

*The Truth About the Agra Summit**

A.G. Noorani♦

The story of how the Agra Summit of July 2001 between Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and President Pervez Musharraf came close to a historic breakthrough and how it was scuttled

Atal Bihari Vajpayee's letter of June 16, 2005, to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is a cheap shot at the process of conciliation with Pakistan which the Prime Minister has pursued with quiet determination. Read in the context of the Bharatiya Janata Party's behaviour as an Opposition party, within and outside Parliament, its sinister purpose becomes all too clear.

Who inspired BJP spokesman Yashwant Sinha (now unceremoniously sacked) to attack the Manmohan Singh-Pervez Musharraf Joint Statement of September 25, 2004, on flimsy grounds? Vajpayee's letter levels three charges — “the peace process has become Kashmir-centric”, “the prominence being given to the Hurriyat”; and indifference to terrorism. The Prime Minister's reply of June 20 nails all three to the counter.

There has been a series of India-Pakistan meetings on non-Kashmir issues. The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) is in a poor state. The unprecedented spurt in tourism in Kashmir reflects decline in terrorism from what it was when the BJP was in power. But Vajpayee fully exposed his motivation and bad faith by releasing the Prime Minister's reply to the media,

* Courtesy *The Frontline India*; as reproduced in *The News* (Islamabad), Tuesday, August 9, 2005.

♦ Eminent Indian jurist and political analyst.

violating the sanctity of such correspondence. The Prime Minister's Office had rejected requests for its copies on this very ground.

The BJP's game is obvious — obstruct the Kashmir peace process in both its dimensions, with Pakistan and with Kashmiris, in order to rob the government of the credit it would legitimately earn by its success. If the process fails, the BJP would claim that it alone could have succeeded. Its president, L.K. Advani's claim last year revealed this game. "The BJP alone can find a solution to our problems with Pakistan because Hindus will never think whatever we have done can be a sell-off."¹ On June 1, only the day before the Hurriyat leaders arrived in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK), he said: "I don't see any harm in the Hurriyat leaders coming here for talks and they have a right to it."² The BJP's claims to monopoly on patriotism impressed many in the media. The Opposition was in a bind. It could not risk incurring odium in the media, still less with the public at large. It was silent on the flip-flops that marked the BJP's policy on Pakistan and on Kashmir, particularly. Pranab Mukherjee fired a solitary salvo attacking Operation Parakram. However, the Congress and the Left tore the BJP apart on the collapse of the Agra Summit in July 2001. Manmohan Singh posed sharp questions. They went unanswered. Jaswant Singh repeatedly insinuated that the Opposition was acting "at the behest" of Pakistan. We now have the crucial record on the Agra summit, published for the first time. It exposes the falsehoods that Vajpayee, Advani, Jaswant Singh and Sushma Swaraj deliberately and systematically purveyed to Parliament, to the media, and to the nation at large. Both the enormity of that fraud and the gravity of the BJP's present challenge emerge clearly if Agra is viewed in the context of the diplomatic record that preceded and followed it.

IN 1997 the BJP's game succeeded with Inder Kumar Gujral for two reasons; he was a man of weak personality and

1 *Indian Express*, March 14, 2004; emphasis added throughout.

2 *India Today*, June 27, 2005.

he was a hawk masquerading in the plumage of a dove. K.P. Nayar wrote in *The Telegraph*:³

One of the myths about Indian diplomacy is that there are hardliners and softliners on Pakistan. In the Indian 'Establishment', you cannot deal with Pakistan and be what peaceniks would call a 'softliner'. When he was Prime Minister, I.K. Gujral, who was miffed at criticism that he was soft on Pakistan, told this correspondent: 'Do you think I will give away anything to Pakistan? I am as much of a nationalist as anyone else.' He stressed that his 'Gujral doctrine' did not cover Pakistan.

Gujral had agreed with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif at Male, on May 12, 1997, at the time of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit, *inter alia* to set up a working group on Kashmir. He reneged on it once Vajpayee opposed it: "*Working group kya work karengey?*" (What work will the working group do?) The Foreign Secretaries of India and Pakistan issued a moderated joint statement which did not exclude the group, however. Gujral reneged on that as well. But the statement is a document of crucial importance. The Agra drafts built on it. It is relevant even now. Yet, it was studiously excluded in the compilations issued by the Ministry of External Affairs as well as by the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses in 2001. Why?

