



# Moving the Indo-Pak Peace Process Ahead: Crucial Questions

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An agreement reached between India and Pakistan on initiating the bus service between the two Kashmiris is seen as a breakthrough in the current peace process. Meetings on gas pipelines, nuclear confidence building measures and the bus service, is perceived as uncomplicated in terms of reaching an understanding, but failed to materialize until January 2005. It was/is believed that a consensus on these three issues, which are achievable, are less controversial and beneficial to both countries would provide a further momentum to both countries to engage in tougher issues, including Kashmir. Cynicism and despondency was growing in the later months of 2004 in the absence of any understanding on these issues. The agreement on bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad has certainly revived the hopes; India's invitation to General Musharraf to watch the cricket matches, which the latter has accepted has arrested the cynicism. Where would the peace process go from here? What are the crucial factors that would make or mar it? What are the ground realities?

## 1. Intra Kashmir Interactions: A new Beginning or a False Dawn?

Given the present situation in India, Pakistan and elsewhere, five factors would play a crucial role in determining this process. First, India's long term approach towards Srinagar and its response to an emerging intra Kashmir dialogue. If India could use the bus service between the two capitals of Kashmir as a means to integrate the people living across the LoC emotionally, economically and politically, it would provide the much needed space vis-à-vis the Kashmiris and Pakistan. There are proposals to initiate more cultural contacts

between the two Kashmiris, foot ball matches and even a joint cricket team against India and Pakistan. There are proposals for economic investments on both sides of the LoC. If these efforts are complimented by New Delhi initiating a serious political dialogue with Srinagar, it may exert pressure on Pakistan and also the Kashmiris to reach an understanding.

On the other hand, if India perceives the bus service as an end, and does not initiate any further dialogue with J&K or desists from negotiating with Pakistan, it would only frustrate both the Pakistanis and Kashmiris. This would also make India suspect, creating the impression that it is not sincere. In such a case, the Indo-Pak dialogue would not proceed much further either on Kashmir or on other issues. The bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad would remain another proof of 'Vajpayee's strategy' towards Kashmir and Pakistan - one step forward, two steps back.

## 2. The US: How Strong is its Pressure and Influence?

The external pressure on India and Pakistan to proceed further remains a crucial factor in sustaining the process. The role played by the international community (read US) in pressurizing India and Pakistan to return to the negotiating table is important. The American pressure was certainly not based on their desire to protect humanity in South Asia; but to further two specific strategic interests. The US needs Pakistan's support for its War against Terrorism, especially in Afghanistan and support from both India and Pakistan for its Iraq policy. Second, the US does not want any nuclear confrontation in South Asia; alternatively it wants to exploit this 'nuclear flashpoint' to compel India and Pakistan to join the international nuclear regime and keep them from developing further nuclear

weapons and missiles. Besides these two specific interests, the presence of US troops in Afghanistan and the related interests in Pakistan and Central Asia contribute in shaping American pressure in South Asia.

If the US approach is based on these narrow objectives, there would not be any real breakthrough in the bilateral process. If the US was to emphasize on economic issues, in particular the gas pipelines from Iran and Turmenistan to India through Pakistan, it would open new areas of cooperation in South Asia. This would lead to the movement of goods and people from Central Asia to South East Asia, through South Asia; strengthening the SAARC in the process. Unfortunately, the US has no such interest; Condoleeza Rice's reservations on the gas pipeline from Iran to India only illustrate this reality. If the US provides F-16s that Pakistan wants as a reward for its increased cooperation to track Osama bin Laden, General Musharraf may feel militarily stronger and his approach to India may not be as conciliatory as at present.

Besides, how much influence has the US over India, Pakistan and the Kashmiris? It can exert pressure, but if the three parties involved are obdurate, there would not be much progress in inter and intra dialogue processes. As proved in

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the past, India and Pakistan have only partially responded to American pressure regarding Kashmir by opening a dialogue and ceasing support for cross border terrorism. Recent years have also witnessed a declining American influence over the Kashmiris. Anti-American feelings are increasing in Kashmir; recent rallies against US actions in Iraq illustrate this change. Neither the separatist leaders, once the darlings of the US, nor the people of Kashmir are positively inclined towards America. Declining American influence, would play a crucial role in keeping

India and Pakistan engaged, irrespective of their rhetoric at governmental levels.

