionately large, becoming increasingly economically and militarily powerful with impressive growing partnership linkages with USA, Israel and other major powers.

To cope with the new 'questions' as Vajpayee put it and find satisfactory 'answers', there is an urgent need for (a) opening up a national debate inside the Parliament and outside in different form in all the provinces on the emerging issues, and (b) in-depth and intensive exercises on the part of the Foreign Office and other concerned governmental organizations to explore all possible options on various questions and to set priorities to achieve national objectives, and (c) engage both factions of the Hurriyyat and more than that, take steps to bring them together.

The writer is a Lahore-based columnist

pacade@brain.net.pk