The Foreign Secretaries agreed "to address all outstanding issues of concern to both sides including *inter alia*... " Eight issues were listed. "Peace and Security including CBMs [confidence-building measures]" and "Jammu & Kashmir" were to be dealt with by the Foreign Secretaries. The others, at the level presumably of Secretaries of the Ministries concerned, were Siachen; the Wullar Barrage project; Sir Creek; "terrorism and drug-trafficking"; economic and commercial cooperation; and promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields. The Foreign Secretaries agreed also "to set up a mechanism including working groups at appropriate levels, to address all these issues in an integrated manner". This foreshadowed the Agra accord on which Vajpayee backed out.

3 July 22, 2001.

Having foiled the 1997 accord, thanks to Gujral, Vajpayee agreed with Sharif in New York on September 23, 1998, “on operationalising (sic) the mechanism to address all items in the agreed agenda of June 23, 1997 in a purposeful and composite manner”. The talks held in November 1998 ended in a deadlock. The new Defence Minister, George Fernandes, resiled from the decade-old accord on mutual withdrawal from Siachen.

By then India and Pakistan had become nuclear-weapon states. The BJP came to power on March 19, 1998. It staged the Pokhran-II tests on May 11 and 13 for political reasons. Vajpayee had tried to hold them in May 1996, when he ran a government without a majority in the Lok Sabha for 13 days. Pakistan held its tests on May 28 and 30. The region has been none the more secure for the BJP’s adventure which triggered off the first United Nations Security Council resolution on Kashmir since November 5, 1965. On June 6, 1998, it passed Resolution 1172 which urged India and Pakistan “to resume the dialogue between them on all outstanding issues... including Kashmir”. But what Advani said in Srinagar, of all places, on May 18, 1998, revealed a lot. India’s tests had brought about “a qualitative new stage in Indo-Pak relations, particularly in finding a lasting solution to the Kashmir problem”. In short, the bomb would silence Pakistan as well as the Kashmiris. The remark revealed, first, a profound ignorance of the power of the bomb. It did not help the United States to solve Vietnam. Advani’s statement revealed, next, his utter contempt for popular opinion in Kashmir. It was not intimidated by the bomb. It is men of such crass ignorance who once ruled us.

Mark the flip-flops that ensued. Vajpayee went to Lahore, without any preparation. The Lahore Declaration he signed with Sharif on February 21, 1999, mentioned the U.N. Charter as well as the Simla Agreement (in 2001 the Agra Declaration omitted mention of both). The two Prime Ministers agreed “to intensify their efforts to resolve all issues, including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir”. This was the only issue that was specifically mentioned. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed by the Foreign Secretaries on security matters. The Prime

Ministers launched a “Kashmir-centric” back-channel comprising two odd balls — R.K. Mishra and Niaz A. Naik. It was overtaken by Pakistan’s perfidy in Kargil. But flip-flops continued.

On July 24, 2000, came the “unilateral” ceasefire by the Hizbul Mujahideen’s “Commander-in-Chief”, Abdul Majid Dar. Neither India nor Pakistan nor the Hurriyat was taken by surprise. The media began extolling the Hizb as did officials. On August 3, they met the Hizb’s representatives and offered terms appropriate to surrendered militants. The ceasefire was called off by the Hizb on August 8. On November 23, 2000, came Vajpayee’s ceasefire (“non-initiation of combat operations”) on the eve of the month of Ramzan.

It was called off six months later, and President Pervez Musharraf was invited for talks on May 24. They were held at Agra on July 14-16, 2001. Capitalising on the U.S.’ mood after 9/11, Vajpayee launched Operation Parakram on December 18, 2001, only to call it off on October 16, 2002. The U.S. used it adroitly in aid of its calibrated pressures on Pakistan for some time leaving New Delhi high and dry once its own purposes were served.

