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# Why make a fresh start?

I sincerely believe that today is a historic day and we have made a new beginning. And I feel confident that despite difficulties on the way, I and President Musharraf will together work and succeed in writing a new chapter in the history of our two countries." Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh

"I hope that this augurs well for the future of Indo-Pakistan relations." Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf

As India and Pakistan expressed their conviction to make a fresh start after the meeting of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Pervez Musharraf in New York in the sidelines of the UN General Assembly annual session, the joint statement issued after their "historic meeting" dealt with the most critical issues faced by New Delhi and Islamabad in their turbulent relations, ie Jammu and Kashmir. The joint statement, which depicted a "win-win situation" for India and Pakistan, clearly stipulated, "The two leaders also addressed the issue of Jammu and Kashmir and agreed that possible options for a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the issue should be explored in a sincere spirit and purposeful manner." Along with the issue of Jammu and Kashmir, the two leaders also agreed to maintain the spirit of Islamabad declaration issued after a landmark meeting of President Musharraf and the then Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on January 6 this year in Islamabad. The role and relevance of confidence-building measures, both at the military and non-military levels, along with the possibility of gas pipeline from Iran to India via Pakistan, also featured high in the meeting between President Musharraf and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Prior to their meeting, Musharraf and Singh in their speeches, which they made at the UN General Assembly on September 22 and 23, underlined the importance of holding meaningful and purposeful talks between the two countries in order to resolve contentious issues. President Musharraf in his speech expressed his confidence that Pakistan and India could resolve all their differences, including over Jammu and Kashmir through sincere dialogue. He also explicitly made it clear that there cannot be a military solution of the Kashmir conflict. Prime Minister Singh in his speech declared his country's determination to resolve all issues with Pakistan including Jammu and Kashmir, which tends to undermine and vitiate relations between the two erstwhile neighbours. As the dust is settling after a chain of events in Indo-Pak relations like the holding of composite dialogue, the speeches made by Pakistan President and Indian Prime Minister on the occasion of the UN General Assembly session and their historic meeting in New York, four important questions occur: first, how India and Pakistan, despite lack of meaningful results from the composite dialogue, can pledge to make a fresh start in their complicated relations? Second, what will be the shape of things in Indo-



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Pak relations, particularly on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir? Third, how the regime of Manmohan Singh will respond to the assertion of opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that the joint statement issued after Musharraf-Singh meeting in New York omitted the consistent position of India ie the issue of "cross border terrorism". Fourth, how will Pakistan deal with India's emphasis on its unilateral measures to promote people to people interaction, along with meaningful trade between the two neighbours? These are the questions, which are raised by the concerned circles in the backdrop of events taking place in Indo-Pak relations since January this year.

Just holding official level talks or summits cannot make fresh start in Indo-Pak relations.

Making a fresh start also requires following a rational and flexible line of action because given the complicated nature of the Kashmir conflict, it is not possible that either party can expect a wholesale gain or the other party loses. Most important, in the entire gamut of Indo-Pak composite dialogue, there is no such thing as giving substantial concession to each other. Even on issues, which are less contentious like Sir Creek and Wuller Barrage, India and Pakistan have stuck to their traditional positions. Pakistan's offer to demilitarise Siachen, which is the world's highest conflict zone, has not been properly reciprocated by New Delhi. With these facts in mind, the entire notion of making a fresh start appears to be a fallacy. As far as the thorny issue of Jammu and Kashmir is concerned, both India and Pakistan in the last one year have come up with several proposals and plans. But the unfortunate part of this issue is the marginalisation of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, who are the real sufferers as a result of Indo-Pak conflict in that region. The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and other nationalist Kashmir organisations have made it clear that any deal reached between Indian and Pakistan on J&K without taking the people of that region into consideration will be counter productive. The composite dialogue is no doubt an encouraging development in South Asia but unless India and Pakistan agree to include Kashmiri groups, regardless of their religious, ethnic and political origin in the dialogue process, there cannot be peace in the sub-continent.

BJP's criticism of joint communique, issued after the summit of President Musharraf and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, is a bitter reminder to the fact that there are strong elements in India who will miss no opportunity to exploit a situation in which the Singh regime is considered weak and compromising on the issue of J&K. The former Indian External Af-

fairs Minister and BJP's spokesman Yashwant Sinha, while talking to newsmen, said that in the Islamabad statement issued after a meeting between the Indian Prime Minister and Pakistan President was carefully negotiated and drafted in which President Musharraf reassured Prime Minister Vajpayee that he would not permit any territory under Pakistan's control to be used to support terrorism in any manner." Sinha regretted that "a complete omission of any reference to cross border terrorism in New York statement had diluted consistent stand of India against cross border terrorism because this lapse on the part of Indian negotiators is, I am afraid, going to haunt us in years to come, as this would send a clear signal to the terrorists and international community that cross border terrorism was no longer an issue with India and Pakistan." Clearly, the Congress led government in India will face a lot of difficulties from the opposition side if it is not able to maintain the traditional Indian stand of linking J&K with the issue of cross border terrorism or is not able to get substantial popular support on its perceived changed position on J&K. In Pakistan also, there are elements that will not miss any opportunity if the government follows a pragmatic and flexible approach on resolving the contentious issue of Jammu and Kashmir.

People to people interaction and meaningful trade have always been India's preference while dealing with Pakistan. In the Musharraf-Singh summit also, these two items were mentioned. But, Pakistan's position has been different from India. From Pakistan's point of view, just and fair resolution of the Kashmir conflict is essential for a healthy and successful future of Indo-Pak relations. That peace between India and Pakistan will have no chance of success unless the Kashmir issue, which is responsible for destabilising peace in South Asia is resolved according to the wishes of the people of J&K. Recently, India announced unilateral measures to relax Visa regime for Pakistani academicians and journalists. But so far, Pakistan has not reciprocated the Indian announcement.

It is yet to be seen how and to what extent, New Delhi and Islamabad are able to deviate from their established positions on various unresolved conflicts. Now the time has come after the holding of composite dialogue and Singh-Musharraf summit that meaningful results are ensured so that the people of India and Pakistan in particular and South Asia in general who are facing endless ordeals because of fruitless confrontation are given a break and the future generations of the two countries are able to live in peace. On this account, there is a logical reason to make a fresh start in Indo-Pak relations with utmost sincerity and professionalism.

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