

Pakistani PM says peace with India hinges on Kashmir

Rana Jawad, *Agence France Presse*, 08/14/03

Pakistani Prime Minister Minister Zafarullah Jamali said on Thursday that peace with India hinged on a settlement over Kashmir, the region at the centre of their tensions since the subcontinent was divided to create Pakistan 56 years ago. "We will have to find a solution to the problem of Jammu and Kashmir. It is the fundamental basis for peace in South Asia," Jamali told a flag-raising ceremony to mark Pakistan's Independence Day. "Pakistan wants friendly and cordial relations with India but our desire cannot be fulfilled until the oppressed people of Jammu and Kashmir get their rights," he said.

August 14 marks the creation of Pakistan out of the bloody 1947 partition of what was British-run India, as Britain relinquished control of the subcontinent. The status of the Himalayan region of Kashmir was never resolved at the time of partition. Pakistan and India fought their first war over control of the scenic river-studded state in 1948 and a second in 1965. They were on the brink of a third war over Kashmir last year. For the past four months the nuclear-armed neighbours have been engaged in a fresh bid for peace, reappointing ambassadors and reviving a bus service that was stopped after an attack on India's parliament in December 2001 that New Delhi blamed on Pakistan-backed militants. But dialogue, stalled since a failed summit in India's historic city of Agra in July 2001, remains a long way off.

In recent weeks Jamali and other Pakistani leaders have returned to stressing that resolution of the Kashmir dispute is pivotal to lasting peace. Banners slung across the parliament building and throughout the capital, Islamabad, for Independence Day demand that India leave Kashmir. New Delhi insists the zone of Kashmir it controls is an "integral part" of India.

Pakistan wants a United Nations-mandated plebiscite among Kashmiris, the majority of whom are Muslims, so they can choose rule by India or Pakistan. It accuses India of using its troops to brutally repress Kashmiri aspirations of joining Pakistan and of perpetrating extra-judicial killings, rape and torture. India accuses Pakistan of fomenting a 14-year-old insurgency by Muslim rebels against Indian rule in Kashmir. Pakistan says it only provides moral, political and diplomatic support to what it calls a "legitimate freedom struggle" by Kashmiri people. "Pakistan and India have gained freedom but the people of Jammu and Kashmir remain deprived of their right to self-determination despite the resolutions of the United Nations," Jamali said. "We have to resolve this problem no matter where we begin... I would like to say that India should resolve basic differences with Pakistan if it wants to see peace in the region."

While Pakistan emphasises the centrality of the Kashmir dispute to the normalisation of ties, India prefers improving the climate through business and cultural links. Ordinary Pakistanis interviewed in the capital Islamabad had mixed feelings on the importance of Kashmir. "Kashmir is our pride, Kashmir is our faith and we should continue to fight for it even if we have to live for another 56 years in poverty and hostilities from India," burger-maker Mohammad Irshad, 24, told AFP. Taxi driver Mohammad Sarwar said it would be foolish to give up Kashmir after so much blood had been shed. But others said the government should shelve the dispute and focus on more practical areas like boosting business links. "Frankly, I was disappointed with Jamali's

assertion to link peace to the settlement of the Kashmir dispute with India," a city shopkeeper said. "Our leaders should avoid agitating the issue in public and concentrate more on improving relations in business and other areas."