In 2003, the freeze in India-Pakistan relations melted, culminating in the joint statement issued in Islamabad on January 6, 2004, when Vajpayee met Musharraf at the SAARC Summit. Ousted from power in May 2004, the BJP finds it hard to come to terms with that fact and with the progress in the peace process; particularly with the rapport established between Manmohan Singh and Pervez Musharraf. Vajpayee and Advani themselves met the Hurriyat leaders on January 22-23, 2004. Advani met them again on March 27, 2004.

The BJP received the full support of the Congress and the Left during this entire phase. Few questioned it on the crores blown away during the foolhardy military standoff. There was one conspicuous exception when the silence was broken. It was on Agra. The records that have come to light establish that, if

anything, the Opposition was restrained. The BJP had plummeted to the depths of mendacity.

The BJP, even in its pitiable state now, can be relied on to obstruct the current peace process. As Laski said, “The strength of parliamentary government is exactly measured by the unity of political parties upon its fundamental objects”.⁴ That includes foreign policy goals.

The BJP is out to wreck the national consensus on domestic matters, touting Hindutva, as well as on foreign policy (Pakistan). The Agra records should open the people’s eyes no less than of those in the media who took the BJP regime at its word. Jawaharlal Nehru faced a far more assertive Opposition and a more questioning press.

Agra origins are uncertain. In his *Kumarakom Musings on New Year’s Day 2001*, Vajpayee said:

India is willing and ready to seek a lasting solution to the Kashmir problem... we are prepared to recommence talks with Pakistan at any level, including the highest level provided Islamabad gives sufficient proof of its preparedness to create a conducive atmosphere.... On Kashmir, we shall not traverse solely on the beaten track of the past.

But Advani has been claiming repeatedly: “I suggested to Vajpayee to invite Musharraf.”⁵ He had said that earlier too.⁶ He was most insistent “on the invitation. I did it. I advised Vajpayee that it does not matter if Lahore has failed.”⁷ What is it that impels him to say that so stridently, so repeatedly? It is his consciousness of public perception that he was the one who sabotaged Agra and his own guilt conscience that that perception is correct. This explains the contradictions in the explanations he and his colleagues offered for their shabby performance at Agra.

Let us begin with Sushma Swaraj. On July 15, 2001, the day the talks began in earnest at Agra, she briefed the press

4 *Parliamentary Government in England*, p.37.

5 June 1, at Islamabad, *India Today*, June 27, 2005.

6 *The Asian Age*, April 7, 2004.

7 *Indian Express*, March 15, 2005 and June 23, 2005.

listing the issues discussed but omitted Kashmir to the dismay of Pakistanis. She gave contradictory explanations even for this. “I didn’t mention Kashmir because it was obvious. That is why Gen. Musharraf has come here.”⁸ On the same day she said “it was not a deliberate omission.”⁹

But, on August 6, in the Lok Sabha, Jaswant Singh suggested it was deliberate. “When she told the press what she did, she told the press what she was authorised to tell and she had the authority of the Union Cabinet to do so.” He was right. A detailed report from Agra in *The Telegraph*¹⁰ revealed: “It can be said now (after the debacle) that some people had an inkling that the Indian side would come out with a deliberate statement to suggest that Kashmir was not being discussed at all and that the summit was going very badly.”

Three causes were cited for the failure — Musharraf’s talk to seniors in the Indian media on the morning of July 16; his insistence that Kashmir was a “core issue”; and his refusal “to address cross-border terrorism”.

Sushma Swaraj told Pakistan daily *The News*¹¹ “Things were derailed the moment the video recording of General Saheb’s tough talk to a group of senior editors was instantly made available to all TV channels of the world who took no time in airing them.” She knew, of course, that this was simply not true. Prannoy Roy asked for the video, acquired it and telecast it. So much for the detail. The substantive bit was equally false. One of the editors who were present, Shekhar Gupta, asked Advani on his Walk the Talk programme on NDTV on March 12, 2005, whether the cause was “the breakfast with us, editors, which was televised”. Advani replied: “I don’t think so. No. Not at all.” Shekhar recalled in *Indian Express* on January 31, 2004, that in fact Musharraf made many concessions: “If you go over the tapes of that Agra breakfast,

8 Siddharth Varadarajan at Agra, *The Times of India*, July 17.

9 *The Telegraph*, July 17.

