

## **Pugwash Meeting no. 303**

### **Jammu and Kashmir and the India-Pakistan Dialogue: The Prospects Ahead 11-14 December 2004, Kathmandu, Nepal**

#### **Media Coverage**

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From *Pakistan Observer*: <http://www.pakobserver.net/200501/07/Articles04.asp>

#### **Kathmandu moot on Kashmir!**

M. Maroof Khan

The historic Pugwash Conference attended by more than 50 leaders from Jammu and Kashmir, India and Pakistan for four days discussed ways and means of ending more than five decades of conflict and establishing a secure and prosperous future for the peoples of Kashmir, a vital region of South Asia. For the first time in many years, members of political parties, Non-Governmental Organisations and civil society from both sides of the Line of Control (LoC) met their colleagues from India and Pakistan, in an atmosphere of trust and reconciliation as they discussed ways of overcoming many of the contentious issues that confront them today. Participants of the four-day conference, held from December 11-14, 2004, welcomed resumption of the composite dialogue between India and Pakistan in the hope that a sustained dialogue between the two countries will lead to enhanced confidence and greater cooperation in areas of mutual interest and a resolution of all outstanding issues including the dispute of Jammu and Kashmir, which has produced widespread suffering and deprivation for the people of the region and served as an enduring source of conflict between India and Pakistan.

The participants expressed the hope that Jammu and Kashmir need not forever represent a chasm dividing Pakistan and India, but could potentially be a bridge between these two great countries and transform the political and economic fortunes of South Asia.

For over four days, participants discussed ways of reducing violence and building trust, improving the transportation infrastructure and economy of the region, instituting cooperative programmes, and generally enhancing the welfare and fulfilling the aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Though, much remains to be done if long-standing tensions are to be overcome but participants at the Pugwash meeting were optimistic that an important first step had been taken. Future meetings and ways of continuing and intensifying the dialogue were also discussed with the stress that the people of Jammu and Kashmir must themselves help lead the way to a more peaceful and prosperous future. International Kashmir Alliance (IKA) had also organized a two-day conference on Kashmir in Toronto, Canada on November 27-28, 2004 after the successful conduct of a two-day Intra-Kashmir Conference at London in May, 2004. The conference attracted a large number of participants from India, Pakistan and both the sides of Jammu and Kashmir, which include politicians, parliamentarians, legislators, human right activists, journalists and experts on Kashmir prominent among them National Conference President and India's former Minister of State for External Affairs Omar Abdullah, who seized the occasion during the two-day deliberations.

In an emotional tone he defended his grand father saying, "late Sheikh Sahib was arrested in 1953 and was put behind bars, spent two decades in jail, he and his colleagues suffered a lot during the span of 22 years but give him the margin that he did not plunge his people in the jungle of death and destruction." However, Abdullah complimented IKA leadership for holding such conferences and seminars as such events provide political and social interaction and help to understand each other. Prior to Omar Abdullah's speech, IKA Vice chairman Mr Mumtaz Khan, while welcoming the participants, threw light on the aims and objectives of the conference. He observed that IKA believes in peaceful resolution of all the political disputes through sustained dialogue and

negotiation opposing every move of commercialisation of politics in Jammu and Kashmir and rejecting any such proposal or idea that aims at the sectarian divide of the State. He said Kashmir could be a piece of land to some people but for us it is much more than that. The people of UN divided State of J&K are the main party and not a single group or forum as is projected by some quarters.

Hence any dialogue or negotiations, which ignore this stark reality was doomed to be failed at the end of the day. Therefore, talks must be inclusive and of representative nature in letter and in spirit. Members of Canadian Parliament Mr Derek Lee, Mr Joe Ko Mortin and Jim Kerygiannis were unanimous in negating the role of violence in the achievement of people's rights and civil liberties. They underscored the need for educational and economical development of people of Jammu and Kashmir. "This is the cornerstone towards the resolution of Jammu and Kashmir problem. Do it if you sincerely want to solve Kashmir problem once for all. However, the education should not be indoctrinated and tribe centric.

Democratic way is the only way if you want to reach somewhere in this behalf. If you succeed in killing even one hundred thousand soldiers, it would hardly make any difference as per the present status of Jammu and Kashmir is concerned. Kashmir is a human problem of political nature. Violence and gun culture is the biggest challenge in Kashmir as violence begets violence, gun invites gun. In 1947, when the tribesmen decided to take part in the freedom struggle of Kashmir, the immediate result was India sending its forces by aircraft, hence more and more guns pouring in Kashmir," they observed. Secretary of CPI (M) in Jammu and Kashmir State and MLA from Kulgam, Mr Mohammad Yusuf Tarigami lauded Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf for his bold and brave declaration that plebiscite was not possible in Jammu and Kashmir. Zafar Iqbal Minhas stressed the need of finding a solution, which does not create other problems. It must be a solution that does not endanger the security of both India and Pakistan and at the same time is consistent with the genuine aspirations of the people of all the five regions of the undivided State of Jammu and Kashmir. "If we have to reach somewhere, then we shall have to confront with some bitter truths and ground realities. The aspirations and wishes of people of J&K are varied, hence a complex situation. Peace is the core issue in Kashmir.

The writer is Islamabad based Kashmiri journalist.

From *Pakistan Observer*: <http://www.pakobserver.net/200501/07/Articles04.asp>