

After New Talks, India Says It May Pull Troops From Kashmir

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NEW DELHI, Sept. 5 - India will pull back troops from the disputed territory of Kashmir if militant infiltration and violence ends, the prime minister's office announced Monday evening after a rare meeting with Kashmiri separatists.

The meeting, between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, a coalition of moderate separatists from Kashmir, came barely a week before the leaders of India and Pakistan are to meet during a United Nations General Assembly session in New York. Pakistan has expressed growing frustration with what it calls New Delhi's reluctance to tackle the problem of Kashmir.

The region is the only Muslim-majority state in Hindu-dominated India, and it is at the heart of a half-century conflict between the two South Asian neighbors. Since 1989 Kashmir has been roiled by an anti-Indian insurgency that India blames Pakistan for, and that Pakistan says it supports only by moral and political means. The Hurriyat leaders recently met with President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan.

In the statement, the prime minister's office said it would also review the cases of all those held under special preventive detention in Kashmir and take steps to "safeguard against human rights violations."

The most far-reaching pledge was on pulling out troops, whose presence across Kashmir is an enduring source of anger and alienation among many Kashmiris.

"The prime minister said that if there is a cessation of violence and an end to infiltration, conditions will be created for the reduction of armed forces," the statement read. "It was agreed that the only way forward is to ensure that all forms of violence at all levels should come to an end."

In an interview with the private New Delhi television station NDTV, the leader of the separatist coalition, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, heralded the talks as the start of a credible conversation. "For first time, there seems to be a realization in Delhi that we need to have a solution in Kashmir, an honorable solution," he said. "It was definitely a very good beginning."