10 July 17.

11 July 20.

you would underline things Musharraf said that no Pakistani leader had said until then.” One wishes he had written this in July-August 2001 when the media went to town over “the breakfast”.

The transcript was published and still holds relevance. Musharraf’s famous four points envisaged elimination of extremes by both sides — of plebiscite and the Line of Control (LoC).

The notes of N. Ram, Editor-in-Chief, *Frontline*, on Musharraf’s remarks to another group of seniors at the tea in Delhi on July 14 also gives the lie to the breakfast theory.¹² Both the Delhi tea and the Agra breakfast belie New Delhi’s version that he was not prepared to discuss non-Kashmir issues and did not recognise the Simla and Lahore agreements. Jaswant Singh’s statement to the media to this effect in Delhi on July 14 was refuted instantly by Pakistan Foreign Secretary Inamul Haque.¹³

There must be something terribly wrong with the BJP leaders if every single claim by them turned out to be untrue. Do you remember Pramod Mahajan’s remark to a TV channel which it kept telecasting repeatedly as an ad? “*Adhoori rahi, asafalta nahi hui*” (It was inconclusive, not a failure). On July 17, on the morrow of the end of the Agra summit, Jaswant Singh, the Minister for External Affairs, told the world’s press: “We will pick up the threads from the visit of the President of Pakistan,” adding, “this is not a failure.” The very next day he instructed the Ministry’s spokesperson, Nirupama Rao, to assert that “we will... have to begin again”; not pick up the threads left dangling at Agra.

If not the breakfast meeting, what was the true cause of the failure at Agra? Jaswant mentioned “three broad areas” at his press conference in Agra on July 17. One was Musharraf’s stand that “unless the issue of Jammu and Kashmir is made central

12 vide the writer’s article, “Of the Delhi tea and the Agra breakfast” based on Ram’s notes; *Frontline*, March 15, 2002.

13 *The Hindu*, July 15.

there will be no progress on any other aspect” whereas India’s approach “addresses all issues”. This had been denied by Inamul Haque at the outset, on July 14. Even so, the External Affairs Minister’s charge was that Pakistan sought discussion of Kashmir exclusively; not settlement of the dispute at Agra, let alone an accord on its own terms. The spuriousness of this ground emerged in its Falstaffian progression in Jaswant Singh and Vajpayee’s later elaborations.

The second area related to “cross-border terrorism” (CBT). The third was omission of previous accords — Simla and Lahore — the very charge he had publicly made in Delhi on July 14 and which Inamul Haque denied instantly.¹⁴ In Parliament on August 6, Jaswant Singh himself rubbished the Simla and the Tashkent accords but had his remarks deleted from the record.¹⁵

That leaves us with Jammu and Kashmir and CBT.

Kashmir

In Parliament on July 24, Vajpayee went beyond the External Affairs Minister’s charge of July 17. He spoke of “Pakistan’s insistence on the ‘settlement’ of the Jammu & Kashmir issue, as a precondition for the normalisation of relations”.

On August 15, Vajpayee went further still. “He (Musharraf) came here with a single-point agenda — to make India accept Pakistan’s terms on Kashmir.” Let alone the transcript of the breakfast chat, the entire exercise was not to settle Kashmir, on whichever side’s terms, but to devise a procedure for its resolution — on the lines of the June 23, 1997, joint statement. Referring to it, the External Affairs Minister himself reminded Members of Parliament on August 6, that “even in the composite dialogue process... it is listed at second place It is already there” — a tacit refutation of Vajpayee.

Terrorism

14 *The Hindu* of July 15 carried the charge and the denial side by side.

15 *Indian Express*, August 9.

The 1997 document listed “terrorism” as one of the subjects for discussion. The Lahore Declaration of 1999 mentioned “terrorism”. It surely covers “cross-border terrorism”, especially since the declaration proceeded to elaborate it “in all its forms and all its manifestations”. If Advani wanted Agra to succeed, he could have asked for this formulation. The agreed Agra Declaration used the 1997-1999 term (“terrorism”). This surely sufficed. Advani’s charge on March 12, 2005 that it did not contain clauses on cross-border terrorism is untrue. The 1997 document covers that. The Summit did not collapse on this issue as Advani & Co. would have us believe. Advani said “[in] all the drafts prepared they were not willing to concede that there is any such thing like terrorism”. As we shall see this was a conscious falsehood.

