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India-Pakistan Peace Process	<i>Dr. Shaheen Akhtar</i> <i>Research Fellow</i>
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The elections in Pakistan that brought the Pakistan People's Party-led Pakistan Democratic Alliance (PDA) coalition into power dominated India-Pakistan peace process in February-March 2008. India welcomed the elections and expressed hope that the fifth round of Composite Dialogue would be soon underway after the review meeting of the two foreign secretaries concluded the fourth round of dialogue. Several statements made by high Indian officials and political leadership, including the president and prime minister, emphasized that the peace process should be carried forward, the progress made so far consolidated and an atmosphere free from terror should be ensured. There has been great anxiety in India in the wake of loss of the ruling party at the hustings whether the progress made in the dialogue process especially on Kashmir would be carried forward.

Shortly after the elections, on 20 February Indian foreign office spokesman stated: "It remains our hope that we will be able to resolve outstanding issues and build a mutually beneficial relationship with Pakistan in an atmosphere free of violence and terrorism. India wishes to see Pakistan develop and prosper within a stable democratic order."⁽¹⁾ Again, on 25 February, Indian President Pratibha Patil, inaugurating the parliament's budget session, reaffirmed New Delhi's commitment to friendship with Pakistan. She said: "We are committed to peace, friendship and good-neighbourly relations with Pakistan."⁽²⁾ ... "A stable and prosperous Pakistan, at peace with itself, is in the interests of our entire region."... "When conditions permit we will resume our dialogue process with Pakistan, aimed at building mutual confidence and resolving outstanding issues, premised on an atmosphere free from terror and violence."⁽³⁾

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh supported the democratic process in Pakistan and emphasized that public sentiment in both countries was for peace and friendship. On 26 March, while greeting Yousuf Raza Gilani on assuming the office of prime minister, he expressed hope to have the 'best ever' bilateral relations with the new government in Islamabad. He expected Gilani to "build on the initiatives taken by his predecessors, former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif and also that by President Pervez Musharraf to improve bilateral relations." In a separate letter he wrote to Gilani the same day, Dr Singh reaffirmed "India's commitment to strengthening friendship and cooperation with Pakistan. We see a stable, prosperous and democratic Pakistan as being in the interest of India and the region." He emphasized: "there is a strong public sentiment in both countries for accelerating the peace process and establishing a cooperative framework for bilateral

relations. There is a common desire to establish a neighbourhood of peace and progress based on greater linkages between our two peoples, trust and mutual understanding.”⁽⁴⁾ Similarly, on 27 March, Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee said that Pakistan’s new government should pick up “the thread from where President Pervez Musharraf left” off and continue the peace process with India.⁽⁵⁾

Prisoners’ issue

The issues relating to the conditions of Indian and Pakistani prisoners in each other’s jails created tensions in the bilateral relations. While on 3 March the release of Kashmir Singh, a spy who remained in Pakistani prison for 35 years, created euphoria in the Pakistani and Indian media, the arrival of the dead body of Khalid Mehmood, a Pakistani prisoner who died at the hands of Indian security agencies, on 11 March, created a furore in Pakistan. Khalid who had gone to India in April 2005 to watch cricket, had lost his Pakistani passport in India. He was arrested by the Indian agencies which interrogated him for being a spy. He was tortured to death on 12 February while his family came to know about the death only on 4 March.

The killing of Kahlid sent shock waves across Pakistan besides upsetting human rights activists who had supported the release of Kashmir Singh. Pakistan’s caretaker minister for human rights Ansar Burney was instrumental in securing Kashmir Singh’s release by securing a presidential pardon, he accompanied Singh across the Wagha Border, and announced a grant of one million rupees for him. On reaching India, Kashmir Singh admitted that he worked as an Indian spy in Pakistan. In contrast, Khalid was tortured to death by the Indian law enforcement agencies and Ansar Burney failed to receive his body. As a result, the Pakistan government came under fire from the media for not doing anything for Khalid while he was alive. Ansar Burney also came under fire for escorting Kashmir Singh up to Wagha border but not being present to receive Khalid’s body at the same place. *The Nation* observed: “A few days back, an Indian spy Kashmir Singh walked across the Wagha Border hail and hearty, while a Pakistani cricket spectator Khalid Mehmood was fetched to the same entry-exit point in a coffin... The celebrations on this side of the border regarding the release of an Indian convict were not yet over when India ‘reciprocated’ the goodwill gesture by sending the body of an Indian-court-declared innocent in a casket.”⁽⁶⁾

The controversy over the death of Khalid heightened tension between the two countries. Pakistan foreign office spokesman expressed shock and anger at Khalid’s death under mysterious circumstances and asked India to thoroughly investigate the matter and share the outcome.⁽⁷⁾ He termed it regrettable that India did not inform Pakistan’s high commission in New Delhi about the arrest of the deceased as required under international diplomatic norms. He observed that the incident had dampened the goodwill generated by the release of Kashmir Singh and the spirit of the establishment of a ‘judicial committee on prisoners.’ Reacting to the statement, India accused Khalid of being a spy and asked the Pakistan government

and media not to politicize the issue. The Indian high commission in Pakistan maintained: “Sensitive documents were recovered from Mr. Mehmood’s possession, which he was carrying to Delhi to deliver to some persons who were travelling to Pakistan by Samjhauta Express.”⁽⁸⁾ Pakistan was not satisfied with the Indian explanation and insisted India should provide full report on the circumstances of his death and share the investigation.⁽⁹⁾

The treatment meted out to Khalid cast its shadow on the clemency petition of another Indian spy Srabjit Singh, who was awarded death sentence for his involvement in bomb blasts in Lahore and Multan in 1990 in which 14 persons were killed. President Musharraf rejected his clemency petition. However, the president granted him a one-month reprieve by putting off his hanging to April 30.

