

## India and Pakistan—Still Moving Forward

**Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh's decision to host a dinner on September 14 in New York for Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf made headlines, but the event did not provide the same visible boost for the peace process as their 2004 meeting. However, their dialogue is still moving ahead. The most encouraging development in the past six months is the start of discussions between Kashmiris and the governments of both India and Pakistan. There has been modest progress on the rest of the India-Pakistan agenda. These developments provide a backdrop for quiet diplomacy. A few missteps along the way are inevitable, but the two national leaders are learning about one another's sensitivities and taking the process seriously.**

**The buses roll, the leaders meet:** The much-heralded April 7 start of bus service between Muzaffarabad and Srinagar, the capitals of the two sides of Kashmir, was nearly disastrous. Faced with threats to the bus, the authorities in Srinagar gathered the passengers at a tourist center the night before, only to see militants attack the tourist center. The buses did roll, however, and have continued to do so, with little fanfare, every two weeks since then. Not only Kashmiris but other Indians and Pakistanis have traveled to the other side. The number of travelers, about 20 to 30 from each side at the outset, has grown; on one recent occasion, over 80 traveled to the Indian side and 50 to the Pakistani side.

Musharraf's April 16–18 visit to Delhi began somewhat strained. Some Indians felt they had been publicly embarrassed into issuing an invitation; some Pakistanis worried that Musharraf's eagerness for the visit had put him in a weaker position. But in the end the summit served both sides well. Musharraf and Singh made clear their determination not to be deterred by terrorist threats like the attack on the Kashmir bus passengers. They announced new measures, including preparing for truck traffic and trade between the two sides of Kashmir and for a new train route between India and Pakistan. Their statement that the peace process had become "irreversible" should be read as an expression of their intentions; that and the upbeat atmospherics surrounding the visit provided a palpable lift to India-Pakistan relations.

**Kashmiri connections:** Since Musharraf's visit to Delhi, several leaders of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), an umbrella group of political figures from the Kashmir valley, have taken the first steps toward a three-pronged dialogue on Kashmir. In early June, they met with the leadership in Pakistan. The visit to Pakistan was a breakthrough, since the Indian government's unwillingness to allow a similar visit in January 2001 caused considerable ill

will and contributed to the demise of an earlier peace initiative. This time, the Hurriyat leaders spent a couple of days in Azad Kashmir and another 10 to 12 days in Pakistan. They had well-publicized meetings with Musharraf and other senior figures from Pakistan as well as from Azad Kashmir. They spoke out publicly many times. The main message both from them and from their Pakistani hosts was the importance of including Kashmiris in the peacemaking process. The Kashmiris, however, made it clear that they wanted to speak for themselves and not have the Pakistani government speak for them.

In July, an APHC group met with a group of Kashmiri Pandits, the Hindu community that has been largely driven out of the Kashmir Valley by violence. Although this meeting was boycotted by several Pandit organizations, it represented a first step in establishing contact between Pandits and the Kashmiri separatists. APHC personalities plan additional discussions with people from Jammu and Ladakh, areas that are part of the old princely state of Jammu and Kashmir but outside the Kashmir Valley.



On September 5, an APHC group had its first face-to-face meeting with Prime

Minister Singh. The atmosphere was cordial and pragmatic. Both sides called for an end to all forms of violence; the APHC stressed human rights in Kashmir. The date for the next meeting has not been set, but there was agreement that the meeting was effective in creating a cooperative relationship. The government of Pakistan warmly welcomed the meeting, a change from the cool reception accorded similar contacts in the past.

The formal India-Pakistan dialogue remains bilateral, but these three meetings taken together have started to create a supplementary process through which Kashmiris can engage with both countries. The APHC's claim to represent the Kashmiris is of course contested. Their representatives include only Kashmir Valley Muslims, and even within this group they include neither militant organizations nor the elected state government. The most stoutly pro-Pakistan elements, such as Syed Ali Geelani, as well as some major pro-independence figures like Yasin Malik, have kept aloof from parts of this dialogue. However, there is now greater space for Kashmiri dissidents to participate in the political debate.

The pace of contacts across the Line of Control between different Kashmiri groups may also accelerate. The chief minister of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir plans to visit Azad Kashmir and Pakistan. The former president of

Azad Kashmir has just been in Delhi. Trade delegations from the Kashmir Valley plan to visit Azad Kashmir to explore exports of both manufactured and horticultural products.