What then was the real reason for the Agra collapse? The Opposition did the nation proud during the debates in Parliament. But it was hampered because the drafts were secret and the government exploited this advantage. The Opposition came so close as to drive Jaswant Singh into a corner in which, in sheer desperation, he had to tell a conscious falsehood. The draft exposes that. But, first, the debates.

Jaswant Singh tried to silence dissent by recourse to McCarthyite imputations. Critics spoke “at [the] behest” of Pakistan was his favourite phrase. “I find that in the intervention that Hon. Madhav Rao Scindia made with scarcely disguised sarcasm, he imputed (sic) that he was more in agreement with the visitor’s views.” The English was as appalling as the imputation on Scindia’s patriotism. He was Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. Manmohan Singh, the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, fared no better. “I was struck, Madam, by the manner, by the words of approbation he had for the visiting dignitary.” When Kapil Sibal criticised use of the expression “cross-border terrorism”, he was told that “he has actually given voice to an argument that has been given (sic) by the Foreign Minister of Pakistan”. This despicable technique is also employed by some officials of the Ministry of External Affairs of a certain breed in order to silence dissent in the press.

At his press conference on July 17, Jaswant Singh evaded questions based on the charge made by Pakistan's spokesman that "a draft agreement, the so-called Agra Declaration was discussed and agreed... and at the eleventh hour it was sabotaged". Jaswant Singh simply declined comment. He did not refute the charge.

In the Lok Sabha on August 6, Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi proved a harder nut to crack when he repeated the charge. Jaswant Singh promised an answer but gave none. He fell back on Kashmir, on the quibble that the document was not signed and that "in the drafting exercise that went on" between him and Pakistan's Foreign Minister, "just as I made pencilled corrections, no doubt he also made pencilled corrections. I have never up till now said or produced or pointed out to the press" those "corrections". A smokescreen of several "corrections" was spread to cover up a single and very damning writing he had penned in his own hand.

MPs were not taken in by this disingenuous prevarication. Informed ones had seen the one crucial clause which he had drafted in part. It fully endorsed not only the whole clause but the document entire. He had to back out when Advani & Co. pounced on him. Conscious of his guilt, Jaswant Singh resorted to cheap jibes. "My friend, colleague and a distinguished member of the Congress party asked me, was there any draft in which I made any corrections with my hands? I must tell you, Sir, there must not have been just one piece of paper. There must have been many pieces of paper on which I attempted to correct all kinds of things from the quality of Punjabi English and grammar to punctuation.

Somnath Chatterjee: To Jodhpuri English...

Jaswant Singh: No. Therefore, I think, finding fault with me would not be a right thing."

This is how he kept evading. Manmohan Singh pointedly asserted in the Rajya Sabha; "I know that he did provide a lot of technical assistance to the Hon. Foreign Minister of Pakistan to correct his English." Remember, while the two "Punjabis",

Abdul Sattar and Foreign Secretary Inamul Haque, had drafted diplomatic documents all their lives, Jaswant was a three-year-old toddler in diplomacy.

Manmohan Singh's persistence, however, paid off. The Minister conceded at last that, not several but "one particular square bracket, we attempted to reformulate it in a particular fashion". He then proceeded to give a totally false account. Both Ministers took this reformulated clause to their respective chiefs. Musharraf accepted it but Vajpayee did not, thanks to Advani.

Now read this exchange carefully

Manmohan Singh: If you were so convinced that India could never accept such a draft, why did you take it to the Cabinet?

Jaswant Singh: I took it to the Cabinet. I was not convinced. Mr. Sattar said, "*Is se ziada hum chal nahi sakte* (We cannot go beyond this)." I was not convinced. I was trying to move it beyond. So, I said that, faithfully, I will convey this. I was not convinced. Had I been convinced, why would I agree with my Cabinet colleagues and come back and say?"

He still did not explain why he did not reject the draft clause when he was 'not convinced' and took it, instead, to the Cabinet.