Meanwhile, The India-Pakistan judicial committee constituted in March 2007 to look into the issue of prisoners in its first meeting on 26 February decided to release all prisoners held under “petty offences”. They directed officials of both countries to prepare and exchange lists of prisoners before their next meeting in Islamabad in mid-April. The eight-member joint judicial committee also held that women, children and those having lost mental balance should be released forthwith whether they have completed the sentence or not. Significantly, the judges held that those detained for holding arms but with no proof of using them, will also come under the category of “petty crimes”. Other categories include inadvertent border crossing, crossing sea borders by fishermen and overstaying in each other’s country beyond permission.⁽¹⁰⁾ It should be noted that the mandate of the judicial committee is recommendatory. Both countries have been accusing each other of maltreating their citizens in their prisons. The Pakistan foreign office spokesman said that to date there were 450 Pakistani prisoners in the Indian jails while in Pakistan there were 500 Indians. Since 2003, Pakistan has released 2,657 prisoners while India has freed 827 Pakistanis.⁽¹¹⁾ On 31 March Pakistan and India exchanged lists of prisoners in each other’s jails through their high commissions in New Delhi and Islamabad.

According to the list provided by Pakistan, there are 53 Indian civilians and 436 fishermen in Pakistani jails. India declared 135 Pakistani civilians and 14 fishermen in its custody. The Indian list is reportedly inconclusive and would be updated.⁽¹²⁾ The Ansar Burney Trust has also released a list of 46 Pakistani prisoners, including women, who are languishing in jails of the Indian Punjab despite completing their sentences.

The two sides are also discussing the issue of PoWs in each other’s countries. According to Director General Pakistan Rangers Punjab Major General Muhammad Haroon Aslam, Pakistan and India are having talks at the level of foreign ministries for the release of prisoners of war of 1965 and 1971 conflicts, who are languishing in jails in the two countries. He observed that “both sides are working on it and there is certain hope of release of prisoners.”⁽¹³⁾

Improving communication links

On 16 February, at the end of two-day talks between their civil aviation officials the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding agreeing to increase the number of flights, destinations and airlines operating between them. The number of flights would be increased from 12 to 28 per week for each side. Both sides would be able to use three airlines each, instead of the present one, for operations on designated routes. The agreement to increase the number of airlines is an opportunity for private airlines to exploit the potential market. New destinations planned under the agreement are Chennai (India) and Islamabad. Currently flights operate only between Karachi and Lahore and New Delhi and Mumbai.⁽¹⁴⁾ The revised arrangement would be reviewed after one year. The agreement will facilitate people-to- people contact and bilateral business and trade activities.

On 22 February, India and Pakistan decided to increase the frequency of the Delhi-Lahore bus service from two trips per week to three from each side with effect from March 17. They also decided to rationalise the bus fare and increase the quota for the return tickets from the existing six to 10 seats. The two sides agreed that en route, the Amritsar-Nankana Sahib bus service would make a halt at Lahore to enable the passengers to disembark/embark whereas the Lahore-Amritsar bus service would continue to operate as per existing arrangement. It was decided that the relevant financial officials of the two sides would meet every year, alternately in Delhi and Lahore, in July for reconciliation of accounts.⁽¹⁵⁾ It is significant to note that since the first cross-border bus service started plying in 1999, the India-Pakistan ‘standing committee on bus services’ met for the first time to review the operations of these services and to resolve technical issues confronting the governments as well as passengers.

People-to-people contact

In the last week of March, a delegation of vice-chancellors from Pakistan-based universities (University of Engineering and Technology, Lahore, Mehran University of Engineering and Technology and University of Engineering and Technology, Peshawar) visited Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi. They had a meeting with Prof. Hasan in which several avenues of mutual cooperation and interaction between universities and institutes of higher learning in the two countries were explored. Exchange of students and faculty members for long-term and short-term visits was also discussed. Earlier during his visit to Pakistan in the first week of March, the Jamia Vice-Chancellor had signed several memorandums of understanding with three universities in Pakistan — University of Sargodha; Government College University, Faisalabad; and Government College University, Lahore. According to the agreement, the Jamia will engage in areas of academic cooperation with these three universities such as organising seminars, technical conferences and workshops; training researchers and assisting each other in collaborative research.⁽¹⁶⁾

Border management talks

A bi-annual meeting between directors general, Pakistan Rangers, and inspectors general, Border Security Force, India was held from 26-29 March. The two countries decided to work out mechanisms to expedite repatriation of inadvertent border crossers. Efforts would be made to return inadvertent crossers immediately, ideally within 24 hours, to mitigate the suffering of the families.

The meeting was part of the ongoing peace process between the two countries and takes place after every six months under an agreed programme aimed at coordinating measures being taken by the two border forces for effective border management duties.

Pakistani side's agenda included unprovoked firing by the BSF troops, trans-border smuggling and illegal border crossing from India to Pakistan, simultaneous coordinated patrolling on the international border, drug trafficking, repatriation of inadvertent border crossers as well as that of Pakistani prisoners detained in Indian jails.