**No big breakthroughs on other issues:** From the U.S. perspective, the most important development on the non-Kashmir agenda was the announcement on August 7 of an agreement on nuclear risk reduction. India and Pakistan agreed to notify each other of missile tests; they revived a hotline between the two countries' foreign secretaries and agreed to hold a structured hotline call once a month; and they will technically upgrade the hotline link between their respective directors general of military operations. This is not the first time that India and Pakistan have put in place communications measures designed to prevent misunderstandings. The key test of their effectiveness will be whether they continue to work even if overall relations sour.

Officials from India and Pakistan made useful progress in defining possible compromise options on their boundary dispute at Sir Creek, on the Arabian Sea coast. The World Bank named a Swiss professor, Raymond Lafitte, as a neutral expert to address their disagreement over India's plans for a dam and power plant at Baglihar, on the Chenab River in Kashmir. There were also unconfirmed reports that India might be considering sales of power from the Baglihar plant to Pakistan in exchange for Pakistan withdrawing its objections. Technical discussions on the steps that might precede demilitarization of the Siachen Glacier continued, but no decisions were made. India and Pakistan exchanged a number of trade delegations, and press reports suggested that one bank from each country might soon be allowed to open a branch in the other.

Discussions on possible gas pipelines across Pakistan into India continued, going into deepening detail on the financial and technical aspects. As in the past, both countries have found it prudent to keep the discussions open to several alternative pipeline routes, in light of Washington's objections to a pipeline originating in Iran. However, the most focused discussions concerned the Iran pipeline, widely regarded as the most cost-effective alternative.

**Building up to a new announcement?** In the weeks before the Musharraf-Singh meeting in New York, all signs seemed to point to a new breakthrough. Both sides released a total of some 500 prisoners; the Indian government announced that it was withdrawing the Border Security Force from the city of Srinagar; and the press reported impending deals on Siachen and on water issues. In the end, there were no dramatic announcements on any of these subjects.

As it turned out, the timing was not good in either country for a dramatic announcement from New York. Musharraf's speech to the United Nations included a reference to the 1948–1949 UN resolutions on Kashmir, despite Musharraf's periodic statements in the past few months that he was ready to "move beyond" the resolutions. This undoubtedly touched some raw nerves in India. In Pakistan, Musharraf's critics on the Islamic right generally oppose resolving issues unrelated to Kashmir without visible progress on Kashmir and have become more vocal in their criticism of Musharraf's policy toward India. But both countries did announce, at the end of September, that they would open a bus service between Lahore, Pakistan, and nearby Amritsar, India.

**What next?** The absence of a breakthrough in New York disappointed friends of both India and Pakistan, but it by no means signals the decline or end of the peace process. In the India-Pakistan dialogue, as in other difficult peace processes, it is normal for periods of energy and progress to alternate with episodes of slower activity. Since the current India-Pakistan effort started, with the November 2003 ceasefire, it has followed this pattern. During the past 22 months, the most effective antidote to a flagging dialogue has been the personal attention of the two national leaders, both of them clearly committed to continuing to talk and hopeful that talks can lead to a good result. The upcoming visit of Prime Minister Singh to Pakistan, which the two leaders announced, may be the occasion for another high-level injection of energy.

The fact that much of the action during the past six months has involved contacts with and among Kashmiris is encouraging. They are the constituency that has been most persistently left out of the dialogue. With both leaders strongly interested in keeping a process going, this is a time for the United States and others outside the region to focus on quiet encouragement rather than high-profile diplomacy.

The visible part of this process consists of small but concrete steps: expanded contacts among Kashmiris and between ever-expanding groups of Indians and Pakistanis, more frequent discussions between them and national leaders in Islamabad and Delhi, forward movement on the hardy perennial items on the India-Pakistan agenda.

This is probably the best we can expect in the next year or two. Expanded political and popular contacts can help change the environment and facilitate future progress. Economic peace-building measures could do the same thing. If an eventual dramatic political breakthrough is possible, especially one that redefines the political relationships among India, Pakistan, and Kashmir, it will take longer. It will need to take shape in months or years of private discussions and with a massive exercise in political leadership. The personal relationship the national leaders develop now may turn out to be their most important asset if they embark on this more ambitious path.

—*Teresita Schaffer*

***South Asia Monitor* is published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a private, tax-exempt institution focusing on international public policy issues. Its research is nonpartisan and nonproprietary. CSIS does not take specific public policy positions. Accordingly, all views, positions, and conclusions expressed in this publication should be understood to be solely those of the author(s).**

© 2005 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.