

Musharraf proposes 'new' Kashmir measures, India disposes

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Indian officials are perplexed and bemused over Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf's recent proposal on resolving the Kashmir issue.

Bemused because various versions of his proposal — to 'demilitarize' seven sections of Kashmir, which could be given either independence, or run under joint control or a UN mandate — have been floating around at least since the time of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, if not earlier.

Perplexed because despite both sides repeatedly exhorting each other to refrain from using the media to air its views, Musharraf did precisely that by raising the issue during an *iftar* party for Pakistani journalists in Islamabad October 25.

The second round of discussions on eight subjects — including Kashmir, nuclear and conventional confidence building measures and the proposed bus link between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad — begin in Delhi November 29.

"We have heard these comments. We do not believe that Jammu and Kashmir is a subject on which discussion can be held through the media," External Affairs Ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna told journalists in Delhi.

Jammu and Kashmir is one of the subjects in the Composite Dialogue process, and "so, if there are any proposals, suggestions, that is the forum we expect they will be brought to," he said.

Musharraf's assertion that Pakistan

would not insist on UN resolutions for a plebiscite too were not new, although this was the first time he had announced it so categorically, said an Indian official.

The rejection of the Line of Control as the international border too was just a reiteration of Pakistan's long-standing position on the issue, he said.

"The only thing new, if it can be called that, in Musharraf's latest proposals, is the formal recognition, or inclusion of the so-called northern areas, like Gilgit-Baltistan as a part of the Kashmir problem," said another official.

The division of the state along ethnic and linguistic lines also belied Pakistan's long-standing position that Kashmir should be part of that country because of its Muslim majority, he pointed out.

Traditionally, India has divided Kashmir into five sectors, the Northern Areas, Pakistan occupied Kashmir, the Kashmir Valley, Jammu and Ladakh.

Musharraf's seven-part division, based on ethnic and linguistic factors, are the Kashmir Valley; Hindu-dominated Jammu; Buddhist-dominated Leh; Sunni Muslim-dominated Rajouri, Poonch and Doda Districts; Shia-dominated Kargil, Kathua and parts of Udhampur districts; Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, Gilgit and Baltistan.

Musharraf's announcement seems to have caused more consternation in Pakistan than in India, with the opposition and right wing parties and even the lawyers association in Lahore

accusing Musharraf of having 'sold out' the Kashmir movement.

Officials later insisted that the President's proposals were only meant to foster debate.

India has repeatedly rejected any suggestions about demilitarizing or changing the status of any of the regions in Kashmir. Musharraf's proposals are very much on the lines of similar proposals made directly or indirectly by Pakistan for the part five years, said Sundeep Waslekar, president of the Strategic Foresight Group, a Mumbai based independent think-tank.

"Essentially, he is interested in India losing control over the Valley," he said.

As for demilitarization, he said while the idea might sound good on paper, the fact is that when you demobilize troops, you leave the field open for militants and terrorists.

"Does Musharraf's proposal to demilitarize also include disarming of terrorists?"

"Water is what it is about — Pakistan needs it and much like it uses terrorism as a strategic leverage over India — India, being the upper riparian state, must maintain its leverage of controlling river headwaters," said US based commentator Arindam Banerji.

"Any plan that reduces this advantage must be rejected — the Siachen plan could make water-giving glaciers available to Pakistan; the Chenab/KSG plans make the Chenab headwaters vulnerable. Hence, for India's own strategic interests, these must be rejected," he said.



AP/GETTY IMAGES

■ Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf addresses journalists at an *iftar* party in Islamabad October 25 where he announced his new proposals on Kashmir

Musharraf Speak

- Rejects LoC as border
- Willing to forget plebiscite
- Divides Kashmir into seven regions — two with Pak, five with India
- Demilitarize the seven regions
- Change their status to joint control/UN mandate/independence