

# Talking of Kashmir

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## **While opposing internationalizing of the Kashmir dispute, India must engage Pakistan**

For the second time since the Indian Government's decision on Article 370 in August last year, China raised the issue of Kashmir at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), prompting a protest from New Delhi. In its response, the Government has said that Beijing should refrain from bringing a bilateral issue into the UNSC, and accused China of working at the behest of Pakistan.

New Delhi's response also pointed towards the "overwhelming majority" of Security Council members being opposed of the Chinese reference on conditions in Jammu and Kashmir which resulted in a lack of consensus for any kind of statement at the end of the meeting.

India's case rests on the Shimla Accord, 1972 where both India and Pakistan agreed to resolve the Kashmir issue bilaterally. China's repeated raising of the Kashmir issue since last August, which includes an aborted attempt in December, is unconstructive and will impact the India-China bilateral relationship if it continues. It is also unlikely to push the Government, which has already defied several international calls from friendly countries, into lifting restrictions or rolling back its measures in Kashmir. Given that New Delhi has refrained from raising similar issues over Tibet, Xinjiang or Hong Kong, it is unfair on the part of Beijing to take its concerns to the international stage, especially since President Xi Jinping didn't officially raise such concerns while visiting India in October.

While China's move may be unwarranted, it is yet another reason for New Delhi to take head of the continuing and unprecedented criticism

of its actions in Kashmir. Prior to August, the last time Kashmir issue was raised at the UNSC format was in 1971; it has since been raised twice within a period of five months. China may have found no takers for a statement, but the fact that it was allowed to raise the issue at the UNSC cannot be brushed away. Nor can India maintain the duality of insisting, on the one hand, that Kashmir is a bilateral issue and, on the other hand, rejecting all bilateral talks with Pakistan. At some point of time, the Government must push for normalization of ties with Pakistan as well as for the lifting of restrictions in Jammu and Kashmir. In the past few days, it seems the government has decided to review some of its decision taken in August; it has released political prisoners and restored 2G connectivity to select places; it has also taken one group of envoys to Srinagar and Jammu and is making plans for 36 Cabinet Ministers, who have not visited the region yet to travel there. These measures however, must not come in dribs and drabs, but must be comprehensive. Only when all the communications are restored, all political prisoners freed and added security restrictions removed, the real task of healing the Jammu and Kashmir region can begin.

**SOURCE:** *The Hindu*