

No bus is set to run across the LoC to allow the divided families to meet and facilitate an inter-Kashmiri dialogue. No mechanism has been developed to involve the people of Jammu & Kashmir in talks between Delhi and Islamabad, which will discuss the future of Kashmir

**By Usmaan Raheem Ahmad**

# The verses that Vajpayee omitted

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**K**ashmir is a paradox. After a long phase of tension on both sides of the border, a move towards peace has finally started to develop in South Asia. Decisions are being made by the leaders of India and Pakistan to open up dialogue and start a peace process, meant to eventually address the Kashmir dispute.

Ambassadors have been appointed; buses have begun to ply; and talks are being seriously talked about. In the background of all these activities, the international community continues to encourage and facilitate this process and extol the two countries that dialogue, and not force, is the right solution to the Kashmir issue.

No doubt, all of these developments are positive. However, the tragedy is that, as happened in the past, attempts to engage the people of Jammu & Kashmir have not been made in the shaping of a peace process. No bus is set to run across the LoC to allow the divided families to meet and facilitate an inter-Kashmiri dialogue. No mechanism has been developed to involve the people of Jammu & Kashmir in talks between Delhi and Islamabad, which will discuss

The only thing Vajpayee had to offer the Kashmiri people on that day was a few select verses of the great Kashmiri poet-philosopher Mehjoor: "Arise, O Gardener! And usher in the glory of a new spring. Create conditions for *bulbuls* to hover over full-blown roses." What the Indian statesman-cum-poet missed in Mehjoor's great poem was the message of the poem.

In this magnificent poem, Mehjoor speaks to the people of Kashmir (compared to caged birds) about the continuing legacy of subjugation. He reminds the Kashmiris of their proud history and calls for an awakening of national spirit and struggle to achieve freedom. No wonder Vajpayee omitted the verses that followed the first couplet: "Total immersion in the love of the motherland behooves man; if you create this faith, surely you shall attain your goal. Who will free you, O bulbul [TALICS], while you bewail in the cage? With your hands, work out your own salvation."

Despite India's and Pakistan's indifference towards the Kashmiris, the people of Jammu & Kashmir—being the strongest advocates for a peaceful solution of the Kashmir dispute—have welcomed the recent peace moves between India and

expressed is that the current process must lead to the involvement of the people of Kashmir in talks so that a solution may be worked out that will be according to their aspirations.

Rightly supporting and encouraging the current peace moves, the people of Kashmir have also rightly asserted their right to speak for themselves and espouse the cherished dream of independence for which generations of the Kashmiris have struggled and sacrificed their lives.

The Kashmiris response to the peace process has been supportive, but they make one clear demand that 'the caged *bulbul*' would like to speak for itself.

By launching a signature campaign in June, this is the stand that Yasin Malik and the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) wished to make known to India, Pakistan and the entire international community. The JKLF has welcomed the peace moves and has expressed that the Kashmiris must be included in the talks. The campaign is a simple mobilisation of the democratic expression.

The message of the campaign reflects in the very spirit of the latter verses of the same poem by Mehjoor

up the *earthquake*; bring about and thunder, raise a tempest

And as Vajpayee purposed these verses of Mehjoor, the Indian Government once again moved to suppress the voice of the people of Kashmir by arresting Yasin Malik two weeks ago who had been campaigning that the Kashmiris should also be involved in the talks. Now released on bail, this was the second time Malik has been arrested since the launch of the campaign. Early last month, Malik was arrested along with his other colleagues and subsequently released after three days.

In announcing the signature campaign, Malik emphasised the importance of a peace process and the need to consult and involve the people of the valley at the roots in achieving substantial results of any peace process. It is a welcome move that must be carried forward

Kashmir is not a territorial dispute; it is about the future aspirations of living people. After all it is a reality of the hardships and sufferings faced by the Kashmiri population, and their yearning for independence, that has yet to be satiated. Being real victims of this dispute, the people of Jammu and Kashmir will have to play a role in any talks that affect their future.

It is also important for both Indian and Pakistani

referred to involving Kashmiris in any dialogue, there is no indication that the two governments have seriously come around to this realisation as of yet. Certainly, the Indian Government remains completely obstinate. Strenuous efforts will have to be made by the Kashmiris to etch a meaningful role for themselves in the unfolding of the peace process.