'Cross-LoC infiltration'

The issue of "cross-LoC infiltration" continued to figure in the statements made by political and military leadership of India and IHK. Barring IHK deputy chief minister Muzaffar Hussain Baig's statement that infiltration has drastically gone down, the Indian army and home ministry sources contended that it still posed a grave threat. On 12 February, Muzaffar Hussain Baig said that the level of infiltration in the state had reduced and the neighbouring country was not orchestrating such attempts in the manner it was doing in the past. He said there had been nearly 40 per cent reduction in infiltration. He said militants trying to sneak into the state were mainly those being pushed by the Laskar-e-Tayba (LeT). Such "organisations have their own command structure. They may even be against ISI and oppose those who do not subscribe to their ideology."⁽¹⁷⁾ Answering queries on Pakistan's support to militancy, Baig said it had diminished. "The state support has diminished. Some officers in the Army may be fundamentalists but it is not being officially orchestrated like before," he said. Asked about the peace process, he said it would resume in a couple of months after a new government assumed power in the neighbouring country.

On 16 February, Indian Army sources stated that around 5,000 militants undergoing training at 52 camps across the LoC in AJK are ready to infiltrate into the Indian controlled valley to disrupt the upcoming assembly elections in the state. Indian Intelligence inputs have suggested that ISI has shifted majority of its launching pads from north (Kashmir valley) towards the areas falling near the LoC in Jammu region (Poonch and Rajouri). The Jammu-based PRO of the ministry of defence, Lt-Col S.D. Goswami, told *The Tribune*: "As the snow in Poonch and Rajouri sector is less as compared to that in north (Kashmir), infiltrators change their routes and try to infiltrate through these area here."⁽¹⁸⁾

Similarly the Indian army chief, Gen Deepak Kapoor, in an interview with Karan Thapar for CNN-IBN programme 'Devil's Advocate,' talking about infiltration across the LoC said while the numbers had declined, attempts to infiltrate had gone up. "In 2006, the infiltration rate was approximately 343 as per our count. In 2007, it was 311. So there's a marginal decline. But as far as the attempts or bids (are concerned) they were slightly higher in 2007."⁽¹⁹⁾

The Hindu of 26 March reported that the latest status paper on internal security, prepared by the Indian home ministry observes that "terror infrastructure" in Pakistan and AJK "remains largely intact and continues to be used by Pakistan-based and Inter-Services Intelligence sponsored outfits such as the Jaish-e-Mohammed, Lashkar-e-Toiba and the Al-Badr for carrying out acts of terror in different parts of India." It contended that the "Pakistan-based terrorist outfits are well organised, interlinked and have the latest hardware and communication equipment." However, on the overall security situation in IHK, the status paper, updated 1 January 2008, conceded that there was a "declining trend in the level of violence since 2001 and infiltration declining by 7 per cent in 2007 over 2006." However, it argued that the Lashkar, Jaish, Hizb and the Al-Badr continued to attack soft targets.⁽²⁰⁾

On 26 March, Indian National Security Advisor M. K. Narayanan said: "We see no change in the attitude of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to mentor terrorist activities of the Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad. Attacks on India from the soil of Pakistan will continue,"⁽²¹⁾ He maintained that India wanted stability in Pakistan but was concerned about the "strong pockets" of anti-Indian sentiment in the country, particularly within the ISI. He also warned that "growth of radical elements in Pakistan would have an adverse effect on the security of India." The statement is a grim reminder to Pakistan that it is "not fulfilling" its commitment "not to permit any terrorism from its soil" against India that it undertook in the 6 January 2004 joint statement.

Gwadar Port

On 22 January 2008, the Indian navy chief, Admiral Sureesh Mehta, said that the Gwadar Port being built by Pakistan with Chinese assistance on its Baluchistan coast has "serious strategic implications for India."⁽²²⁾ Pakistan foreign office dismissed concerns expressed by Admiral Mehta saying: "Gwadar is a project for the benefit of the people of Pakistan. It has nothing to do with any other country, so there should be no concerns on that."⁽²³⁾ Pakistan's Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Muhammad Afzal Tahir, also brushed aside Admiral Mehta's concerns about Gwadar as "self-serving" and hoped that India would not inject nuclear weapons into its naval arsenal. He rejected the perception that Gwadar was developed for military purposes. "The port has been developed by a Chinese firm and its operation has been outsourced to a Singapore-based operator. China is not physically present in Gwadar," he explained, adding that the port was developed for the betterment of Pakistani people.⁽²⁴⁾

Water issues

On 30 January, Pakistan stated that it should be allowed to inspect the Baglihar dam before India commissioned it. Pakistan wants to inspect the dam to see if India has complied with the World Bank neutral expert's verdict regarding the design of the power project.

On the other hand, addressing a press conference on 30 January, Indian Water Resources Minister Saifuddin Soz announced that India would harness the irrigation and hydroelectric potential of the country's western rivers to the fullest. Referring to the World Bank's verdict on the Baglihar dam project, he said it had been clearly established that India could use its water for irrigation and other development purposes. He said two more projects — at Burser on River Chenab and at Ujjh on a tributary of River Ravi — were also in the pipeline.⁽²⁵⁾ Soz, however, observed that there was no chance of abrogating the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) with Pakistan. Such statements have strengthened Pakistani fears which is not very satisfied over the verdict of neutral expert that "India can still regulate water of River Chenab through spillway gates and inflict huge damage to irrigation of Punjab which caters to 85% of the food requirements of the whole country."⁽²⁶⁾ India, according to Pakistani experts, "can also weaken defence of Pakistan by stopping water of Chenab through the said spillways as two canals emanate from Head-Marala, Sialkot, which irrigate central Punjab and are also [constructed from] defence point of view, could be dried as and when New Delhi desires." Thus Pakistan has decided to construct Mangla-Head Marala Link Canal to ensure water in the two canals that originate from Head Marala making the defence of the country sound. The link canal will ensure the availability of water in two defence canals, Upper Chenab and Lower Chenab, and provide irrigation water to the wheat fields of central Punjab.⁽²⁷⁾ Pakistan is thinking of moving the International Court of Arbitration on the resolution of the dispute on design of spillways.

