

## As Indian Premier Calls for Treaty, Pakistan Says Kashmir Is the Key

By [SOMINI SENGUPTA](#)

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NEW DELHI, March 24 — Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called Friday for a far-reaching "treaty of peace, security and friendship" between [India](#) and [Pakistan](#), in what appeared to be an effort to stanch criticism from across the border for inaction on the contested Kashmir region.

Pakistan politely welcomed the offer but pointed, not surprisingly, to the need to take on the Kashmir issue.

"We are not afraid of discussing Jammu and Kashmir or of finding pragmatic, practical solutions to resolve this issue as well," Mr. Singh said. He went on to say that territorial lines could not be redrawn — the Indian government's longstanding position — but that the two countries could work toward making them irrelevant, or as he also put it, "just lines on a map."

The two countries, violently separated at birth in 1947 but unable ever since to agree over who controls the Himalayan territory of Kashmir, have been engaged in peace talks for more than two years. Those talks have yielded little more than modest agreements to open train and bus links across the border.

For the last several months Pakistan has stepped up criticism of India for what it calls New Delhi's recalcitrance on resolving the Kashmir dispute. Pakistan's president, Gen. [Pervez Musharraf](#), for his part, has dangled the idea of greater self-rule for Kashmiris on both sides of the de facto border.

"I think it's a response to Pakistan's upping the diplomatic ante recently," said Kanti Bajpai, the principal of the exclusive Doon School in the Indian city of Dehra Dun and an expert on Kashmir.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars, two of them over Kashmir, and reached the brink of a fourth.

The spokeswoman for the Pakistani Foreign Ministry, Tasnim Aslam, on Friday called India's overtures positive but also described Kashmir as being "at the heart of conflict, mistrust and hostility" and having "bedeviled relations between the two countries for such a long time."

"We also need sincerity and flexibility in order to overcome the legacy of the past," Ms. Aslam said.

Mr. Singh praised General Musharraf's efforts to curb terrorism and urged him to do more. Mr. Singh also spoke of the need to address lingering disputes over the waters of Sir Creek, at the southern end of the countries' common border, and a dam called Baglihar on the Indian-held side of Kashmir that Pakistan fears will allow India to tamper with its water supply.

Mr. Singh's statement was perhaps more revealing for where it was delivered than what it said. He spoke at the unveiling of the latest bus link between the countries, this one cutting across divided Punjab from the Indian city of Amritsar to the Sikh pilgrimage site of Nankana Sahib in Pakistan, the birthplace of the Sikh religion's founder.

Punjab is the center of the carnage that characterized the partition of South Asia in 1947, when India and Pakistan won independence from British rule. Millions streamed across the frontier at the time, Sikhs and Hindus to India, Muslims to Pakistan.

Mr. Singh was among them. A Sikh, he was born in what is now the Pakistani province of Punjab, just as General Musharraf was born here in what is now the capital of India.

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