

Building momentum for peace in J&K - Daily Times

One of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government's more interesting promises has been the formation of a new roadmap on Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). Over the past two decades, there have been multiple interactions between [Islamabad and New Delhi](#) on this longstanding territorial dispute. The problems preventing a resolution to the J&K dispute are well known; unfortunately, the recommendations and solutions reached through the above interactions have not succeeded in providing a road map that is acceptable to all the actors involved.

In recent years, at the State level, India and Pakistan have pursued divergent paths, increasing their distance. New actors, with substantial street power in both countries, are pushing India and Pakistan further away from each other. Extra-regional actors — particularly the US and China — are pursuing their global interests in South Asia; but unfortunately, this pursuit is pushing India and Pakistan into different groupings, as it happened during the Cold War.

Within J&K, there are new issues and bigger stakes — politically and economically. From Lakhnampur in the Jammu region to the Khunjerab pass in Gilgit, new issues are emerging within different parts of J&K. The emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its strong political presence in Jammu, CPEC investments in Gilgit-Baltistan, sectarian violence along the Karakoram Highway (KKH), the strategic significance of KKH, and the resurgence of violence inside Kashmir Valley are recent developments that have the potential to push the different regions of J&K further apart from each other.

[Shireen Mazari's](#) proposed new report on J&K to be tabled in Pakistan's Parliament assumes importance in this context. While the contours of the Mazari report, and likely responses from India will have their own trajectory, as a civil society, India and Pakistan will have to explore new alternatives to break the present impasse between the two, especially on J&K.

Especially, at the academic, media and track-II levels, there has to be a new push. Given the past, the critics have every right to be cynical. Nothing may change at the end, even with a *Naya Pakistan*; but that should not stop the two countries to identify new pathways to work together. Allowing the status quo to persist will increase the Indo-Pak divide.

Now let us address J&K. Let us start with some low hanging fruits on J&K and expand some of the existing interactions. This should build a peace momentum between the two countries, which could provide confidence to India and Pakistan to tackle contentious issues in J&K subsequently.

Halting violence completely across the Line of Control should be the starting point for any Indo-Pak icebreaker. This is absolutely doable and has adequate mechanisms in place already. The 2004 agreement between the two countries was leading towards making the LoC stable between India and Pakistan.

The above stability across the LoC had three serious positive implications in J&K. First, it immensely helped the border communities to stabilise and improve their livelihood. From agriculture to education, the reduction in violence across the [LoC](#) made the border people confident. Second, aided by the above confidence, the rest in J&K started looking beyond the violence and instability narrative. It helped the rest to invest further in cross-LoC interactions via the bus and truck services. Third, a silent LoC had a loud but positive echo in the regional capitals at the political levels. It helped to build a positive environment in J&K.

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Let India and Pakistan start with stabilising the LoC. There will still be occasional skirmishes; but both countries must ensure that the violence does not escalate. Militant groups must not be allowed to undermine the above stability.

Once the LoC is stabilised, let India and Pakistan re-build the momentum across the LoC, and expand the interactions further.

During 2004-08, India and Pakistan took new and bold initiatives across the LoC — bus and truck services. There are complex issues in both the interactions; but they signified a courageous new beginning between the two countries. It is unfortunate that the two countries failed to follow up on this. The original spirit behind these two interactions were forgotten; both India and Pakistan, along with the Kashmiris on both sides of the LoC got embroiled in narrow interpretations. As a result, a great beginning was reduced to a trickle.

Rebuilding the above two cross-LoC interactions will create great momentum for India and Pakistan in J&K. As of now, these interactions are taking place only through two vectors and need to be deepened. Additionally, they also need to be expanded in other sectors. New points have been already identified — for example across Kargil-Skardu. Besides the bus and truck services, there have been policy suggestions to expand the intra-Kashmiri interactions at the civil society levels. Vice Chancellors, economists and media personnel across the LoC have [explored new areas of interactions](#). From Cross-LoC educational interactions to tourism, there are already policy recommendations containing a list of things that India and Pakistan could consider.

As a part of the cross-LoC interaction, there could even be a bold attempt to see whether the mighty Indus could become a connector in J&K. The current differences between the two countries on the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) are well known. In recent years, there has been a further divide between the two countries on the IWT projects. It is unfortunate that both the countries have allowed the water warmongers to take over the IWT debate.

Can the IWT be used to identify a common project that both countries can work together, especially in J&K? Legally, the document provides ample space to cooperate.

Cross-Indus interactions could be a separate pursuit in itself. Indus and its tributaries could be a great connector.

Significant momentum will be gained once the LoC is stabilised and the interactions across the Line are revised with expansions.

Building a peace momentum in J&K is an essential precursor to addressing several complex issues. The earlier approaches of “resolve Kashmir”, leading to a top-down political process have not succeeded. Let India and Pakistan reverse their approach. Failures of the past initiatives must not burden new approaches. Let India and Pakistan be cautiously pessimistic but also courageously optimistic.

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