Kashmir

The contours of dialogue on Kashmir and its centrality in India-Pakistan relations figured high in the peace process. The first salvo came from Co-chairman Pakistan People's Party Asif Ali Zardari even before the new administration was in place. On 2 March, in an interview with the Indian television news channel CNN-IBN's programme "Devil's Advocate," Zardari underscored the point that relations between India and Pakistan should not be held "hostage" to the Kashmir issue and that the two countries "can wait" so that future generations resolve the dispute in a mature manner in an atmosphere of "trust."⁽²⁸⁾ Asked if the PPP would be willing to put aside the Kashmir issue just as India and China had set aside their border dispute to focus on other aspects of their ties, Zardari said, "Exactly." Zardari's remarks on Kashmir created an impression that the new regime in Pakistan is ready to put Kashmir on the back burner. In his subsequent statements, however, Zardari tried to dispel this impression. After a meeting with IJK People's Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti he emphasized: "We are totally involved with Kashmir, and we intend to solve the

Kashmir problem and not just shadow-box on it.” He emphasized: “We do not want confidence-building measures, we want action.”.... “If boys in Kashmir are to be given pens instead of guns, if they are given jobs, if they are allowed to meet their relatives in Pakistan, if we allow our Kashmiris to meet their Kashmiri brothers across the border, I think it will go a long way.”⁽²⁹⁾ He also indicated that “Kashmir policy will be pushed forward in the parliament” “with an aim to evolve a consensus.” He also said that Pakistan would continue to extend moral, political and diplomatic support to Kashmiris for the resolution of the issue.⁽³⁰⁾

Similarly, on 29 March, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani in his address to the National Assembly after winning the vote of confidence reiterated Pakistan’s traditional position on Kashmir. He stated “the sacrifices made by my Kashmiri brothers and sisters will not go waste” and promised that the issue would be resolved according to the aspirations of the people of Kashmir. The government would take forward the negotiations to seek resolution of the Kashmir issue.” He underlined that confidence-building measures would only be effective if the issue was seen as getting resolved according to the aspirations of Kashmiris and international principles.⁽³¹⁾

Later, on 31 March, Pakistan's new Kashmir Affairs Minister Qamar-uz-Zaman Kaira shortly after taking oath of office said the Kashmir dispute was a “basic issue” which could not be “set aside” and should be resolved for “better ties” with India. “We want trade relations and people-to-people contacts with India to increase. Confidence among the people should grow. The Kashmir issue is a basic issue. We can't set it aside and we have to take it forward and resolve it.”⁽³²⁾ At the same time, Kaira said, “we want to have good ties and trade relations with India because this is the era of regional cooperation. Without regional cooperation, no country or region can survive.” However, Hussain Haqqani, appointed ambassador-at-large and special adviser on foreign affairs and national security to the prime minister, said the normalisation of relations with India would be a priority for the new government but no “unilateral concessions” would be made. Pakistan army expressed its support for the political consensus on the issue of Kashmir. On 12 March, Chief of the Army Staff Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani reaffirmed the army’s commitment to the Kashmir cause in line with the aspirations of the nation. Addressing officers, junior commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers during his first visit to forward locations near the LoC after taking over as the COAS, he said there was a national consensus on the issue.⁽³³⁾ Kayani’s statement led to different interpretations. Some analysts interpreted it as reaffirming army’s commitment to country’s traditional stand on Kashmir others viewed it as support to the new regime for its policy on Kashmir that is in line with the ‘aspirations of the nation’.

The current state of dialogue on Kashmir also figured in Pakistan and India. On 7 February, former Pakistan foreign minister Kharsheed Mehmood Kasuri had said that India and Pakistan might settle the issue of Jammu and Kashmir within the next 10 months.⁽³⁴⁾ The process at back channel as well as through composite dialogue

was moving in positive direction. He stated: "I will not be surprised if major development takes place towards the solution of Kashmir dispute in next 10 months." Admitting that domestic conditions both in India and Pakistan have diverted the focus of attention on Kashmir, he claimed that there was willingness in both countries to find an amicable solution. He said it was generally believed that some development may take place by the end of the year 2007 with the solution of minor issues like Siachen and Sir Creek, but the elections in certain Indian states and afterwards the judicial crisis in Pakistan diverted the attention.

