



# INDIA NEWS

## PRESS RELEASE

News reports that Indian prisoner Sarabjit Singh will be hanged on 1<sup>st</sup> April have been met with dismay in India, where it has been noted that the view in the media in Pakistan is that this sudden decision is in retaliation for the unfortunate death of Khalid Mehmood, who was a Pakistani under-trial prisoner in India, while at the same time Kashmir Singh was pardoned and returned to India.

Such impressions will impinge on the positive atmosphere currently existing between India and Pakistan. The two governments have been working on several initiatives designed to lead to an improvement of the situation for prisoners of either country. These include a new Agreement on Consular Access and setting up of a Joint Judicial Committee on Prisoners. The Committee met recently in New Delhi and the Indian judges are due to visit Pakistan in early April. The Government of India holds high hopes from such new institutional arrangements, as well as from the dialogue process with Pakistan, which it hopes very much that it can quickly resume.

Sarabjit Singh's imminent hanging was raised in the Indian Parliament both yesterday and today. Cutting across party lines, Members of Parliament urged that his life should be spared. The Indian Minister for External Affairs today appealed to the Government of Pakistan to treat Sarabjit Singh's case with clemency on humanitarian grounds. In response to a letter sent to him by the Chief Minister of Punjab, Shri Prakash Singh Badal, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has assured him that our request for clemency for Sarabjit Singh has been conveyed at the highest possible level in the Government of Pakistan.

Today, Sarabjit Singh's sister, Dalbir Kaur has sent a written appeal for clemency directly to His Excellency President Musharraf. She has also requested the President for permission to visit Pakistan to meet with Sarabjit Singh in jail.

It is hoped that appeals from Sarabjit Singh's family, the Government of India and others would be given a chance to be considered from all angles, including by the new government expected to take office in Pakistan soon.