

Intra-Kashmir dialogue: need for consensus

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Introduction

Kashmiris are central to the resolution of the Kashmir conflict as they are the primary party that has suffered most from India-Pakistan's prolonged confrontation over Kashmir, yet they remain on the margins of any dialogue process on Kashmir. Further, years of separation, absence of communication and dialogue reinforced by physical barriers and dominance of state narratives has contributed in trust deficit, perception gaps and emergence of separate, competing and even conflicting narratives within different regions of divided Kashmir and across the LoC. Nonetheless, there is a broad consensus that aspirations of Kashmiris be fulfilled through democratic means and they should be involved in India-Pakistan dialogue process.

Ever since the resumption of India-Pakistan composite dialogue in 2004, there has been a number of Kashmir-specific Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), especially in the area of travel and trade that have expanded cross-LoC interactions between Kashmiris living on both sides of the LoC, but intra-Kashmir dialogue has remained minimal and largely ad hoc in nature. There have been some visits of individual leaders from across the LoC and few intra-Kashmir meetings organised by international and India-Pakistan based organisations working in conflict resolution and peace building. The main focus of intra-Kashmir dialogue within different regions of divided Kashmir and across LoC is to bridge divides and perception gaps and evolve consensus on common concerns of various regions in Kashmir; strengthen cross-LoC CBMs and discuss ideas regarding ultimate solution of the Kashmir conflict which is acceptable to people of Kashmir from all regions, India and Pakistan.

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The paper attempts to look into the logic and importance of intra-Kashmir dialogue in building consensus amongst Kashmiris to play their role for political settlement of the Kashmir conflict. It explores the current context and trends in intra-Kashmir dialogue and emerging issues in the discussions that various organisations have organised to engage Kashmiris in the dialogue process. Finally it examines the challenges that intra-Kashmir dialogue is facing in terms of perception gaps, leadership rivalries, regional and religious distrust and aspirations and the unresponsive attitude of the governments in Delhi and Islamabad. It argues that a structured and sustained intra-Kashmir dialogue is must for building a shared vision on resolving Kashmir conflict and bringing Kashmiris' voice forcefully in the India-Pakistan dialogue process on Kashmir.

Contextualising intra-Kashmir dialogue

Kashmiri narrative on Kashmir conflict is largely fractured and divided along the regional and the religious lines. There have been several reasons for the fractured narratives. The foremost has been the territorial division of Kashmir in 1947, which also divided the people and hardened the communication barriers with a ceasefire line that was later turned into LoC in 1972, sealing the movement of the people or goods across. The physical barriers were not confined to the absence of cross-LoC movement alone. It became a militarised, volatile and contested line where wars were fought, warlike crises erupted and shelling and fencing became frequent with landmines littering the line of control. Secondly, the division of land of Kashmir gave it a territorial dimension with Indian and Pakistani conception of security taking a state security route and human dimension of security taking a back seat. As a result, Indian and Pakistani narrative on Kashmir was securitised with the partition that also influenced the mainstream Kashmiri discourse on the issue. Although Kashmiris kept on demanding their inclusion in deciding their final destiny and frequently referred to ascertaining their wishes, that remained unheeded.

Against this backdrop, the Kashmiris' voices remained irrelevant at best and suppressed at worst. Today, in Indian held Kashmir (IHK), diverse and even conflicting regional narratives exist within and across the three regions- Valley, Jammu and Ladakh. In the Kashmir Valley that has been at the centre of *azadi* struggle, the dominant narrative has remained end of Indian rule shared by political umbrella group – All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) and the militants conglomeration United Jihad Council/Hizbul Mujahideen. The pro-*azadi* groups- APHC asserts that final status of Kashmir is yet to be determined through the exercise of the right of self-determination in accordance with the UN Charter and UNSC and UNCIP Resolutions passed in 1948-49. Although it is making endeavour for an alternative negotiated settlement acceptable to all parties to the dispute, there continues to be strands within the APHC narrative

involving pro-Azadi, pro-accession (to Pakistan) to pro-independence sentiments. The Hizb and various militant groups under the United Jihad Council (UJC) have been largely considered supportive of Pakistan. The Geelani faction of Hurriyat had rejected Musharraf's four-point formula and wants Islamabad to pursue its traditional stance. He strongly feels that any deviation would "cause damage to the interests of Pakistan as well as Kashmiri nation."¹ However, he favours a peaceful struggle to achieve the right of self-determination for the Kashmiris.

The ruling political parties in IHK are generally viewed as pro-India parties as they advocate extensive autonomy for Kashmir with some nuances- like National Conference (NC) demanding the restoration of greater autonomy, originally accorded to Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution while the State Congress, an extension of Indian National Congress supporting the state autonomy within the constitutional framework of India. The Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), formed in 1999 and led by a former Congress leader from Kashmir Mufti Sayeed is intensely backing self-rule for all regions of Kashmir with soft borders.

The regional narrative is more divided. In Jammu region, the discourse ranges from regional autonomy to the demand for *punun* Kashmir. The state wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) like national BJP strongly subscribes to the scrapping of special status given to Kashmir under Article 370 and complete integration with India. Kashmiri Pandit migrants on the other hand have their own grievances and since mid-1990s are pursuing a demand for *Punun* Kashmir, implying a homeland for the Kashmiri Pandits. The Ladakh region divided into Buddhist-dominated Leh and Muslim-dominated Kargil has its own regional perspectives along the regional and religious divides.

On the Pakistani side, the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) political parties have broadly followed the national narrative with an urge and now increased demand for more politico-economic autonomy for the region. The people of Gilgit- Baltistan (GB) on the other hand have always aspired for their political economic rights and the dominant sentiment has been to become a province of Pakistan.

Despite fractured narratives, in the past few years there has been a strong demand by Kashmiris of all political shades and regions for an intra-Kashmiri dialogue and their involvement in the dialogue process that concerns their lives and the lives of their future generations. The dialogue is very important as it would help Kashmiris to develop a consensus for a common position and a shared vision which is essential for bringing their voice in the settlement process of Kashmir along with India and Pakistan.

Engaging Kashmiris: Current trends in intra-Kashmir talks

The resumption of composite dialogue in 2004 included for the first time some Kashmir-specific cross-LoC CBMs to ease movement of people and goods between divided Kashmir. This provided opportunity to APHC and other individual Kashmiri leaders to visit Pakistan and some of them, especially the Hurriyat leaders crossed LoC using entry permit as travelling document and came over to AJK and Pakistan. In addition, in the last few years, some intra-Kashmir discussions have been organised by international, Delhi and Islamabad based organisations working in conflict resolution and peace building where Kashmiris from both sides of the LoC have participated. There are number of issues that have emerged in this limited intra-Kashmiri interactions which reflect the perceptions, concerns and hopes of the Kashmiris to develop their own narrative that satisfies the aspirations of Kashmiris from all regions and involves them in resolving the conflict.