Jaswant Singh tried to convey that he did not agree with Abdul Sattar's draft and Abdul Sattar's reformulation. In fact, it was Jaswant Singh's own handwritten reformulation which completed Abdul Sattar's in a jointly agreed text of Clause 1. Why did Jaswant Singh write out what he did so readily and when he "was not convinced"? This bears out Abdul Sattar's charge that Jaswant Singh and he had agreed on the text thus revised, but the former was repudiated by the Cabinet.

The documents published here must be read in the context. The Agra Summit began at 11 a.m. on July 15 in a plenary followed by a one-to-one meeting between Vajpayee and Musharraf. At the end of the day, the Foreign Secretaries began drafting a joint statement and ended the exercise at 4.30 a.m. the

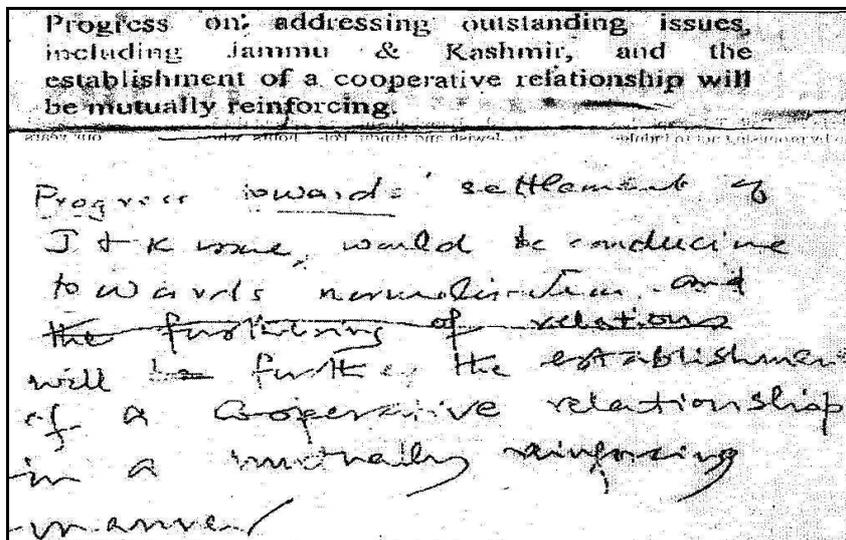
next day. There were seven square brackets in an agreed text, signifying seven differences for the Summit to resolve.

Each side had come with a draft. Pakistan's draft was published by *Dawn* on July 22, 2001. India's draft has not been published yet. Around noon on July 16, well after "the breakfast" the leaders asked the Foreign Ministers to resolve the differences and convert the text into a Declaration. The Foreign Ministers succeeded eminently at about 2.30 p.m. on July 16. A draft was agreed. They showed it to their respective heads of government.

At 3.30 p.m. Sattar said on television: "There is likely to be a Declaration." Indian leaders were informed of Musharraf's acceptance. However, later Abdul Sattar was told that the Indian Cabinet wanted Clause 1 to be reformulated. The Foreign Ministers therefore met around 6 p.m. Jaswant brought along a printed text. Abdul Sattar reformulated it in his own handwriting but only upto a point. Beyond it (beginning with the word "and") Jaswant Singh completed the text in his own handwriting thus endorsing the entire reformulated Clause 1 and, with it, the entire draft declaration, since Clause 1 was the only point of disagreement. This and the related documents are published here for the first time but they were well known to some MPs and to some in the media even in July-August 2001.¹⁶ Jaswant Singh assured Abdul Sattar that "it would take him 15 minutes" to secure approval for the agreed revised Clause 1.¹⁷ Musharraf accepted the revised Clause.

16 Vide John Cherian, *Frontline*, August 17, 2001 and Seema Guha, *The Times of India*, July 21, 2001.

17 vide his interview to the writer, *Frontline*, January 18, 2002.



X-FILES: Jaswant Singh's reformulation of Clause 1 of the declaration, which he brought along and showed to Abdul Sattar at 6 p.m. (see the printed text above). It presumably had the approval of the Indian Cabinet. Abdul Sattar and Jaswant Singh jointly revised this printed text in their own respective handwritings. The first part is in Abdul Sattar's handwriting. From the word "and" the rest is in Jaswant Singh's own handwriting. He thus endorsed the entire jointly reformulated clause and, with it, the entire draft declaration. The handwritten part reads: "progress towards settlement of J&K issue would be conducive towards normalisation and will further the establishment of a cooperative relationship in a mutually reinforcing manner."