The Kashmiris will need to convince the leaderships of India and Pakistan to recognise the need to involve them in the peace process and work out a concrete mechanism for their participation in the composite dialogue format that is likely to proceed.

Vajpayee should be praised for his public observation that he recently made in Germany that the resolution of the Kashmir problem would require "serious compromises". He should also be praised for starting the current peace process by quoting the opening verses of Mehjoor's poem, thus, calling for a new era in Kashmir.

But Vajpayee is just not getting it right in Kashmir. The Indian government continues to keep people behind bars and arrest Kashmiri leaders such as Yasin Malik who are campaigning peacefully to support the peace process and demand inclusion of the people of Jammu and Kashmir in any talks that affect their future. It is also important for both Indian and Pakistani

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It is also important for both Indian and Pakistani governments to understand that by involving the people of

getting it right in Kashmir. The Indian government continues to keep people behind bars and arrest Kashmiri leaders such as Yasin Malik who are campaigning peacefully to support the peace process and demand inclusion of the Kashmiris. Already thousands of *bulbuls* have been slain in the valley, thousands are missing, and hundreds are languishing in prisons.

Vajpayee cannot quote Mehjoor and continue this sordid policy of suppression at the same time. If history is a testament, putting *bulbuls* in the cage will not silence the walls of the people of Kashmir.

The JKLF signature campaign is a novel effort to use strategic non-violence as a powerful method of resistance in the Kashmiri freedom movement. Despite health constraints from previous arrests and torture in jail, Malik has addressed hundreds of public gatherings and visited schools and hospitals to carry out his peaceful struggle. Traveling mainly on foot, the JKLF activists have already toured more than 130 villages in South Kashmir and got thousands of signatures. The JKLF intends to cover the whole of Kashmir and involve millions in the campaign in a period of six months.

Above all, Malik has been struck by the enthusiastic response of the people and has commented that such an intense and sustained desire of people to have a say in their future cannot be ignored for long. Since the launch of the campaign, hundreds and thousands of the Kashmiri villagers are gathering and signing the JKLF petitions. Indeed, it is an incredible sight—the people of Kashmir are making their voices heard.

All political observers and analysts should think why the Indian Government is so afraid of a non-violent campaign that seeks people's opinion about their role in a future peace process? Why does the sight of thousands of people in the Kashmiri countryside, calmly signing petitions, swing the Indian security forces into