Visits of individual Kashmiri leaders

The resumption of cross-LoC travel provided opportunity to individual Kashmiri leaders from across the LoC to meet the AJK political leadership to develop better understanding of the drivers of Kashmir conflict and imperatives for its resolution. In June 2005, a nine-member delegation² of APHC's moderate faction travelled to AJK and Pakistan by trans-LoC bus service which was very emotively received by the AJK leaders on the LoC. This was the first time that pro-freedom political leadership crossed LoC on entry permit that both sides worked out to facilitate 'free movement' of the people within the divided parts of Kashmir. Delhi allowed APHC leaders to visit AJK and Pakistan while Islamabad reciprocated by allowing pro-Delhi leadership especially those from NC and PDP to come to Pakistan and participate in conferences on regional peace and security and meet Kashmiri and Pakistani political leadership.

In their first trip, the Kashmiri leaders who came at the invitation of Pakistan, supported India-Pakistan peace process, but demanded their participation in the dialogue and called for new ideas and a change of strategy to pursue settlement of Kashmir.³ Chairman of APHC (Ansari) Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and Yasin Malik of Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) argued that dialogue process could not move forward without inclusion of the Kashmiris in the talks. The leaders also addressed the meeting of joint houses of AJK legislature and stressed that there should not be any 'sell out' on the sacrifices made by the Kashmiris for the cause and urged on a sincere and purposeful dialogue in a forward looking manner. Mirwaiz justified changing strategy while pursuing a 'defined goal' and called on Kashmiri leadership to make themselves 'relevant' to the peace process and put their heads together and think "how best we can represent ourselves" in the planned dialogue.⁴

Abdul Ghani Bhat, another APHC leader called for an end to all kinds of violence in the state, dialogue with the militants, “those who hold the gun” and urged them to “give peace a chance”.⁵ APHC leaders also met Kashmiri leaders from AJK. The visit was significant as it marked first ever open interaction between political leaders from both parts of Kashmir since it got divided in 1947-48. The hardline faction of APHC led by Syed Ali Shah Geelani which had opposed the cross-LoC bus service, however, declined the invitation, saying that country’s leadership was ‘deviating’ from its basic stance on Kashmir. He maintained that Kashmir could only be resolved through plebiscite and tripartite talks.⁶

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The 2005 earthquake that devastated several parts of AJK and some areas across the LoC highlighted the human dimension of the conflict and the need for greater intra-Kashmir interaction and dialogue. People living along the LoC could not reach out to each other to provide relief or share grief. The quake expedited the opening of five cross-LoC points. In January 2006, a three-member delegation of moderate faction of APHC(A)⁷ led by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, along with Prof. Abdul Ghani Bhat and Bilal Ghani Lone visited AJK and Pakistan. They held discussions with top political leadership of AJK and visited quake hit areas including Ambore refugee camp of the Kashmiri migrants who had come there after 1990 and expressed their solidarity with the quake victims. Referring to human dimension of Kashmir, Mirwaiz said the “quake has once again highlighted the humanitarian aspect of Kashmir problem. It is now being acknowledged at the international level that Kashmir is more than a political issue. People are divided, families are divided and their pain and agony should end”.⁸

In their discussions, the Kashmiri leaders from both sides rejected permanence of LoC as border and stressed on the inclusion of Kashmiris in the dialogue process and a sustained dialogue between the Kashmiri leadership from both sides of the divide so that they can evolve consensus around ideas and strategy to reach a settlement of the issue. They also met top Pakistani leadership including then President, Prime Minister and foreign minister and expressed their willingness to talk on all options but rejected the idea of converting LoC into permanent border. The visiting leaders also explored their ideas and proposals with AJK and Pakistani leaders. Mirwaiz discussed his proposal on United States of Kashmir including demilitarisation while President Musharraf shared his ideas regarding demilitarisation and self-governance in Kashmir which were then

under discussion with New Delhi through ‘quiet’ unofficial channels. APHC leaders supported the initiative on Kashmir, described proposals as positive but felt these could be CBMs, not permanent solution to the issue. Mirwaiz said autonomy and self-rule in Kashmir were different things which must not be confused. The Kashmiris “reject autonomy under the framework of the Indian constitution but self-rule is something different from that”.⁹ Khurshid Kasuri in his meeting with the delegation expressed optimism and anticipated “forward movement” on Kashmir issue in the third round of composite dialogue. Hurriyat delegation, however, did not interact with the two main opposition political parties - Pakistan Peoples’ Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz).

A year later, in January 2007 another Hurriyat delegation led by Mirwaiz came and interacted with top Kashmiri leadership in AJK and Pakistan. Mirwaiz urged political leadership of both countries to evolve a domestic consensus by involving political parties for a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the Kashmir dispute. In the meeting with Musharraf, the discussion was largely focused on his four point formula including self-governance, demilitarisation and joint control of the disputed territory. Mirwaiz endorsed ideas, embodied in the formula and felt that it had the potential of working out a common plan for the settlement for Kashmir.¹⁰

Significantly, in a joint press conference, Mirwaiz announced that as part of intra-Kashmir dialogue, the leaders from both sides of Kashmir had agreed to set up two working groups to enhance mutual interaction aimed at contributing towards the resolution of the Kashmir issue.¹¹ These working groups on Kashmir were to meet after every two months. Kashmiri leaders from both sides also stressed on a tripartite dialogue involving Pakistan, India and the Kashmiris and termed it vital for finding a durable solution of the Kashmir dispute. The AJK president Raja Zulqarnain Haider felt that a more united Kashmiri leadership could mount pressure for involvement of the Kashmiri people in the dialogue process.¹²

Of great significance was Mirwaiz call to *mujahideen* groups to give up armed struggle to pave the way for fruitful negotiations for a lasting settlement of the Kashmir dispute. Mirwaiz said some people involved in the struggle could still have some reservations, but as far as the APHC was concerned, “we are not prepared to sacrifice any more of our loved ones”.¹³ Mirwaiz and Yasin Malik of JKLF met with Syed Salahuddin, head of Hizbul Mujahideen and Chairman of United Jihad Council (UJC) separately and urged him to give up armed struggle but they failed to convince him. Salahuddin in fact, expressed support for Syed Ali Shah Geelani’s inclusion in the peace process.

