

Indo-Pakistan Relations: Latest Trends

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Most informed opinions across the geographical divides hold a fearful notion that if relations – to whatever form they exist in our present circumstances - between India and Pakistan were to collapse irreparably, the South Asia region would stand at the verge of a nuclear conflict. The notion has gained even more credence with the growing phenomenon of ‘terrorism’ that has permeated across the globe. While the history of Pak-Indo relations over the last 57 years marked by their obstinate ‘official’ stands on issues left over following the great partition, and punctuated by three wars, may have given credence to that particular view, the common mass who form the over one billion total in the region still continue to hold on to a vision of a better future than a nuclear holocaust.

Today, even the officials on both sides of the Wagha realize the need for ‘flexibility’ on official positions on certain core issues that have plagued relations between the two states. No less than the President of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf has reiterated the call for flexibility at innumerable forums, and the need to move away from traditional positions when it comes to the question of dealing with the core issue of Kashmir. For Kashmir, ladies and gentlemen, is seen as the one issue on whose settlement would rest the foundations of the relations between the two estranged neighbors.

At the start of the new century, when peace between India and Pakistan talks stalled during the Agra summit of 2001, both sides were disappointed and pessimistic about the future. Then in April 2003, Vajpayee made a speech offering the ‘hand of friendship’ to Pakistan. Over the next eight months, officials ferried messages back and forth between Vajpayee and General Musharraf, who came to see a possibly unique opening to end a half-century of enmity. The issue gained momentum with Vajpayee’s decision to attend the 12th SAARC Summit in Islamabad in January 2004, where the two leaders agreed to

start the process of a composite dialogue. This was preceded by a number of CBMs as both India and Pakistan, moving cautiously, are now at least talking about steps to improve relations between the two countries. (We shall be looking at some of these steps later in the presentation, and take stock of process of the ‘composite dialogue’.)

It would seem finally, that both countries realize the necessity of resolving their long-standing problems and build a relationship that has continually broken down in the years past.

The Mechanics of Current Pakistan-India Detente

In the spirit of turning the adversarial relationship around witnessed during the 12th SAARC Summit, the Foreign Secretaries of Pakistan and India held their first formal talks in February 2004 in Islamabad. The talks were part of the recent Pak-India rapprochement that we have witnessed in the flurry of people to people contacts across the Wagha. During those talks, both sides agreed on the basic ‘roadmap’ for a composite dialogue process:

1. **March/April 2004:** Meeting between the DG Rangers and the Inspector-General of the Indian Border Security Force.

The Inspector General of India’s Border Security Force (BSF), JS Gill, and Pakistan’s Maj. Gen. Hussain Mehdi of the Pakistan Rangers met in March in Lahore and signed an agreement aimed at curbing cross-border smuggling, drug trafficking and illegal immigration.

In April, Pakistan proposed the hosting of expert level talks on nuclear CBMs between Pakistan and India on May 25-26. The talks were held on June 20, following a postponement by India, and which focused on nuclear crisis management, including a ban on further tests and preventing the accidental or non-authorized use of nuclear weapons. Views were also exchanged on respective security concepts and nuclear doctrines.

2. **May 2004:** Talks on drug trafficking and smuggling
3. **May/June 2004:** The Foreign Secretaries of Pakistan and India to hold talks on Kashmir, CBMs and Peace and Security, in New Delhi.

Two days of talks between the foreign secretaries of Pakistan and India concluded on June 28, 2004. This was the first meeting between the foreign secretaries after a gap of six years, the last foreign secretary level talks were held in 1999. Both sides have agreed on various confidence building measures which include: a hotline between the foreign secretaries (?? Check); advance notification of missile tests; reopening of consulates in Mumbai and Karachi; restoring the staff strength at their respective High Commissions to 110, and the release of fishermen held in each others waters. The Foreign Ministers have also agreed to meet in the third week of August to review progress achieved in the composite dialogue before the meeting of the Foreign Ministers.

4. **July 2004:** Talks on issues such Siachen; Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project; Sir Creek; terrorism; economic and commercial cooperation, and friendly exchanges between the two countries.

Mr. Ajay Vikram Singh who replaced AK Bhatnagar as the new Indian defense secretary in the first week of July 2004 is scheduled to discuss a coterie of issues with his Pakistani counterparts sometimes in the first week of next month. Both sides will be holding talks on six different subjects including Siachen, and prepare a report for bilateral dialogues between the foreign ministers.

5. **August 2004:** The Foreign Ministers meeting.