Around 9 p.m. the Pakistani delegation was informed that the agreed draft was rejected by the Cabinet Committee on Security. Musharraf made a last-ditch effort to revive the summit during his farewell call on Vajpayee. He failed. It was too late and the moment was not propitious, Vajpayee said. He, however, promised to visit Pakistan. But he did not ask Musharraf to stay on for another day, a fact which the visitor mentioned with regret on July 20. Abdul Sattar said on July 17

that if time had been granted, “the residual paragraph could have been worked out.”

Clearly some[one] the Indian side did not want any accord at all. As far back as on June 2 Advani said: “We should not have expectations. Simply the heads of the two states meeting will not resolve issues.” On July 14 at the very outset, he read the Riot Act to Musharraf on Dawood. “It is unheard of, protocol-wise, for a Home Minister to discuss an individual fugitive with a head of state,” *The Telegraph*’s correspondent noted in retrospect after the collapse on August 16. Advani did worse. He publicised his talk with Musharraf. He was aided by the Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs on the Pakistan desk, Vivek Katju, who told K.R Nayar: “I am a Kashmiri... I (sic) can never compromise with Pakistan.”¹⁸ Advani did not expect the conference to go beyond an exchange of views; a sizing-up of Musharraf.

When it did, he wrecked the accord. The Declaration would have raised Vajpayee’s standing internationally and at home. Advani was seen agitatedly pacing up and down when the drafting was in process. Vajpayee revealed in the Lok Sabha on August 16 that Advani “had got worried when his one-to-one meeting with Musharraf went on for an unusually long time.” The Prime Minister disclosed how Advani sent a man inside to “find out” what was afoot.¹⁹ This is utterly unheard of. Jaswant Singh was treated as badly with intrusions and phone calls to his officials over his head. The Advani who behaved thus was an Advani out to abort the Agra Declaration.

A diminished Vajpayee emerged from the debris at Agra. Advani overruled him twice thereafter within the next six months; on the selection of the presidential candidate and on Narendra Modi’s dismissal. Vajpayee reacted after Agra the way he was to react to defeat after Gujarat when, on April 12, 2002 at Goa, he denounced the entire Muslim community. After Agra he and Jaswant Singh took turns holding Musharraf to

18 *The Telegraph*, July 21, 2001.

19 *Indian Express*, August 17, 2001.

cheap ridicule for a whole fortnight from July 28 to August 10. Significantly, it all began at the party's executive meeting on July 28. Sample these gems of the poet's refinement: "You didn't see Musharraf's face when he was leaving. I did. He had a long face... I didn't even give him a photo-opportunity." (That is, did not escort him out as civility requires).

The nadir was reached when it was claimed incredibly that Musharraf had offered to take back areas "ceded" to China. It was denied by Pakistan and denounced by China, respectively, on August 8 and 12.

Jaswant Singh treated MPs to jibes at Musharraf's English and entertained them with cameos of his own: "advancements were made in 1996" (advances would have been too simple a word to use); "the selectivity of the Venerates"; "India too is not absent (sic) of soldierly qualities"; Delhi has its "convulsive dimensions"; "the habited barrister, Shri Somnath Chatterjee"; "the mental equity of the Leader of the Opposition"; and this bit at the press conference on July 17: "I am in your hands Nirupama [Rao, the official spokesperson], and she is in your hands. I do not mean physically." Comment is unnecessary.

Read the Declaration. It did not "settle" any dispute but laid down a road map for resolution of all the issues that divide the two countries. Terrorism was explicitly mentioned. Nor were non-Kashmir issues ignored. Kashmir was given due importance and no more.

Jaswant Singh's revision made for a better and much more balanced text. Advani wrecked a fine diplomatic achievement for India for his own petty gains. Vajpayee and Jaswant Singh sailed along. To think it is small men such as these who were stewards of this great nation's affairs not long ago.

The perfect comment on Agra was made by Lalu Prasad: "It is against our culture to let a guest leave the house at midnight."