In June 2008, Mirwaiz again led a three-member delegation comprising Abdul Ghani Bhat and Bilal Ghani Lone to Pakistan on the invitation of former Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Geelani. They met leaders of political parties in Pakistan including chief of Jamaat-e-Islami, Peoples Party (PPP) and the Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM); former president Musharraf and the AJK leadership. The discussion focused on measures that could be taken for Kashmir solution and what Kashmiris could get out of peace process. Mirwaiz also brought up the issue of ‘mass graves, cultural invasion, transfer of hundreds of kanals of land to Shri Amar Nath Shrine Board and other non-state subjects, the issue of human rights violations and massive troops’ concentration in Kashmir. He strongly felt that there was no impact of peace process in Kashmir, as there was no change whatsoever on ground.¹⁴

An important development in this visit was that Mirwaiz for the second time met UJC/Hizb chief Syed Salahuddin and both discussed the need to bring all the pro-movement forces together so as to evolve a joint strategy to address the Kashmir issue. Salahuddin gave him “full assurance” of his support for the efforts undertaken and agreed to carry forward the consultation process.¹⁵

Yasin Malik of JKLF also made several trips to AJK and Pakistan and met local Kashmiri and Pakistani leaders as well as cross-section of Kashmiri and Pakistani society. He also came to AJK with relief goods to empathise with quake victims and conveyed sentiments of the Kashmiri brothers from the other side that wanted to help the victims “but the restrictions along the dividing line prevent[ed] them from doing so”.¹⁶ Yasin Malik supported India-Pakistan peace process but strongly felt that Kashmiris must be given a role in the process. “It is also in the national interest of India and Pakistan to give this role to Kashmiris,”.... “This is the collective voice of the Jammu and Kashmir people.”¹⁷ He repeatedly stated that exclusion of Kashmiris from the talks had been a main reason of failure of bilateral agreements on Kashmir.

As composite dialogue got under way, Islamabad opened communication channels with pro- Delhi political leadership from IHK, especially those belonging to NC and PDP. Several Kashmiri political leaders from across LoC visited Pakistan on different occasions to attend conferences and used the opportunity to hold discussion with Pakistani government.

Visits of pro- Delhi political leaders from IHK

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visited Pakistan on different occasions to attend conferences and used the opportunity to hold discussion with Pakistani government. Much importance was given to the visits of PDP President Mehbooba Mufti and Omar Abdullah of NC who came to Pakistan to attend Pugwash meetings and discussed various models of the settlement of the Kashmir dispute with Pakistani leadership. In 2006, during his first visit to attend the Pugwash Conference in Islamabad, Omar Abdullah met with Musharraf and discussed National Conference's autonomy proposal for Kashmir and found him responsive on several points.

In 2008, Mehbooba Mufti and Omar Abdullah came to Pakistan for the Pugwash Conference. On 3 April, in a speech on “Indo-Pakistan Relations and the Kashmir Issue” at the South Asia Media Centre in Islamabad, Mehbooba proposed setting up of a “Regional Council” comprising members of assemblies of both parts of Kashmir for settling the dispute. The Council serving as a joint Indo-Pakistan senate with a twin power sharing formula could serve as means to find out a lasting peace in Kashmir before a final solution could be arrived at. Regional Council members could be elected from all parts of Kashmir — whether under Pakistani or Indian control. “Elections for them [could] be held under the constitutions of respective parts they come from, without having to abandon their existing territorial loyalties.”¹⁸ However, following little support from NC and state Congress and hawkish reaction from BJP and Jammu and Kashmir National Panthers Party (JKNPP) of Bhim Singh and Indian media, she backtracked on her suggestions. During her visit, she met former President and Prime Minister of AJK, Sardar Abdul Qayoom and discussed “political and economic issues” facing the two parts of Kashmir. She strongly advocated inclusion of militant groups into talks. Omar Abdullah also met with the then President Gen. Pervez Musharraf.

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AJK leaders' limited travel across LoC

There was hardly any reciprocal visit of the top political leaders of AJK across-LoC that could have strengthened intra-Kashmir dialogue and India-Pakistan peace process on Kashmir. Only Sardar Abdul Qayum, former Prime Minister of AJK could go to Delhi in 2005 to attend ‘heart to heart’ dialogue organised by Bhim Singh. For the first time, in September 2011, former AJK Prime Minister Barrister Sultan Mehmood Chowdhary could visit Srinagar to attend the marriage of son of a close businessman friend Zahoor Ahmad Watali.

In his press conference, he pointed out that he is the first person from Azad Kashmir to visit Indian held Kashmir. “The process should not stop here. It should go on.”¹⁹ The trip was of course not possible without approval of both New Delhi and Islamabad. During his visit, he met chief minister Omar Abdullah and cross section of political figures and called for settlement based on ‘the implementation of UN resolutions’.

Intra-Kashmir discussions organised by peacebuilding organisations

For the past several years, a limited and intermittent intra-Kashmir dialogue is going on either at a neutral venue or in Delhi and Islamabad but hardly on the soil of Kashmir. Some groups engaged in arranging intra-Kashmir dialogue are Delhi-based Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation (CDR), Jammu-based Panthers Party; Islamabad-based Kashmir Institute of International Relations (KIIR) and Jinnah Institute; London-based Conciliation Resources (CR), Rome-based Pugwash, US-based International Centre for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD), Institute of Multi Track Diplomacy (IMTD) and US Institute for Peace (USIP).

CDR is engaged in intra-Kashmir dialogue at inter-regional as well as cross-LoC levels. Between 2005 and 2007, it organised several intra-Kashmir conferences in Srinagar, Jammu, Delhi, Haryana as well as one in Islamabad.²⁰ Some of them were intra-regional and others across-LoC. The first one took place in Srinagar in July 2005. It was first Kashmir conference that was held on the soil of Kashmir under Indian occupation and had participation from AJK, Gilgit and Baltistan as well. In April 2006, CDR organised an intra-Kashmir dialogue in Jammu with one-day session in Kashmir Valley. It was attended by participants from both sides of the LoC. The conference made specific recommendations regarding dialogue process and its mechanism, CBMs and solution for Kashmir issue. It supported multi-religious, multi-regional, comprehensive and co-political dialogue process that is suitable and exhaustive without any preconditions and suggested various platforms for inter-state dialogue both with India and Pakistan that included facilitation by Indian and Pakistani NGOs.²¹ It suggested strengthening of bilateral CBMs, opening of all traditional trade and travel routes and simplification of travel across LoC.