Similarly, in India the media put great emphasis on the continuation of the dialogue on Kashmir. In an editorial in *the Tribune* H.K. Dua observed that interlocutors of the two nations K.S. Lamba and Tariq Aziz had travelled a considerable distance even on Kashmir. Officially, neither government has acknowledged the areas of convergence on Jammu and Kashmir but a few points where the interlocutors have come to a sort of understanding are already known in the public domain. They are:

- No change in the territories;
- Open borders in Jammu and Kashmir;
- Autonomy for both sides of Kashmir;
- Joint consultative commissions to be set up on both sides of Line of Control; and
- Reduction of forces on both sides of Jammu and Kashmir; in other words, demilitarisation.⁽³⁵⁾

Trans-LoC trade

On 22 March, India's Union minister of state for commerce and industry, Jairam Ramesh, during the foundation stone laying ceremony of International Trade Centre at Pampore in south Kashmir said that the trans-LoC trade in Kashmir would start within three months. India had handed over a list of 14 items, including fruits and handicrafts, to Pakistan from which Pakistan had given a go-ahead for 9 items for trade across LoC. Within this context, Jammu-based businessmen have expressed concern that the opening of the trade link between both parts of divided Kashmir would only benefit businessmen in the valley as no measures had been taken to start trade across the LoC from the Jammu region. Traders in Jammu are demanding the opening of Mirpur-Nowshera, Chhamb-Jourian and Sailkot-Suchetgarh road.⁽³⁶⁾

Kashmiris & India-Pakistan Peace Process

Pro-India groups

People's Democratic Party (PDP)

The pro-Delhi Kashmiri groups expressed hope that Kashmir would not be put on the back burner. People's Democratic Party (PDP) patron Mufti Muhammad Sayeed expressed the hope that positive political situation in Pakistan would help to find a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir issue. He said now he sees a "promise in the environment for the people of the state."⁽³⁷⁾ He hoped that the

new government in Pakistan would ardently pursue the peace process with India to permanently end the six decades of hostilities, violence and economic deprivation in the region. He also demanded employment and economic package, troop cutback and repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in the interest of the state's peace and stability. On 26 March chief minister of JH Ghulam Nabi Azad urged Pakistan's new premier to revive the slow-moving peace process with New Delhi. "With an elected government in place in Pakistan, I am hopeful that it will work towards consolidation of the peace process initiated by the two countries four years ago."⁽³⁸⁾

Towards the end of March, PDP president Mehbooba Mufti and National Conference (NC) president Omar Abdullah visited Pakistan to attend the Pugwash Conference. The PDP leader attracted the limelight by meeting PPP-co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari and addressing a joint press conference with him. The press conference facilitated Zardari to clarify his earlier statement that trade and other ties between India and Pakistan should not be made hostage to the solution of the Kashmir issue. Mehbooba Mufti urged the new leadership in Pakistan to take forward the peace process and not put it on the "backburner" as that would nullify the progress made over the last few years.⁽³⁹⁾ She underscored: "Democratic governments always work for peace and do not go to war."⁽⁴⁰⁾ Mehbooba also had a meeting with former president of AJK Sardar Abdul Qayoom Khan and the two leaders jointly addressed the mediapersons.

National Conference

National Conference president Omar Abdullah said that Kashmiris were hoping that Pakistan's new coalition government would "seamlessly" continue the peace process with India and take it forward. "Our expectation is that they will show with not just words, but deeds, that the peace process has been institutionalised in the way Prime Minister Manmohan Singh did when he took over after Atal Bihari Vajpayee."⁽⁴¹⁾ Reacting to Zardari's statement that the Kashmir issue could be put on a backburner, he said: "To believe that a future generation will be better equipped than the present one to solve the issue is a dangerous gamble that no one in Jammu and Kashmir wants to take." He also regretted that India did not respond "in quite as timely a fashion as we should have" on the peace process when President Pervez Musharraf was in charge. By the time progress had been made through back channel diplomacy, he said, Islamabad pulled back citing the political upheaval in the country, and the peace process was "mothballed." He felt that India had lost an opportunity as President Musharraf was the country's all-in-all and it was easier to deal with a single power centre than with several. National Conference patron Dr Farooq Abdullah also accused Delhi of being non-serious towards resolving the Kashmir issue. He stated: "Unfortunately, the Government of India wasted two precious years when Pakistan President Gen Parvaiz Musharraf had showed a soft approach towards resolving the matter through dialogue process." He emphasised the need for involving the people of Jammu and Kashmir in the dialogue process. He said the indifferent attitude of New Delhi towards resolving the matter could

also be gauged from the fact that recommendations of the Kashmir Working Groups were still not implemented and instead the fate of the India-Pakistan dialogue process was hanging in balance. Referring to the resolution on state autonomy passed in the IHK state Assembly during the NC regime, he said: “The Government of India has to restore the autonomy status to Jammu and Kashmir and there is no other alternative to it.”⁽⁴²⁾

Pro-Freedom groups

APHC

All the pro-freedom groups and their leaders in IHK rejected the views of Asif Ali Zardari on his readiness to set the Kashmir issue aside and focus on other aspects for improving relations with India. The spokesman of the hardline faction of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference led by Syed Ali Shah Geelani said the Kashmir issue had its own history and it seemed that Asif Ali Zardari was unaware of Kashmir’s political history, and the cause for which the people of Kashmir had “sacrificed their lives.”⁽⁴³⁾ Syed Ali Shah Geelani said that “Kashmiris should not expect too much from the new government” in Pakistan. He said : “After 9/11, the Pakistan government has taken a U-turn on Kashmir. Pakistan should do some rethinking and support the Kashmiri cause.”⁽⁴⁴⁾

The moderate faction of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference led by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq also expressed its concern over the statement made by the PPP leader. A former chairman of the APHC, Abdul Ghani Bhat said any delay in resolution of the Kashmir issue would be of serious consequences in the entire South Asian region and that “Zardari’s statement was a deviation from Pakistan’s long stand on Kashmir.”⁽⁴⁵⁾ The issue was discussed at the Executive Council meeting of the Mirwaiz faction of Hurriyat Conference which described Zardari’s views on setting aside the Kashmir issue “as his personal opinion”, and “unexpectedly a deviation” from the PPP’s Kashmir policy.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The spokesman said that the people of Kashmir had sacrificed their lives for the resolution of the Kashmir issue and that in view of its sensitivity “the issue cannot be kept hanging for long.”