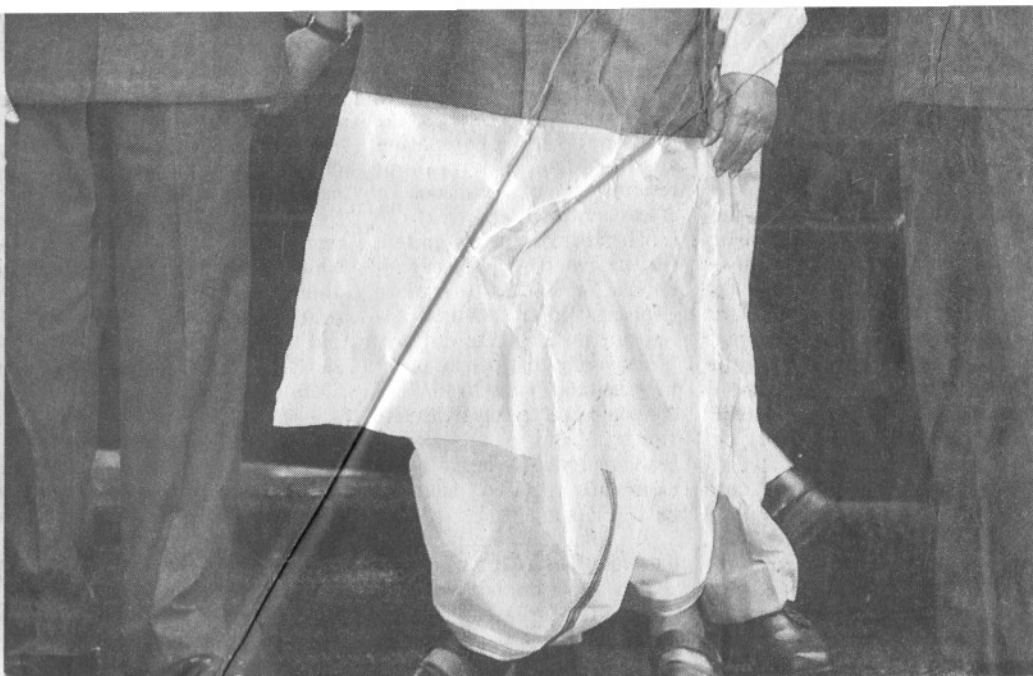


# kashmir

Jammu & Kashmir in the talks, they will actually pave the way towards a peaceful and lasting solution to this vexing problem. A successful peace process must include a direct and effective participation of the people of Kashmir; otherwise it would not bear fruits.

What has made Kashmir intractable over the years has been the bilateralism of India and Pakistan in dealing with the dispute. It is not a coincidence that every single dialogue and agreement on Kashmir since 1947 have two things in common—they all failed to bring peace and they all excluded the Kashmiris. The zero result over Kashmir has much to do with Indo-Pak perceptions of each other and each other's differing historical narratives. Kashmir will always be a zero-sum game between India and Pakistan as long as Kashmir is seen as a territorial or ideological prize. By involving the people of Kashmir, and thereby 're-humanising' Kashmir, both countries will have to turn their eyes towards the real victims of this conflict—the Kashmiris.

It would be difficult for India and Pakistan to accept a creative solution that falls short of their long-held stands, while safeguarding their actual interests. No Indian PM can give concessions to Pakistan on Kashmir, and the same holds



**SRINAGAR:** Activists of the Democratic Political Movement (DPM) display placards as they protest against alleged custodial killings in Srinagar 23 July 2003. Dozens of activists arrested by Indian Police during the demonstration. — AFP wirephoto

the future of Kashmir.

Perhaps it was meant to start this way. After all, the recent turn of events started in April when the Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee extended his 'hand of friendship' towards Pakistan while addressing a rally in Srinagar.

Pakistan and have appreciated the role of the international community in facilitating the process. They hope that the process will pick up momentum and create an opportunity for serious talks to resolve the 56-year-old quagmire. The only caveat or condition being

which he calls upon the people of Kashmir to thunderously raise their voices in unison and let their aspirations be known: "In the garden many birds sing but their notes are varied; may God harmonise these into one effective melody! If you must awaken this rosy habitat, give

or ideological prize. By involving the people of Kashmir, and thereby 're-humanising' Kashmir, both countries will have to turn their eyes towards the real victims of this conflict—the Kashmiris.

It would be difficult for India and Pakistan to accept a creative solution that falls short of their long-held stands, while safeguarding their actual interests. No Indian PM can give concessions to Pakistan on Kashmir, and the same holds true for a Pakistani PM. India and Pakistan will have to offer many mutual political compromises on the question of Kashmir. By ensuring that the Kashmiris have effective participation in any process that seeks to address the Kashmir dispute, the zero-sum dynamic would be averted and such peace process would be far more result-oriented.

It is, therefore, from this perspective that the demand for including the Kashmiri populace in the proposed talks is in the interests of South Asia. Just as the subsequent verses of Mehjoor give real meaning to the initial verses that Vajpayee recited, Kashmiris must be included to give a real meaning to the peace process.

Though Pakistan's President Musharraf and other prominent Pakistani officials have recently

villagers are gathering and signing the JKLF petitions. Indeed, it is an incredible sight—the people of Kashmir are making their voices heard.

All political observers and analysts should think why the Indian Government is so afraid of a non-violent campaign that seeks people's opinion about their role in a future peace process? Why does the sight of thousands of people in the Kashmiri countryside, calmly signing petitions, swing the Indian security forces into action and in arresting the organisers of the campaign? It seems that the Indian Government is not ready to face the reality of Kashmiri opinion. But as Vajpayee said, "serious compromises" are really needed.

Mehjoor gives an empowering message of responsibility to the Kashmiris when he says: "With your hands work out your own salvation." This is the powerful message with which the great poet sought to awaken his nation. A collective voice for a just and lasting peace must now ring out the way Mehjoor desired.

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