On 7 May 2008, CDR organised a three-day intra-Kashmir dialogue attended by 40 political leaders from both sides of the LoC, India and Pakistan. The group supported the composite dialogue process and suggested the constitution of a truth and reconciliation commission to address the issue of human rights violations in entire State of Jammu and Kashmir. The group also said that no decision on ‘Jammu and Kashmir’ should be taken without the consent of its people, and “separatists” should also be involved in peace talks.²²

CDR also organised intra-regional dialogue amongst people of the three regions of the IHK – Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh. The first such dialogue took place in 2004. The participants in this dialogue were convinced that ‘a common understanding had to evolve if they hoped to resolve the Kashmir problem.’²³

‘Heart to Heart’ dialogue

In 2005, the Panthers Party organised intra-Kashmir ‘Heart to Heart’ dialogue in Jammu and Delhi that was attended by political leadership from both parts of divided Kashmir. This provided opportunity for the first time to top political leaders from divided Kashmir to come on one platform. The leading political figures and civil society members from AJK included Sardar Qayyum Khan of the Muslim League that was in power for most of the time of its existence. Three intra-Kashmir ‘heart to heart’ conferences took place in Srinagar, Jammu and New Delhi where Kashmiris tried to articulate their views and bridge the gaps between themselves. Another Heart to Heart dialogue was held in 2007 and one is set to take place in May this year. The dialogue has been largely episodic and not effective as such.

KIIR has also organised few meetings involving Kashmiris from both parts of divided Kashmir. In 2003, KIIR in collaboration with International Centre for Religion and Diplomacy (USA) initiated a faith based reconciliation project in Kashmir. In November 2005, KIIR and ICRD organised an intra-Kashmir dialogue in Kathmandu with the objective to bring the Kashmiris of all regions and religions from both sides of LoC for building bridges with the concept of faith-based reconciliation. The consensus emerged on a pluralistic vision of the community and the restoration of human values; return and rehabilitation of the Kashmiri Pandits and all displaced persons to their homeland; demolishing walls of hostility and hatred; encouraging free flow of the Kashmiris; inclusion of Kashmiris in the peace process for achieving sustainable peace and international support to India-Pakistan peace process.²⁴ The meeting strongly recommended that respect for all religions should form part of educational curriculum; unified voice of Kashmiris to get their aspirations heard and power sharing among different identity groups to ensure social justice. In March 2007, KIIR in collaboration with US-based IMTD and USIP organised a conflict transformation workshop on Kashmir. It was attended by many prominent political figures and civil society individuals from both sides of Kashmir, India, Pakistan and the US. It discussed various issues pertaining to human rights, justice, ideas of demilitarisation, self-governance, joint management and different models of conflict resolutions.

The Pugwash has organised several workshops as part of track II dialogue on

India-Pakistan and Kashmir-specific workshops since 2002. In December 2004, Pugwash organised its first conference on Kashmir at Kathmandu, Nepal which provided opportunity to Kashmiri leaders from both sides of the LoC to meet and discuss various dimensions of the Kashmir issue. The initiative held with tacit support of the two countries brought together prominent politicians, intellectuals and civil society activists from both sides of the LoC. It resolved “to integrate the Kashmiri leadership and society in a framework of semi-official dialogue with a reach to the formal circles of bilateral negotiators.”²⁵ In March 2006, over eighty delegates including prominent leaders and civil society representatives from both sides of Kashmir²⁶ participated in the second Kashmir conference organised by Pugwash in Islamabad. It focused on the ‘prospects for self-governance in Jammu & Kashmir, and present status of cooperation and communication across the LoC’. The dialogue provided Kashmiri politicians of diverse opinion an opportunity to discuss the future of their divided state amongst themselves and with intellectuals and former diplomats from India and Pakistan. In Kashmir, on both sides of the LoC, the process was “viewed as extremely slow, lacking inclusiveness and lacking perceptible positive effects.” It was pointed out that Kashmir-specific CBMs are “too restrictive and inaccessible to common man.”²⁷ There was also discussion on Musharaf’s ideas of self-governance, demilitarisation and need to end all types of violence. Participants were sharply divided on a number of issues, especially those related to terrorism and demilitarisation.²⁸ Although no clear-cut consensus was achieved at the end of the meeting, most participants expressed their support for the peace process between the two countries and urged them “to create mechanisms whereby Kashmiris would have a voice in the peace process.”

In July 2007, Pugwash organised another intra-Kashmir workshop in Colombo which focused on “Building Institutions for Peace in J&K, and Improving Cooperation and Communication across the LoC”. The participants discussed the status of Kashmir-specific CBMs and suggested that functional and sustainable institutional arrangements were essential in addressing the main issues of relief for the Kashmiri population, economic development of the entire state and political inclusiveness of all parties concerned.²⁹ Building on these ideas, in March 2008, Pugwash held a workshop on “Intra-Kashmir Economic Cooperation” in Colombo that explored number of avenues and made sector-specific recommendations to develop human exchanges, economic collaboration, joint collaboration in hydroelectricity, tourism, forest and environment, information technology and disaster management.³⁰ From intra-Kashmir dialogue perspective it suggested expanding the scope of the bus service to include all Kashmiri residents from both parts and streamlining the travel documentation requirements. It stressed on political interaction between two parts of Kashmir and suggested visa free regime for Pakistan and Indian Parliamentarians to be extended to the members of legislative assemblies on both sides of Kashmir.

In 2008, 2009 and 2011 Pugwash meetings concentrated on bilateral and regional peace and stability in the region. Pugwash meeting held in Islamabad in March 2008 focused on “Promoting Regional Stability” in South Asia. It was not essentially intra-Kashmiri dialogue but was attended by some political leaders and academics from across the LoC, including Amitabh Mattoo, then Vice-Chancellor of Jammu University and BJP state president Dr Nirmal Singh. The pro-freedom leaders dissociated themselves from the proceedings of the conference while militant leaders also stayed away from the meeting. The March 2009 Pugwash meeting in Islamabad focused on the ‘Prospects for Restarting the India-Pakistan Dialogue and had participation from divided Kashmir. The meeting took place against the backdrop of the Mumbai attacks in November 2008 that stalled the peace process. The participants included leaders of major political parties from both sides of the LoC, government officials, diplomats, academics and prominent civil society actors from India and Pakistan. They broadly focused on the issue of terrorism, Afghanistan and Kashmir and strongly supported uninterrupted track II dialogue irrespective of the level of tensions between the two countries and increased interaction among Kashmiri politicians and civil society across the LoC.³¹ In May 2011, Pugwash organised a two-day meeting of Indian and Pakistani parliamentarians in Islamabad. This was the first ever all-MPs Indian delegation to visit Pakistan to advance the process of peace-building in the region. The idea was to encourage people’s representatives on both sides to discuss and better understand the various outstanding issues between the two countries and to find ways and means to resolve them.³²

International Kashmiri organisations

There are also Kashmiri international organisations that are actively engaged in expanding intra-Kashmir interaction. These include US-based Kashmir American Council (KAC) and Kashmir Centres based in London and Brussels. Over the last few years they also organised several international peace conferences on Kashmir and invited participants from both sides of the LoC to discuss various dimensions of the Kashmir conflict. Of great importance has been the role played by KAC in promoting intra-Kashmir dialogue. It has been holding conferences that were participated by many prominent political figures, diplomats, media persons, academia and civil society activists from both sides of the LoC as well as India and Pakistan. Many US senators also attended these conferences. Led by Dr. Ghulam Nabi Fai, it organised eleven international Kashmir peace conferences in Washington D.C., one in Uruguay and few more on the issue of self-determination, defending the will of the people and defending the democratic processes in Geneva. Through these meetings, KAC tried to promote dialogue amongst participants with varied opinions from India, Pakistan and Kashmir. There was always a broad consensus in these meetings that

Kashmiris should be involved in the dialogue process and their rights and aspirations should be respected.

