

# Time for boldness and courage

THIS AUGUST, BOTH PAKISTAN AND INDIA celebrated 57 years of their independence. Fifty-seven years is a long period in which we have made impressive strides in nation building in our respective countries. Both our nations are responsible nuclear-weapon states and their nuclear capabilities, driven by their national imperatives, are a factor of stability.

In the community of nations, our two countries have acquired recognition for our important roles. On the world stage, we have cooperated with each other to push social development, an equitable economic order, and fair trade regimes. As the foreign minister of Pakistan, I am glad to say that our country is recognised as a pivotal state in addressing regional and global issues.

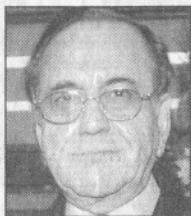
It is regrettable that we have not been able to resolve the Jammu and Kashmir dispute that has, in the past, kept us in a state of tension and flux. All along, the question before us has been very simple. We should give the Kashmiris the choice to determine their own future. This choice should have been given to them in August 1947. But, 57 years later, we are still at the starting line.

The founding fathers of our two countries — Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan and Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru — started the odyssey for the solution of the Kashmir dispute. But the issue still remains unresolved.

I would say that we have the genius to resolve this issue. We also have statesmanship on both sides to resolve all outstanding issues. What we need is a clear vision for our future generations. Most importantly, we need the courage and boldness to realise this vision.

We live in a different era. Post-industrial,

## POLICY



### KHURSHID MAHMUD KASURI

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post-modern realities demand that we solve problems, fight threats that transcend nations, and

attack poverty, disease and illiteracy. And we should do it together, because together we can do it more effectively.

Peace is an ideal that the people of our region wish to pursue. It is not a daydream, but a vision for the people of Pakistan, India and Kashmir. Given the history of our relations, we have to work hard to translate this vision into reality. There is no quick fix, no miracles waiting for us around the corner. We will be the architects of this new vision.

It is to our credit that after wars and clashes, we have always returned to the negotiating table. We met at the UN, in Tashkent, Simla, Lahore and Agra, Islamabad and now we will meet in Delhi. Four decades ago, two of our ministers — Mr Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Sardar Swaran Singh — conducted what we can call a structured dialogue, and some accounts suggest that they did make progress. Forty years later, I am meeting my Indian counterpart. The quest for peace, security and stability continues.

The unfortunate events of the fall of 2001 and the spring of 2002 took us to the brink of war. People around the world feared that this situation could escalate to a nuclear war. Coercive diplomacy could have proved to be a fatal mistake. The international community realised the gravity of the crisis. We returned from the precipice. The world heaved a sigh of relief.

In 2003, we started with confidence building, which picked up momentum, but what we needed was dialogue — sustained, structured, substantive, and uninterrupted. The credit goes to the sagacity of President Musharraf and former prime minister Vajpayee to agree on the commencement of the com-

posite dialogue. We are glad that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress president Sonia Gandhi have clearly and emphatically stated that India attaches highest importance to dialogue with Pakistan leading to resolution of all outstanding issues, including Jammu and Kashmir.

It is a matter of satisfaction that when I meet my counterpart, Mr Natwar Singh, the external affairs minister, Pakistan and India would have completed the first round of talks on all eight agenda items, according to the agreed timetable. Against the backdrop of the events in 2002, this in itself constitutes movement. But this is just the beginning, not the end. We must, however, ask why despite this propitious beginning, confidence in this process, as reflected in media reports and analyses, has been sagging.

I am glad to say this and nobody will deny that, in the recent past, the biggest CBM announced and implemented has been observance of ceasefire along the LOC. There is tranquillity, where we used to see killings, displacement and suffering. But this tranquillity must extend to the valleys of Kashmir by respecting and protecting the rights of the Kashmiris.

I want to assure Kashmiris that they would not be marginalised. We want to persuade India to associate them with our dialogue. Their association would add substance and meaning to the dialogue. A resolution of the Kashmir dispute alone will guarantee peace and security in South Asia.

Our dialogue should be guided by the compass of results. We must know where we are going. And as we press ahead, we should manage our time well and relate it to our goals. It is time that we refuse to go through the motions, and through the familiar cyclical pattern of peaks and troughs, dialogue and conflict. It is time to fix things.

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As we negotiate this difficult turn in our history, public expectations of instantaneous gratification should be tempered. At the same time, we should not accept inordinate delays. We need all the skill to achieve our key objective, namely, a durable and lasting peace in South Asia that also meets the aspirations of the Kashmiris. And we have to resolve related and residual issues. I have no doubt that a resolution of the Kashmir issue will cascade other issues into speedy solutions.

Kashmiris are not holding India and Pakistan hostage. By denying them their rights, we have kept their future in limbo, and ours in a state of perpetual tension.

I am going to Delhi with full confidence. I will engage my counterpart on all issues. This is not the time for tall promises, but for investment of our time and energy in solving problems, which I do not find intractable. Yes, I can say confidently that Kashmir is not an intractable problem. It only requires political will for its solution.

As we meet in Delhi, the whole world will be watching us, hoping that we would take credible steps towards conflict resolution, genuine rapprochement, and cooperation. Pakistan is fully conscious of its obligations to history, to the people of Kashmir, to South Asia, and to the international community.

This is not the dialogue that is taking place only between governments. The media, academia, civil societies, and, above all, people of Pakistan, India, and Kashmir, are participants and stakeholders in this dialogue. They all have to play their role to make this endeavour of ours successful.

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