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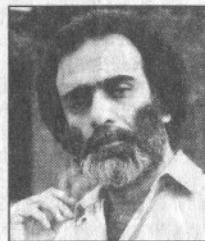
TWO IMPORTANT MEETINGS BETWEEN THE policymakers of Pakistan and India are scheduled for September, this year. One is the meeting between the foreign ministers of the two countries on September 5-6 when Pakistan's foreign minister, Khurshid Kasuri, travels to India to meet with his Indian counterpart. More importantly, President Pervez Musharraf is expected to meet with the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the sidelines of the UN summit late next month. In the euphoric days of January's Islamabad declaration, it was expected that by this time there would be something beyond atmospherics to show for what was regarded at the time as a significantly changed attitude and approach to the task of resolving the outstanding issues between the two countries.

Undeniably, some progress has been made. It can be said, for instance, that the constituency for peace in both countries is considerably stronger or in the words of Pran Chopra "the circle of sanity is widening". But, at this fairly crucial point in the proceedings the pendulum back somewhat seems to have swung and again a less conciliatory mood is discernible since the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government assumed power in India. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh delivering his maiden Independence Day address reiterated the desire to pursue peace moves with Pakistan but also pointed to the trends of "cross-border terrorism and violence" that make the task "difficult and complex". Two days later, a sharper statement by India's junior foreign minister E Ahmed reinforced the message: "Infiltration levels have increased in June and July

and Pakistan has not so far taken any credible steps to dismantle the infrastructure of support to terrorism in that country". Earlier, there was the observation by the Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh soon after taking charge to the effect that the Simla agreement would form the basis of negotiations between the two countries. This was subsequently clarified and he reportedly emphasised during a meeting with President Musharraf when he was in Islamabad last month to attend the SAARC foreign ministers' meeting that the Simla, Lahore and Islamabad agreements would help as "links in the chain" that would lead to decisions acceptable to all parties.

However, by this time, apart from differences on specific issues related to the eight areas of the composite dialogue, the difference in approach was also apparent. Pakistan sought simultaneous progress on all key issues, including Kashmir, within a "reasonable time frame" while India, according to its foreign minister favoured a "sustained and steady dialogue". This is an old problem. While India appears reasonable in proposing a serious dialogue without time limits, Pakistan is fearful lest the process become a substitute for the product. And developments on both sides are unfortunately undermining the optimism that had characterised the interaction between the two countries earlier in the year. In Indian held Kashmir, there is not much of a let-up in the killing of innocents Kashmiris by Indian security forces. The "healing touch" promised by the new state government that took office after the 2002 elections in Kashmir has not been in sufficient evidence. The hated Special Operations

VIEW



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peace process ✓

Group may have been merged with the regular police but allegations of harassment, disappearances and killings continue. Apart from dampening the enthusiasm in Pakistan's official circles this has also led even the moderate faction of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference to become wary of a dialogue with the Indian government. For its part, the latter points to the rise in militancy and violence in the Valley in the recent weeks seeing in it an indication that Pakistan may be reversing its policy of not allowing its territory to be used as a spring board for violent activities across the line of control. This impression may have been further strengthened by General Musharraf's statement to the effect that the *jihadi* groups will be completely curbed once the Kashmir issue is resolved. India's position on 'cross-border terrorism' was endorsed in July by the visiting US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage who said "clearly, all the infrastructure that supports cross-border terrorism has not been dismantled. Some has been dismantled". He pointedly denied in Islamabad that he had been misquoted. While he declared at the same time that serious human rights violations continued in Kashmir, it is obvious that neither the US nor the international community at large is willing to see the one as justifying the other, in a global order that posits violence by non-state actors as a grave threat to peace and security.

India seems convinced that time is on its side in Kashmir and that Pakistan, faced with multiple challenges, is not in a position to force it to concede anything beyond the *status quo*. It has the ear of the

international community; it has managed to hold elections in Kashmir that were widely regarded as credible. And the Hurriyat stands divided. Pakistan, on the other hand is of the view that it has already made a series of concessions and India should, therefore, reciprocate in the same vein. It is unlikely, however, that meetings next month will yield any dramatic breakthrough over Kashmir. But for any progress to be possible India must check the routine killing and torture of innocent Kashmiris by its security forces. If this does not cease the Kashmiris will continue to resist it, with or without Pakistan's support. The peace process must go on even as Pakistan continues to press India and mobilise international opinion to ensure that it is productive. Allowing Pakistani territory to be used as a staging ground for militancy across the LoC will only provide India with an excuse to continue its heavy-handed oppression of the long-suffering Kashmiris. The issue of Kashmir has to be tackled not through war, low-intensity or otherwise, but by creating space for manoeuvre through other means. For a start let the two sides come up next month in the course of the high level meetings with an agreed formula for activating the Muzffarabad-Srinagar axis through the proposed bus-service between the two cities. And, as winter gets a lot worse on the killing heights of Siachen, perhaps the agreement virtually in place for many years can be finalised.

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