Pakistan-India forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFDP) has also been promoting intra-Kashmir interaction through joint conventions that it has been holding since 1995. The objective of these joint conventions, eight of which have been held so far is to formulate strategies for promoting peace between the two countries through people to people initiatives.³³ The discussions at the joint conventions revolved around issues ranging from ‘war, demilitarisation, peace and peace dividends ‘ to democratic solution to Kashmir problem, democratic governance, religious intolerance to globalisation and regional cooperation. In the first convention held in 1995, New Delhi, the delegates discussed the contentious issues of Kashmir, demilitarisation and the politics of religious intolerance. PIPFPD formulation on Kashmir is now part of public discourse.³⁴

In the 7th joint convention held in Delhi in 2005, the Forum came up with a ‘Joint Position Paper on Jammu and Kashmir’, stressing on inclusion of Kashmiris in the dialogue process. It viewed Kashmir not merely as a ‘territorial dispute’ between the two countries but a matter of the lives and aspirations of Kashmiri people, who must be involved in any discussion about their future.³⁵ It urged both governments to agree to an “unconditional no-war pact” and to recognise “a peaceful democratic solution” to Kashmir dispute.

The 8th joint convention held in December 2011 after a gap of four years had for the first time active participation of the Kashmiris comprising politicians, media, academia and civil society from all parts of Kashmir. The working group on Kashmir supported solution of Kashmir issue in accordance with the aspirations of the people of Kashmir. It specifically demanded an immediate end to violation of human rights, unrestricted travel across the LoC; opening of communication channels and travel routes; the enhancement of trade relations and people to people contacts with an emphasis on students and youth; the demilitarisation of Kashmir; immediate withdrawal of forces from Siachen and declaration of peace zone; and repeal of Armed Forces Special Powers Act. It also suggested the establishment of a joint forum for peace and democracy of peoples of both parts of Kashmir.³⁶

Other conferences on Kashmir

In March 2007, Islamabad-based Institute of Strategic Studies and the Kashmir Institute of International Relations co-organised a conference on “Jammu & Kashmir Dispute: Models for Resolution”. The participants came from both sides of the LoC, India, Pakistan and internationally. It focused on human rights and justice in Kashmir; step-by-step approach to self-determination; identification of the area of demilitarisation; self-governance;

joint management and learning from models of conflict resolution and peace processes. The recommendations comprised guiding principles, process, settlement frameworks and confidence building measures in resolving the conflict.³⁷ Stress was laid on the inclusion of the Kashmiris in the dialogue process in determining their future; respect for human rights, cessation of all forms of violence; withdrawal of the army and paramilitary forces from the populated areas; inter and intra-Kashmir dialogue between regions, religions, political and ethnic groups; addressing all displacement of people since 1947; acknowledging basic needs of the Kashmiri people for identity, dignity, recognition, security and development and expanding interaction between civil societies from both sides of the LoC. There was also emphasis on UN principles including right of self-determination and international facilitation for resolving the Kashmir conflict. Different models of resolutions were explored and it was found that Northern Ireland, faith based reconciliation and conflict transformation models have some aspects that have relevance to the Kashmir conflict in terms of the principles and processes that were followed. Given the current realities, an interim settlement framework was suggested that could pave way for a final settlement.

In May 2011, the University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir organised an international conference on “Kashmir in Emerging Global Perspectives” that brought together participants mostly from media and academia from both sides of the LoC besides India and Pakistan. There was a consensus that it is not possible to find a sustainable solution without Kashmiri peoples’ participation in the process and both sides should facilitate intra-Kashmir contacts and use the untapped potential of Kashmiris to build peace in the larger South Asian framework. Kashmir was recognised as a region with ‘unity in diversity’. It was stressed that intra-Kashmir dialogue must encompass all regions, all religions and all political orientations and Kashmiri civil society across the divide should play a proactive role in a Kashmiris’ narrative on Kashmir.³⁸

Kashmiris have also become part of some India-Pakistan dialogues that cover the larger relationship between the two countries. These include Neemrana, BALLUSA, PIPFPD, Chaophraya track II process by Jinnah Institute that discuss Kashmir issue and have always had some representation of the Kashmiris and consistently urged that people of Kashmir should be consulted in the dialogue process.

Intra-Kashmir women dialogue

The intra-Kashmir women dialogue across LoC is also taking shape. CDR and CR have launched cross-LoC initiatives in this regard. The women on both sides have borne the brunt of instability, conflict and violence and have suffered displacement. They want to move forward and explore a role for themselves in dialogue and peacebuilding in Kashmir. There were two women specific intra-Kashmir dialogues organised by CDR in collaboration with its local partners in 2007 and 2011. The first intra-Kashmir women's conference - "Connecting Women across the LoC", which CDR co-organised with the Women's Studies Centres of universities of Kashmir and Jammu was held in Srinagar from 16 -18 November 2007. The dialogue was attended by over thirty women delegates including fourteen from AJK. This was the first time that the women from both sides of the divided Kashmir met and shared their sentiments and perspectives on the Kashmir conflict that is affecting their lives directly or indirectly. In a statement issued after the meeting, the women condemned violence in "all forms and manifestations" resulting in "loss of lives and property, enforced disappearances, custodial killings, torture, unjustified arrests, rapes and molestations."³⁹ They called for withdrawal of military forces from civilian areas, reduction of forces on both sides of the LoC, disbanding of Special Operations Group (SOG) and pro-government militants as well as de-commissioning of militant groups to create an atmosphere that is conducive to a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Women supported India-Pakistan peace process and urged early resolution of the Kashmir issue through the involvement of the people of Kashmir including women. They demanded opening of communication lines, easing of procedures relating to cross-LoC trade and travel and issuing of visas to all irrespective of religious affiliations and political identities. In particular they underscored that "women's sacrifices and struggles during the years of conflict have not been acknowledged. The mental health consequences need to be recognised and urgently addressed."⁴⁰ They urged on the return and rehabilitation of Kashmiri youth that 'crossed border' and the displaced families including Kashmiri Pandits. They asked media to play a constructive role in the peace process and stressed on the exchange of students and teachers; research collaborations, media and cultural exchanges, extension of medical facilities and trade and tourism across the LoC.