The pro-freedom groups did not like the visit of mainstream PDP and NC leaders to Pakistan. They felt that such moves were sending very wrong signals in Kashmir. Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, Chairman of Hurriyat Conference (M) decided not to visit Pakistan even as he was invited for the conference.

JKLF

The JKLF chairman, Mohammad Yasin Malik, also expressed concern over the PPP leader’s views. He said the people of Jammu and Kashmir “sacrificed” their lives during the past six decades, “particularly during the last 18 years for a cause” and that the “sacrifices” of the people could not be ignored.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Yasin Malik also rejected any bilateral agreement between New Delhi and Srinagar as a solution to the Kashmir issue saying that it could only be resolved in accordance with the wishes and aspirations of the people. He said

the 1989 armed rebellion was a people's movement, and it was the outcome of a serious approach towards the problem. He said any accord on the lines of 1975 would not be acceptable to the people of Kashmir.⁽⁴⁸⁾

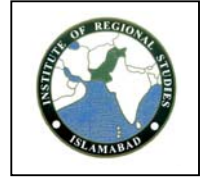
Muttahida Jehad Council

On 1 April, the Supreme Commander of the Muttahida Jehad Council and the Hizbul Mujahideen Kashmir, Syed Salahuddin, stated that Kashmiri Mujahideen could give up their armed struggle only if Indian government agreed to hold tripartite negotiations to find a solution for the Kashmir issue on the basis of UN resolutions.⁽⁴⁹⁾ He underscored that the Kashmiri people would not accept the formula for Kashmir's division or internal autonomy for the disputed region. Justifying the liberation movement, he said: "The armed struggle, which the people of Jammu & Kashmir initiated in 1989, is not a terrorist movement. Instead, it is a recognized movement for freedom and for the right to self-determination for the Kashmiri people. We are peaceful people and want a political solution to the problem."⁽⁵⁰⁾

Notes

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3. "India committed to peace process, CBMs in J&K: Pratibha", *The Kashmir Times*, Jammu, February 26, 2008. Jawed Naqvi, 'India waiting to resume talks', *Dawn*, Islamabad, 26, February 2008.
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6. Ch. Aamer Waqas, "Send their spies alive, get your innocents in coffins!", *The Nation*, 11 March 2008.
7. Baqir Sajjad Syed, "India's explanation sought on prisoner's death", *Dawn*, Islamabad, 13 March 2008.
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10. "Indo-Pak judicial panel decides to release 'petty crime' prisoners", *The Kashmir Times*, Jammu, February 27, 2008.
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After seven years of the "war on terror" and the Iraqi experience, it seems that both "sides," i.e. the militants and the allied forces, have become more pragmatic. Slogans such as "crusade" against Islamic extremism and "clash of civilizations" remain in the media since long but the truth of the matter is, they have merely been catchphrases. The irony is no one is winning the war; both sides have refined their approach aimed at achieving specific goals and targets. If NATO has acquired excellent knowledge of the Taliban's network, the Taliban and al-Qaeda have also excelled in gathering information on NATO and its allies.

Afghanistan terms US estimates baseless

Afghanistan expressed shock and surprise on US intelligence assessment that the Afghan government controlled only 30 per cent of the country and Taliban insurgents held 10 percent, calling the report totally baseless. Amrullah Saleh, head of Afghanistan's intelligence service, refuted the US intelligence assessment calling the report totally baseless.⁽¹⁾ The assessment, by US Director of National Intelligence Michael McConnell, came amid warnings by Western think-tanks, politicians and diplomats that Afghanistan could revert to becoming a failed state and slide back into anarchy. McConnell said the rest of Afghanistan, or 60 per cent of its territory, was under the control of tribal groups.⁽²⁾

Weak government tops Afghanistan's ill

According to *Chicago Tribune*, the biggest challenge is not necessarily the Taliban-led insurgents, problems with the NATO alliance nor the slow pace of reconstruction. Instead, it is the US-backed Afghan government which analysts and some government officials say is not only weak but rife with corruption, from local police in the remote provinces right up to high-level ministers in Kabul. The central government appears unable or unwilling to stem corruption and the drug trade or to establish rule of law, causing some people in the south to turn to the strict Taliban for justice instead of the slow-moving and often corrupt judiciary.⁽³⁾

It is alarming to note that Taliban control 10 per cent of the country, while 30 per cent is controlled by the Karzai government and the rest is under warlords.⁽⁴⁾ In January, a report by former NATO commander and retired US Marine Gen. James Jones concluded that "urgent changes" were required to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a failed state. The independent study, co-written by former UN Ambassador Thomas Pickering, also said Afghanistan risked becoming the forgotten war. The report said, "International engagement is under serious threat from resurgent violence, weakening international resolve, mounting regional challenges and a

growing lack of confidence on the part of the Afghan people about the future direction of their country."⁽⁵⁾

Security still 'major constraint' in Afghanistan

A senior UN official is quoted in a UN press release that lack of security in many parts of strife-torn Afghanistan continues to hinder the efforts of United Nations agencies to deliver vital relief to millions of people affected by a harsh winter and rising food prices. The official, Charlie Higgins, emphasized that the use of international military in support of humanitarian response should only be a "last resort," when all other options have been exhausted."⁽⁶⁾

The Europeans have started questioning the Bush Administration's one-dimensional portrayal of the Taliban as a tightly disciplined, international terrorist organization. " There is a hard core of Islamic extremists of varied ethnic and national origin, but the great majority of people we are engaged against are those who are fighting with the Taliban for financial, social and tribal reasons," says British army chief, General Sir Richard Dannatt." We will need to deal with and eventually reconcile the elected government with the majority of these people."⁽⁷⁾

The increased militarism by the allied forces has undoubtedly unified the Pushtuns — the heart of the Taliban — on both sides of the border, and local tribes have inflicted thousands of casualties on the Pakistan Army, rocketed the provincial capital of Peshawar, and spread the insurgency into the rich Swat Valley.

