

PM asks Pak to walk the talk on terror

None | By Chaitanya Kalbag, On Board Air India One

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PRIME MINISTER Manmohan Singh said on Tuesday that Pakistan would have to prove that it was serious about joining hands with India in cracking down on terrorism, and the first test was the Mumbai train explosion findings. "How else can we ask Pakistan except through a mechanism like this?" the prime minister asked reporters aboard his chartered Boeing 747 on the way home from what he described as a "very successful" three-day visit to South Africa.

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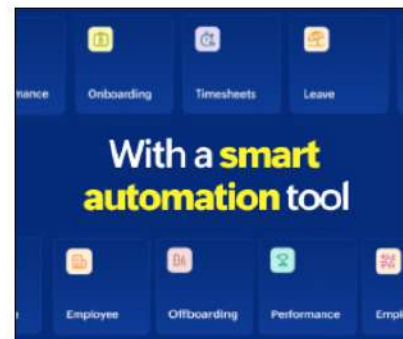
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"How else can we ask Pakistan except through a mechanism like this?" the prime minister asked reporters aboard his chartered Boeing 747 on the way home from what he described as a "very successful" three-day visit to South Africa. He was referring to the joint mechanism he and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf agreed to set up when they met in Havana last month on the sidelines of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit.

"If we have evidence we will hand it to them (the Pakistanis)," he said. "We will test the waters. As the Foreign Secretary (Shivshankar Menon) has said I think Pakistan will have to walk the talk."

Mumbai Police said on Saturday that they had found evidence linking the July 11 serial bombings in Mumbai commuter trains to the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, and accused Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence of involvement in the attacks, which left at least 192 rush-hour commuters dead and several hundreds injured.

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"Now here is what our people have discovered. We will share this information with Pakistan and test them on how sincere they are in carrying forward the commitment that I and President Musharraf underlined in our joint statement (in Havana)," Singh said. But he noted earlier, at the same news conference, that the joint mechanism "has yet to take off. We have to test it. We will test it."

Clearly buoyant after his third successive foreign-policy triumph in a month, the prime minister said India's external relations were in "robust" shape.

On September 12 he, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and South African President Thabo Mbeki agreed to cooperate on a range of issues at the first summit meeting of the IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa) Dialogue Forum in Brasilia. A few days later the prime minister broke the ice with Musharraf in Havana. And on Monday he secured South Africa's crucial support for civilian nuclear cooperation while proclaiming India's support for Pretoria's bid for a permanent United Nations Security Council seat.

Senior Indian officials who did not wish to be identified said the South African statement of support was a very good development, especially since Pretoria is a key member of the 30-nation Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG). Brazil currently chairs the NSG.

The nuclear deal, ostensibly contingent on US Congress approval of the broad civilian nuclear cooperation agreement with India, will also cement India's closeness to Brasilia and Pretoria and unite the world's three largest emerging-market democracies.

Singh said India had worked well with like-minded developing countries in developing a consensus on the Doha Round of global trade negotiations.

The prime minister said he had also urged a pro-active NAM role in the Middle East and in Africa. "But we have to recognize that the world is not static and that we live in an increasingly interdependent world," he said. He said India's relations with the big powers "are as good as they could be. At the same time we have strengthened our relationships with developing countries." Commenting on Shashi Tharoor's withdrawal as a candidate for the secretary-generalship of the UN, the prime minister said: "I have always said that it is a Herculean task. We are up against an existing international order. But this is the first time we have challenged it." He said Tharoor's performance had been "very, very creditable" and added: "I think there is no reason to feel disheartened. I think people will have to reckon with the fact that India is resuming its role in the management of the international system."

The prime minister said the April-June quarter's Gross Domestic Product growth of 8.9 per cent followed a pattern of very strong (fiscal) first-quarter growth over the past two or three years. "So I think the economy is in good shape. It will remain in good shape, but we have a lot of work to do both to give our growth process the dimension of being inclusive socially... at the same time we have to create an environment in which business and industry can move forward in wealth creation." Singh spoke with passion about the need for economic reforms to continue, especially in the banking, insurance and pension industries.

"We need a huge amount of investment, as large as \$150 to \$200 billion over the next seven or eight years.... Infrastructure everywhere requires long-term money and therefore we need to create in our country a strong debt market, and this strong debt market can come only if the pension funds activity gets a boost, the insurance industry gets a boost."



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He said the reform process was unfortunately blocked because of a lack of consensus in the ruling UPA coalition, "but we keep on trying".