The second intra-Kashmir women dialogue took place in Gulmarg, Srinagar from 27-29 September 2011, after a gap of four years. It was co-organised by CDR and Srinagar-based Women for Peace (WFP) and focused on "women's role in peace-building and policy-making". A group of forty five women from both sides of the LoC, representing a cross section of society - doctors, educationists,

social workers, lawyers, public representatives, entrepreneurs and students participated in the dialogue. In a statement, women of Kashmir expressed strong desire for “peace, security, and economic stability to prevail throughout the region and an immediate end to the protracted conflict.” They demanded the “inclusion of women in all peace-building and peace negotiations/dialogue on Kashmir” and felt that the resolution of the Kashmir “must reflect the aspirations of all regions and communities” of undivided Kashmir. They asked both governments to simplify procedures in trade, communication and travel across the LoC and open other trade and travel routes, like Kargil-Skardu, Chamb-Bhimbar, and Leh-Khaplu; respect the ceasefire and address land mine issues; initiate phased de-militarisation in all civilian areas, and repeal ‘draconian’ Acts such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) and the Public Safety Act (PSA), end to human rights abuses and violations of all kinds – arbitrary arrests and detentions, enforced disappearances, sexual violence, crackdowns, searches, displacement of all kinds and rehabilitation of displaced communities without segregation by all sides.⁴¹ They suggested setting up of a joint forum for peace comprising women from both sides of the LoC.

In 2009, Conciliation Resources also launched a “Kashmiri Women’s Mapping Initiative” on both sides of the LoC. The main objective of the initiative was to understand the operational context and perspectives of Kashmiri women on peacebuilding in Kashmir. It tried to investigate major issues confronting women from both sides of Kashmir and discover their perspectives on peace and conflict so that appropriate interventions could be designed to bring them into the peacebuilding process. Based on the parallel localised conversations conducted on both sides of the LoC between December 2009 and February 2010, a report was published in August 2010.⁴² The major findings of the study were that impact of conflict has varied from region to region which makes it essential that there should be dialogue between different regions of Kashmir which would help in creating a Kashmiri understanding of the conflict. Kashmiri women do recognise their potential for peacebuilding in their regions and want their inclusion in the dialogue processes.

As part of the initiative, in February-March 2012, CR co-organised with Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, a cross-LoC women meeting in Cambodia to learn from the conflict and peacebuilding process in that country. An effort was made to study the Cambodian experience and undertake a shared analysis of the Kashmir conflict so as to develop a shared vision for Kashmir. The participants after intense discussions developed broad consensus to envision Kashmir as a first step as a ‘region of peace with shared diverse identities’ and the inclusion of Kashmiris in realising that vision. They recognised the multiplicity of the perspectives and inclusivity of the women in the peacebuilding process. They identified peacebuilding strategies to develop linkages across

regions of divided Kashmir, building trust and pursuing creative processes of reconciliation in which Kashmiris would play a lead role.⁴³ The CR women initiative is trying to involve women from both sides of the LoC and within each region in peace building in Kashmir.

Issues emerging in intra-Kashmiri interactions

The intra-Kashmir dialogue efforts made by different organisations vividly show that a broad consensus is emerging on humanising the conflict by putting an end to the militarisation of Kashmir and suffering of the people; expanding cross-LoC communication and interactions; inclusive and sustained dialogue; intraregional and inter-communities dialogue and searching for a creative solution of Kashmir that is people centric rather than state centric.

- **Ending militarisation of Kashmir and suffering of the people:** The militarisation of Kashmir and the suffering of the Kashmiris in the Indian occupied Kashmir have been invariably focused in intra-Kashmir discussions and there has been strong demand to disengage military from the region and provide relief to the Kashmiris. There is a strong feeling that India-Pakistan peace process has not changed the situation on the

ground. There have been some relaxation on the LoC, but “human rights abuse, which needed the maximum attention, was not only ignored, it continued with a vengeance even as figures of all security agencies confirmed that there was a drastic decline in militancy.”⁴⁴ The massive presence of the security forces and immunity that they enjoy under AFSPA has utterly disappointed people especially in the Valley which was reflected in stone pelting by the Kashmiri youth and revival of *azadi* protests. The withdrawal of AFSPA and phased demilitarisation of Kashmir is considered vital for a political solution of the issue.

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- **Intra-Kashmir movement and communication across the LoC:** People from all parts of Kashmir have expressed their strong desire to loosening of controls on the intra-Kashmir movement and communication across the LoC. Human dimension of Kashmir conflict is acquiring primacy in the discourse on both sides of the LoC. In their meetings, the political leaders and different civil society actors have consistently demanded removal of all operational difficulties in cross-LoC travel and trade. Ideas have been floated to simplify the procedures by introducing ‘smart card’ that can be used to travel across LoC. There has also been a suggestion that people living on both sides of the LoC should be allowed to use private cars for visits across the LoC. There is also consensus across-LoC that all traditional trade and travel routes be opened in particular Kargil-Sakardu which will reconnect 6-7000 divided families between Kargil and Baltistan. The other routes are Mirpur-Noshera, Chumb-Pallanwalla (Jammu), Kotli-Rajori and Sialkot-Suchetgarh. People also want free telephonic communication between different parts of the divided regions. India has yet not allowed telephonic links across the LoC. This is also hampering cross-LoC trade as well.
- **Intra-regional and inter-communities dialogue:** Kashmir conflict has widened gaps between different regions of Kashmir, in particular within and across three regions of IHK- Valley, Jammu and Ladakh which were thoroughly debated in intra-regional and inter-communities dialogue held from time to time. There is a strong consensus that there should be a sustained intra-regional and inter-communities dialogue that addresses gaps in sub-regional aspirations of the communities. In a CDR sponsored intra-Kashmir dialogue conducted in Srinagar in July 2005, there was a consensus that the “key confidence building measure would be to begin consultations with people from all regions, communities, and shades of opinion on how to sustain the peace process to get real change on the ground with an assurance that their inputs would go into negotiations for a settlement, when they begin.”⁴⁵ Inter-communities dialogue is also found essential to develop trust and confidence between displaced communities in different regions and facilitate their return, especially that of Kashmiri Pandits to Valley and migrants/refugees of 1990 living in AJK.
- **Inclusive and sustained dialogue:** In their interactions, Kashmiri leaders and civil society actors from both sides have stressed the need to involve Kashmiris in the dialogue process initiated by the two countries. Kashmiris strongly feel that they do not have the ownership of the dialogue process either amongst themselves or as part of the peace

