

Dr. Mahbub ul Haq's Statement

Several statements and editorials have already appeared regarding my purported remarks about Kashmir in a seminar in New Delhi last week. I find it quite distressing that the usual attacks on my personal integrity have started even before anyone has seen the original text of my proposals.

My basic point about Kashmir was that we have rightly claimed for the last 50 years that Kashmiris should be given the right through a plebiscite to choose either Pakistan or India, in accordance with the UN resolutions. We naturally desire that the Kashmir dispute should be settled on these lines. However, the real situation is that the Kashmir issue is in deep cold storage by now. We seem to have lost most of the international support on this issue. And Kashmiris are dying every day.

In such circumstances, it was my proposal to unfreeze the issue by giving Kashmiris a third option : independent Kashmir. In the last analysis, Kashmir belongs to the Kashmiris. It is neither an integral part of India nor of Pakistan. If we are fully confident in Pakistan that Kashmiris will always choose Pakistan in a free plebiscite, then why should we object to including this third option in the plebiscite? And if Kashmiris do wish to choose independence instead of becoming a part of either Pakistan or India, then what right these countries have to force a choice on Kashmiris against their will?

In order to unfreeze the situation, I also suggested that both India and Pakistan should withdraw their armed forces completely from inside Kashmir to a border belt, entrust all administrative machinery to the Kashmiris, open the border between the two

parts of Kashmir, and establish a UN trusteeship for the next 10 - 15 years. These were all interim steps before Kashmiris could decide their future in a free and fair plebiscite.

In all parts of the world, long - standing disputes can be settled only in a step by step process. Even Yasir Arafat had to accept this reality. We also need to think of new ways to make real progress on the Kashmir issue.

There should be open discussion on these issues. We cannot freeze our thinking as a nation. Nor should we readily accuse every one with the courage to offer some fresh way of settling disputes as being a foreign agent. Let us cultivate some tolerance for constructive discussion.