US launches aggressive training for Afghan police

The US military has launched a plan to dramatically improve Afghanistan's national police force, amid persistent concerns over growing terrorism and crime. The limited but aggressive programme, focuses on some of the country's most dangerous districts in Kandahar and Helmand provinces. The programme, called "Focused District Development," targets police officers in areas key to commerce and security, mainly in the south and east.⁽⁸⁾ Officers in these districts are being sent to regional training centres staffed by Western military personnel and by police officers hired by US security firm DynCorp. There, the Afghan policemen train for eight weeks. He says the main issue with training the Afghans involves refining the role they are expected to play. The U.S. State Department envisions the Afghan officers as taking on a traditional police role, while the Department of Defense wants them to be more of a paramilitary force.

Sweden plans to increase presence in Afghanistan next year

A Swedish military official said on 12 March his country planned to increase its presence in Afghanistan, adding up to 130 soldiers in 2009. Lt. Gen. Anders Lindstrom, head of Sweden's strategic joint forces command, told Swedish broadcaster Sveriges Radio he expected the unit to be increased to close to 500 soldiers next year

because the overall situation in Afghanistan is worsening. Sweden is not a NATO member, but operates under NATO command in northern Afghanistan as part of the International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF.⁽⁹⁾

Sweden's Defence Minister Sten Tolgfors told the Associated Press, he is "open for a number increase" in Swedish troops, but emphasized it will need parliamentary approval and would only concern the northern parts of Afghanistan.

US may be allowed to use Uzbek military base: NATO

Uzbekistan may let the United States use a military airbase for operations in Afghanistan after evicting US troops in 2005, a NATO official said. Any move by Washington to tiptoe back into Uzbekistan is certain to enrage Russia, which has accused NATO of triggering a new arms race by beefing up its military presence around Russia. Once an ally in the US-declared war against terrorism, Uzbekistan evicted US troops from Karshi-Khanabad airbase in 2005 when the West condemned it for firing on protesters in the town of Andizhan.⁽¹⁰⁾

Robert Simmons, NATO's special envoy for the Caucasus and Central Asia, was quoted as saying in Moscow that Tashkent was now willing to let the United States use Termez, another Uzbek airbase operated by Germany.⁽¹¹⁾

Pakistan & Afghanistan for setting up a joint chamber of commerce & industry

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) for setting up Pakistan-Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PACCI) was signed on 15 March here at the regional office of Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI). FPCCI former vice president Faiz Rasool Khan and Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry chief executive Hamidullah Farooqi signed the agreement on behalf of their organisations.

The body, under the agreement, would be governed through a 30-member executive committee having equal representation from both sides. President of the chamber will be elected for two years on rotational basis, first one from Pakistan. However, existence of a similar body with the same objectives and goals is causing confusion about the legality of the new body. The MoU for the same kind of joint chamber of commerce was signed on March 23 last year by the Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) and Afghanistan International Chamber of Commerce (AICC).⁽¹²⁾

Saudi prince interested in investing in Afghanistan

Saudi Prince Al Walid bin Talal, one of the richest men in the world, has shown keen interest in investing in Afghanistan.⁽¹³⁾ He said he was particularly interested in investing in hotels, the energy sector and aviation.

UN renews mission in Afghanistan

The UN Security Council has authorized an expanded political mission in Afghanistan to strengthen support for the Afghan government as the country confronts increasing insurgent violence. The resolution was approved unanimously by the 15-member council.

US Ambassador to the UN Zalmay Khalilzad said, "Afghanistan is one of the most important issues facing the world, because the struggle against terrorism and against extremism in that part of the world is the defining challenge of our time,"⁽¹⁴⁾

The new UN representative to Afghanistan, Kai Eide will have the responsibility to supervise support by the international community to the Afghan government and for leading the UN in a strengthened and expanded presence throughout the country.

Kai Eide said that his top priority would be to better coordinate international development and aid efforts with the NATO-led military forces and Afghan authorities. The Norwegian diplomat said more security in southern and eastern Afghanistan was needed to foster economic and social development, but added that the solution to the war-torn state's problems was political, not military. Mr. Eide told Reuters that the international Community has not coordinated efforts well enough. "The pieces do not fit together well as a result, and it's the Afghans who suffer first," he added.⁽¹⁵⁾

Eide considers his role as a "partner in dialogue" for Karzai and his government, reflecting their concerns to the international community and the world's to the Afghan authorities.