process between Delhi and Islamabad. In fact, composite dialogue had excluded Kashmiris by stating that the two countries will be working for peaceful settlement of Kashmir “to the satisfaction of both sides”.⁴⁶ All leaders of APHC, irrespective of their rivalries and associations agree that Kashmiris are the primary party to the conflict and any solution without their inclusion would be untenable. APHC leader Abdul Ghani Bhatt stated: “These talks are taking place between two sovereign states, and ours is just a disputed territory.”⁴⁷ The pro-freedom leaders, including UJC/Hizb and hardline faction of Geelani advocate a tripartite/trilateral or triangular dialogue which involves Kashmiris in the settlement process. Pakistan does recognise Kashmiris as the principal party to the dispute and desires their inclusion in dialogue on Kashmir, but Delhi has not yet accepted it and wants an internal dialogue with selected leaders in the Hurriyat or outside it, a move that divides Kashmiris rather than bringing them together in the dialogue process. The mainstream political parties especially PDP and NC also strongly support inclusion of Kashmiris in the dialogue process. AJK leadership holds similar views on the involvement of Kashmiris in the peace process. Former Prime Minister of AJK, Sardar Attique believed that the talks can only be successful if Kashmiris are included in the process of negotiations and if a solution is imposed on the Kashmiris, it will neither be acceptable to them nor peace can be guaranteed in the world.⁴⁸

- **Searching for a creative solution:** The intra-Kashmir discussions show that there is a strong desire on both sides of the LoC to search for a creative solution embodying a soft reunification of all parts of Kashmir. This is shared by most of the Kashmiri leaders on both sides of the LoC, barring Hizb chief Salahuddin and APHC Geelani faction who continue to support Pakistan’s traditional stance on Kashmir and want Islamabad not to show any flexibility and back Kashmiris’ right for self-determination. In his 2006 visit to AJK/Pakistan, Mirwaiz stated: “The APHC is doing its level best to work out a solution where there is reintegration of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and not its division”.⁴⁹ APHC leaders also feel that international mediation and guarantees are imperative for achieving a solution of Kashmir. Similar sentiments were expressed from this side of the LoC. Sahibzada Zafar Ishaq, then PPP AJK chief felt that LoC had no status and both sides of Kashmiris were like a single body.⁵⁰ A number of proposals were floated in the past few years within Kashmir, suggesting ways to move forward which were closer to those discussed in the back channel. In 2006, Mehbooba Mufti floated the idea of self-rule framework for all of Jammu and Kashmir. This comprised soft border but no partition or altering of LoC; Jammu, Ladakh and Kashmir Valley form their own local assemblies; power

sharing arrangement between Indian and Pakistani Kashmir through a regional council including legislators from both sides. The formula involved political restructuring, economic integration between two parts of Kashmir, demilitarisation and constitutional restructuring within the Indian constitution.⁵¹ In 2005, Mirwaiz proposed United States of Kashmir which was to be discussed by the diverse people of Kashmir and by the people of Kashmir separately with the Pakistani and Indian leadership. In 2006, Sajjad Lone's Peoples Conference talked about 'achievable nationhood'. This envisaged sovereignty for Jammu and Kashmir, demilitarisation of both parts of Kashmir, formal relationship between Pakistan and Indian Kashmir; and India and Pakistani Kashmir, the two Kashmir having economic union; joint immigration control; joint control over natural resources and additional sector-specific cooperation.⁵²

Bringing Kashmiris to the centre: Challenges and prospects

There are a number of hurdles in the way of bringing Kashmiris into an inclusive dialogue process that need to be tackled. These include trust and perception gaps within the ranks of pro-freedom groups and between pro-azadi groups and mainstream political parties; leadership and personal rivalries; regional, ethnic and communal distrust and rivalries; lack of free movement of people especially political leaders across the LoC and unresponsive attitude of governments and security establishments in India and Pakistan.

Trust & perception gaps

A huge challenge is how to narrow the trust and perception gaps that exist within the ranks of pro-freedom groups divided into hardliners and moderates; between pro-freedom groups and the mainstream political parties within IHK and between mainstream political parties and groups across LoC. There is issue of bridging perception gap between the pro-*azadi* political and militant groups which is less on the ultimate objective to achieve self-determination and more on strategies to achieve the goal. In June 2005, when APHC delegation for the first time came to AJK through LoC, the United Jihad Council declined to meet the visiting leaders while Geelani faction of APHC stayed away. Later, Mirwaiz's statement on the armed struggle evoked strong criticism from Kashmiri militant groups who accused him of taking a U-turn. Although in their 2007 and 2008 trips, Hurriyat leaders could meet militant leadership but there was not much headway and the trust deficit continue to exist and efforts for unity and joint strategy are yet to be materialised.

There is also huge trust, perception and policy gap between pro-azadi groups

and the mainstream political parties in IHK which has cast its shadow on the intra-Kashmir dialogue process. Islamabad's opening channels of communication with NC and PDP leadership did not go down well with APHC circles who strongly felt that it was undermining their credibility and position on Kashmir. Similarly, Syed Ali Geelani was keen to attend Pugwash conference in Islamabad 2006, but a majority of his allies in the Tehrik's Shoura were reluctant arguing that mainstream Kashmiri leaders would also be present in Islamabad and that would compromise group's position on Kashmir.

Leadership & personal rivalries

There are intense personal and leadership rivalries within Hurriyat that have severely hampered any serious intra-Kashmir dialogue. The APHC that was created in 1993 had leaders from over two dozen political groups that joined hands to form a platform to raise their voice for the right of self-determination for the Kashmiris.⁵³ The group split in 2003 apparently on the issue of proxy participation of Peace Conference in the 2002 state assembly election in IHK which was in fact culmination of the pressures from leadership rivalries within the outfit. This resulted in emergence of Mirwaiz-led moderate faction and Syed Ali Shah Geelani-led hard line group renamed as Tehreek-e-Hurriyat Jammu and Kashmir. Yasin Malik also parted Hurriyat after he failed to bring them together. Before his June 2005 visit, Mirwaiz unsuccessfully tried to re-unite the two factions of APHC and to motivate Syed Ali Shah Geelani to join them in taking bus to AJK and get involved in the dialogue process. The leadership rivalries are also reflected in their stances adopted on India-Pakistan dialogue on Kashmir. While Mirwaiz supported the flexibility exhibited by Pakistan, Geelani opposed it and interpreted it as a compromise on Kashmir.