### **3. Pakistan and General Musharraf: How Stable are they?**

Internal stability in Pakistan and the political support for General Musharraf's domestic and external policies would play a crucial role in determining the future course of the peace process. The regime supported by General Musharraf is surviving; but how stable it would be over the next six to twelve months would be significant. (See Suba Chandran, "Pakistan in 2005: Implications for India and Indo-Pak Dialogue," Issue Brief 28, February 2005) The MMA, disappointed with General Musharraf for not shedding his uniform has already started its agitations. Pakistan's internal War on Terrorism in Waziristan begun in 2002, continues to date with no final settlement in sight. Historically, no army - Mughal, Sikh or British has successfully put down the Wazir and Mahsud tribes. Given the current policy and strategy adopted by the Pakistani Army in Waziristan, it is unlikely that these two tribes would submit to the state. In Balochistan, the situation would remain unstable; if threats issued by the state and the Sardars of the Bugti and Marri tribes are considered, it is likely to worsen. The sectarian violence from Gilgit to Karachi has been increasing questioning the tall claims made by General Musharraf about controlling. Enlightened moderation remains only in his speeches and official bravado performed in the national and international televisions. Finally, the much talked about political reconciliation with the opposition parties including the PPP and PML (N) is seen as a grand bargain not based on principles, but on political expediencies.

Much would depend on General Musharraf's ability to cope with the fast growing internal pressure and not letting it affect the slow moving external dialogue with India. How much support he has within the Army and at the popular level remains significant for sustaining the peace process before taking it further ahead.

### **4. People to People: How many and How much?**

The popular support and pressure to sustain the peace process and its ability to influence their governments would remain a major factor. Though there is an emphasis and faith in popular

support, at the ground level, it has remained fragile and ineffective. A militant attack or a communal riot in India is enough to change the popular mood from support to hostility in both countries. The fact that a film actress in Pakistan is getting death threats for her alleged performance in a kiss scene in an Indian movie yet to be released speaks volumes about this fragility. Both countries have been swayed by public responses to the cricket matches and occasional reports about medical treatment and humanitarian assistances. Both governments are reluctant to enhance these popular initiatives or respond to independent efforts from their societies; while the civil societies in both countries have not been able to institutionalize their backing either domestically or bilaterally. The existing bilateral forums remain miniscule and ineffective. How successful these popular initiatives would be in becoming a pressure group at the national and bilateral levels would play a significant role to sustain the current peace process.

### 5. Civilian and Military Bureaucracies: Ready for a Change?

Will the political (and military) leaderships in India and Pakistan succeed in carrying their civilian and military bureaucracies along which remains the most important factor in any positive progress? Recent initiatives between India and Pakistan have been taken not due to any conviction on their part. Instead, they were taken by charismatic leadership, in India and Pakistan, keeping the bureaucracies outside the process. When Vajpayee and Sharif decide to engage, they preferred to rely on back channel diplomacy, but also secret negotiations, keeping out their rigid bureaucracies. This modality was continued later during the JN Dixit - Tariq Aziz meetings. In fact the Niaz Naik - RK Mishra channel was blown by the bureaucracies.

The civilian and military bureaucracies in India and Pakistan have remained rigid and have stuck to their maximalist positions, while the political leaderships both in countries have been willing to take the extra step. There are reports that had it not been for the Brajesh Mishra - Tariq Aziz interactions, the Islamabad summit in January 2004 would never have succeeded in finalizing a joint statement. How successful the political leadership in India and Pakistan are in taking

along their bureaucracy would remain a crucial factor in determining the future of present peace process.

### Final Tally: What is in India's Interests?

From an Indian perspective, it is essential to address these five questions, to sustain the peace process. First, India should use the bus connection between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad as a starting point to initiate an internal dialogue with the Kashmiris. This would garner more sections of the Kashmiris for a dialogue at New Delhi - Srinagar level. This would further distance the militants from the people who believe in violence and the extremist section of the Hurriyat led by Syed Ali Geelani who has already voiced his opposition to the proposed bus service. This modality would provide space for India and Pakistan to reach a long term understanding over Kashmir. Second, India should persuade the US to keep Pakistan on the peace track by not tilting the military balance; American support and influence is also essential for India to keep terrorism in Kashmir within limits and to persuade the Kashmiris to engage in internal dialogue between Srinagar and New Delhi. Third, India may not be able to prevent internal instability in Pakistan; but should realize that an unstable Pakistan is not in its interests both in short and long term. It would be in India's interests therefore to reach an understanding with Pakistan on Kashmir. India could use the proposed visit of Musharraf to watch cricket in New Delhi to start the process of a meaningful dialogue on Kashmir. With real democracy remaining a distant dream in Pakistan, India should deal with Musharraf while he has the power and capacity to deliver. Fourth, India could take unilateral measures to strengthen popular Indo-Pak interactions; a liberal visa regime could be the starting point. Finally, the ability of the political leadership to take along its bureaucracy to sustain the peace process would remain India's greatest challenge



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