Helmand governor seeks talks with Taliban

The newly appointed governor of Helmand province, Gulab Mangal, has vowed to hold face-to-face meetings with Taliban fighters as part of a new strategy to quell the insurgency raging in Afghanistan's poppy belt. In an interview with the *Financial Times*, the well-regarded former governor of Laghman province said one of his first tasks would be to set up traditional Afghan jirgas – councils or meetings – with “second and third-tier” fighters. He said he hoped to prove to insurgents, and to ordinary Afghans, that only the government could deliver schools, roads and social services.⁽¹⁶⁾

France to host Afghan donor conference

French foreign minister has announced to host an international donors conference for Afghanistan in June 2008.⁽¹⁷⁾ Germany and France are working together to organize the conference, which is aimed at bringing in donations to rebuild Afghanistan and reaching "a common strategy" within the international community for Afghanistan. France has 1,500 troops in and around Kabul, providing security and training Afghan troops as part of the NATO mission. Another 400 are in the separate US-led Operation Enduring Freedom, an effort to battle the Taliban and al-Qaida.⁽¹⁸⁾

Russia to decide soon on NATO Afghan route

Discussion on whether to let NATO transport goods to Afghanistan is an issue in Russia. In 2001, Russia allowed France and Germany to transport military goods to Afghanistan, which ended in the ousting of the Taliban rulers. But Moscow has been reluctant to allow a broader deal with NATO. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that Russia would soon announce whether it would allow NATO to deliver supplies to Afghanistan through its land and air spaces.⁽¹⁹⁾ NATO and Russia already cooperate in training Afghan and Central Asian counter-narcotics officials as part of efforts to contain Afghanistan's huge opium trade.

Moscow urges NATO-CSTO treaty on Afghanistan

Sergei Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, said that Moscow would like to see the signing of a treaty on cooperation in Afghanistan between NATO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).⁽²⁰⁾ Russia has long been urging NATO partners to conclude a treaty on cooperation on all aspects of the Afghan problem between the two organisations. The CSTO includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

EU offers to bolster Afghan police mission

The European Union offered to boost its police training mission in Afghanistan. The EU has expressed its readiness to consider further enhancement of EU engagement, particularly in the field of police and wider rule of law. When fully operational, the EU's EUPOL Afghanistan mission will consist of almost 200 police, law enforcement and justice experts.⁽²¹⁾

EU training will help build the Afghan police force, as well as mentor and advise interior ministry officials. The decision has come in the backdrop of NATO's civilian representative to Afghanistan Dan Everts' criticism that the EU lacks efforts compared to the United States stressing that Afghan police remained widely corrupt and inefficient, aiding drug-trafficking.

Iran refugee expulsions will harm Afghan stability

According to AFP report, Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Rangeen Dadfar Spanta told reporters in Kabul that Iran's mass expulsion of illegal Afghan migrants would harm peace and stability in Afghanistan, which does not have the capacity to receive such large numbers.⁽²²⁾ Teheran has vowed to send back as soon as possible about 1.5 million Afghans who are within its borders without the required papers. Afghanistan has made it clear to Iran that the country does not have the capacity to receive back and reintegrate into social life this many refugees.

Taliban threaten spring offensive on Kabul

A new warning has come from the Taliban leaders to strangle Kabul,

targeting civilians with dozens of suicide bombings and using thousands of fighters to lay siege to road links to the Afghan capital. Western officials have told *The Daily Telegraph* that intelligence reports warn of Taliban plans to increase pressure around the city, which saw more than 30 bombings last year. Some NATO officials predict that the figure could rise above 100 this year. The Taliban strategy will aim to cripple the city's economy through "spectacular" attacks in a new spring offensive, and erode international will to remain in Afghanistan.⁽²³⁾

Speaking from an undisclosed location, one senior Taliban commander with the nom de guerre Abu Tayyub, told *The Telegraph*: "We have planned that 7,000-8,000 fighters will surround Kabul, to block the entrances to the city. Around 1,000 Fedayeen [suicide fighters] will mount attacks inside the city, both suicide and guerrilla attacks."⁽²⁴⁾

It is largely assumed that due to the failure of conventional attacks on western forces, Taliban are now looking for softer targets through suicide bombing. Taliban have made it clear that they did not differentiate between the foreign military forces and the civilians working for the occupying forces; they are all their targets.

Obama asks Europe to do more in Afghanistan

Barack Obama, Democratic Party's front-runner to become its nominee for the White House, praised Britain's Prince Harry for secretly serving on the frontlines of the war and said other NATO allies should be doing more. He said, "With respect to our NATO allies, I've been very clear that we do need more support from them. We also may need to lift some of the constraints that they have placed on their forces there"⁽²⁵⁾

He further said," You can't have a situation where the United States is called upon to do the dirty work, or the United States and Britain are called upon to do the dirty work, and nobody else wants to engage in actual firefights with the Taliban."⁽²⁶⁾

Obama said that it was important for the US to ask more from the European allies. He said that it was also important for the US to send a signal that the US would be listening to them for policies that they usually find objectionable, Iraq being at the top of the list.

Afghanistan needs NATO help

US Vice President Dick Cheney stressed the need for more military assistance for Afghanistan at the NATO summit meeting in Romania in April. Cheney refuted any possibility of Afghanistan sliding into a failed state. He said that the US and NATO allies would not allow resurgent extremists to bully their way back into power.⁽²⁷⁾

Though all 26 NATO nations have soldiers in Afghanistan, the caveat attached to the presence of most of the European allies about no combat action is building up pressure on the US military to fill the

gap. The US contributes one-third of the NATO force, and also has about 12,000 other US troops operating independently from NATO. The Pentagon says that by late summer, there will be about 32,000 US troops in Afghanistan — up from about 28,000 now. The bulk of the increase reflects the 3,200 additional Marines President Bush recently sent to Afghanistan.⁽²⁸⁾

"Through politics and brute force, we can suppress the violence for awhile, enough to give space for people who have never talked to each other, to talk to each other."⁽²⁹⁾

Ronald Neumann, former US envoy to Afghanistan

Notes

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