Regional, ethnic and communal distrust and rivalries

Intra-Kashmir dialogue is severely constrained by regional, ethnic and communal distrust that has widened over the last two decades or so. This is much more visible within IHK where three regions –Valley, Jammu and Ladakh are developing conflicting narratives especially on their respective victimhood and future vision for Kashmir. Valley, which has been at the centre of freedom struggle and has borne the brunt of the atrocities by the Indian security forces feel that its wounds are not understood well in the other two regions. It also feels that Delhi is deliberately promoting a regional narrative that would divide the state. In Jammu, the Hindu community barring few exceptions is more akin to New Delhi's narrative on terrorism and emphasises on displacement of Pandits and shows little empathy to the sufferings of the Kashmiri Muslims. The Jammu Muslims are split between regional pressures and their empathy with Valley which is also reflected in Ladakh region divided on regional and religious lines.

There is a dire need to intensify efforts to narrow down the regional and communal gaps within three region of IHK. Similarly, there exist regional gaps between AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan on Pakistani side of the LoC and between them and IHK. A structured intra-Kashmir dialogue within and across LoC can bridge the regional and communal distrust.

Issues in cross-LoC interactions

The lack of free movement across LoC is a major impediment in promoting intra-Kashmir dialogue and consensus building. The high politics still rules the movement of people across the LoC, more so when it comes to Kashmiri political leadership. In a symbolic gesture, APHC leadership crossed LoC in 2005 but later it was tacitly reverted to visa option due to hassles associated with entry permit system. In fact in June 2006, the APHC delegation had to travel through international border as they were not allowed to travel through LoC for which they had submitted required documents right after the earthquake and also arranged the relief material. In addition, while Islamabad has encouraged IHK mainstream political leadership to come to Pakistan, there has not been such good will gesture by New Delhi to allow AJK mainstream political leadership to go across the LoC and meet local leadership there. There are many pending applications for entry permit which have not been entertained and this includes an application by former AJK assembly speaker Shah Ghulam Qadir who also happens to be a member of the divided families. The clearance procedures must be simplified, long term permit be introduced, eligibility be extended to all subjects of the state of divided Kashmir and the role of military intelligence agencies in processing the applications be eliminated so that people can easily travel across LoC. A greater unhindered interaction between the people as well as political leaders on both sides of the LoC would enhance cross-LoC intra-Kashmir dialogue.

Governments' and security establishments' unresponsive attitude

The unresponsive attitude of Delhi and Islamabad especially their respective security establishments are quite discouraging for intra-Kashmir dialogue. India and Pakistan are still following a state-centric security paradigm which amongst others subjects Kashmiri interests to their own national security agendas. While both have agreed to allow some cross-LoC interaction, they have made little effort to ease the cross-LoC travel regime or engage Kashmiris in the dialogue process. The only silver lining is that they did not backtracked on the agreed Kashmir-specific CBMs in the wake of Mumbai attacks in 2008, but the bureaucratic resistance in both capitals has resulted in uneven implementation of even those that had been agreed.⁵⁴

The fact that Indian government has not taken any substantive step to improve human rights or security conditions in IHK by removing repressive laws and military forces and has preferred to launch a parallel dialogue process through Round Table Conferences; interlocutor panel and a direct dialogue with a section of Hurriyat has only disappointed and fragmented Kashmiris. Islamabad has done little to encourage AJK leadership to get into intra-Kashmir dialogue. Unless Delhi and Islamabad facilitate a structured intra-Kashmir dialogue, the political dialogue on resolution of Kashmir will remain ad hoc and operationalisation of travel and trade CBMs limited. This will severely constrain the growth in cross-LoC peace constituency which can play a critical role in India-Pakistan peace process.

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Conclusion

Intra-Kashmir dialogue is essential for involvement of the Kashmiris in the political settlement of the Kashmir conflict. Decades of isolation, parochial politics and vested interests have created massive distrust and conflicting narratives that are impeding a consensus on the future vision of Kashmir. The current trends indicate that since the resumption of India-Pakistan peace process some symbolic visits of political leaders from APHC and mainstream political parties have taken place but no effort was made by Delhi and Islamabad to institutionalise a cross-LoC intra-Kashmir dialogue. Srinagar and Muzaffarabad were neither encouraged nor facilitated to initiate such dialogue. As a result some international organisations, others from Delhi and Islamabad have tried to organise intra-Kashmir discussions largely outside Kashmir to bring together political leaders from various parts of Kashmir to share their perspectives on conflict, CBMs and future vision for Kashmir. Since this interaction is mostly ad hoc and is not led by Kashmir based organisations, it has not yet broken the barriers of distrust and embedded narratives that are keeping them apart. Thus there is a strong urge amongst Kashmiris that intra-Kashmir dialogue be held on the “Kashmiri soil, liberated from the overwhelming influence of lobbies.”⁵⁵ One such proposal is to “create a small demilitarised zone (perhaps one kilometre or

so) on Srinagar-Muzaffarabad highway alongside LOC and to allow this to be used as a park dedicated to dialogue amongst Kashmiris.” This could be coordinated by the Red Cross or co-managed by district administration of both sides of the divide.⁵⁶ Such dialogue is likely to prove more effective in consensus building across LoC.

A silver lining is that despite diverse perspectives, there has been broad consensus on many areas of common concerns which include gradual withdrawal of troops from IHK and ending suffering of the people; ensuring peace with justice and addressing human rights violations; hassle free intra-Kashmir movement by streamlining travel, trade and communication across the LoC to enhance people to people interactions; intra-regional and inter-communities dialogue to build trust and reconciliation across communities; cross-LoC sustained dialogue to build consensus, bridge trust gaps and search for a creative solution of Kashmir and finally inclusion of Kashmiris in a meaningful structured dialogue with India and Pakistan.

While there are hopes that consensus can be built through sustained intra-Kashmir dialogue, there are many challenges that have to be recognised and addressed. There are wide trust and perception gaps that exist within the ranks of pro-freedom groups, divided in moderates and hardliners and between them and the mainstream political parties. This gets worsened by personal and leadership rivalries that prevent any substantive intra-Kashmir dialogue. The regional and communal distrust and rivalries further complicate the dialogue process and adds many imponderables. An array of impediments in cross-LoC mobility, communication and trade has limited the benefits of cross-LoC CBMs stunting the growth of Kashmiri civil society to play their role in conflict transformation. Finally the unresponsive attitude of the governments in New Delhi and Islamabad coupled with bureaucratic wrangling keeps the Kashmiris off the centre stage which is so critical in working out and implementing a lasting and sustainable solution of Kashmir that has ownership of all stakeholders, India, Pakistan and the Kashmiris.

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