Composite Dialogue - Results

S. No	Agenda	Date/Venue	Status
1.	Meeting DG Rangers & Indian Border Security Force	March 2004, Lahore	Agreement signed aimed at curbing cross-border smuggling, drug trafficking and illegal immigration. The two sides also held talks on June 15-16, 2004 on the smuggling issue.
2.	Meeting between nuclear experts on nuclear CBMs	June 20, New Delhi	Inconclusive
3.	Foreign Secretaries Talks	June 27-28, New Delhi	Inconclusive
4.	Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project	July 29-30, Islamabad	Inconclusive
5.	Promotion of friendly exchanges	August 3-4, New Delhi	Inconclusive
6.	Siachen	August 5-6, New Delhi	Inconclusive
7.	Sir Creek	August 6-7, New Delhi	Inconclusive
8.	Terrorism & drug trafficking	August 10-11, Islamabad	Inconclusive
9.	Economic & commercial cooperation	August 11-12	Inconclusive

The Foreign Minister's of the two countries are scheduled to meet sometimes in September, while Prez Musharraf and Mr. Manmohan Singh are also expected to meet the same month at the sidelines of the UNGA meeting in New York. But while the current dialogue process has ended without tangible results, even the fact that experts from both the sides are now talking about conflicts ranging from Kashmir to Siachen, to Wuller Barrage and the Sir Creek is by itself a positive indication that both neighbors want to prevent the outbreak of the fourth round in their version of the South Asian Cold War. Like all disputes, the process of settlement can be laborious, especially when

between neighbors who, if you permit me, ‘hate each others guts’, but the very fact that Islamabad and New Delhi now have the confidence in talking and seeking way for dealing with issues which in the immediate past would have threatened an all out war on their borders

Unofficial list of Proposals Exchanged between India and Pakistan as Part of the Composite Dialogue

On Kashmir

1. Re-locate forces from Indian side of Kashmir, including Siachen
2. Repeal ‘draconian’ laws
3. Reduce human rights violations
4. Establish Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus link
5. Open the Jammu-Sialkot route
6. Permit cross-border trade at selected points
7. Allow interaction at selected points between people on both sides of the LoC
8. Permit pilgrimages on both sides to shrines
9. Promote cultural interaction and cooperation
10. Explore cooperation on issues such as management of environment, forestry resources etc.

On CBMs

1. Establish new communication links between the two navies and air forces, reestablish links at Division/Corps Commander level, specifically Leh and Kargil-Gilgit, Baramulla and Kupwara-Murree, Rajouri-Jhelum, Srinagar-and Nagrota-Rawalpindi and Jammu-Sialkot
2. Upgrade, dedicate and secure the communication links between the DGMOs and establish a hotline between the two foreign secretaries
3. Establish communication links between Indian Coast Guards and Pakistan Maritime Security Agency
4. Develop links between the armed forces through exchange of visits by naval ships; seminars between academic and research institutes dealing with strategic and defense-related issues, exchanges between defense training establishments; friendly sporting tournaments and joint adventure activities between the two militaries; exchange of military bands
5. The DGMOs of the two countries could meet periodically, followed by an annual meeting between two VCOAS
6. Restore the strength of respective high commissions to 110
7. Re-establish consulates-general in Karachi and Mumbai
8. Release all apprehended fishermen

On Commercial and Economic Cooperation

1. Pakistan should grant MFN status to India
2. Grant transit facilities to each other's goods on reciprocal basis
3. Open the Attari-Wagha land routes for trade
4. Promote investment in joint ventures
5. Participate on trade fairs/exhibitions
6. Tackle piracy of Indian music and films in Pakistan
7. Lay down optical fibre cable from Attari to Lahore
8. Facilitate counterpart arrangement between mobile operators
9. Allow Indian companies in telecom projects in Pakistan
10. Allow multiple airlines for operating the scheduled services
11. Allow air connectivity with India to designated carriers of Pakistan
12. Amend the 1974 Protocol on Resumption of Shipping Services to allow third country flag ships/vessels to lift India/Pakistan bound cargo; also allow flag carriers of both countries to lift cargo for third country from each other's ports
13. Supply petroleum products from India to Pakistan and extend diesel pipeline to Pakistan
14. Commercial cooperation in the CNG sector
15. Participation of Indian companies in on- and off-shore production activities
16. Harmonise customs procedures and valuation
17. Cooperation between SEBI and Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan
18. Cooperation in the field of Information Technology
19. Bring out a joint commemorative stamp, and exchange philatelic exhibitions
20. Open branches of nationalized banks in each other's country
21. Collaborate in post-harvest technologies
22. Cooperate in the water resources sector

On Promotion of Friendly Exchanges

1. Exchange of artists, writers, poets, musicians, painters and sculptors
2. Liberal visa regime for performing artists, film personalities, and liberalize visa regime through grant of one-year multiple visas to bona fide businessmen; grant of Exempt from Police Reporting (EPR) visas to journalists, artists, students, scholars, businessmen, persons working with multinational companies, senior citizens (65 years and above)
3. Invitation to theatre groups from Pakistan and India
4. Exchange of exhibitions, paintings, sculpture, photographs, handicrafts, musical instruments
5. Exchange of publications, recorded music, slides
6. Interaction between national museums
7. Participation in book fairs/exhibitions in each other's country

8. Cooperation between libraries
9. Joint seminars in the field of elementary education
10. Interaction between the University Grants Commission and the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan
11. Joint workshop in the field of medicinal and aromatic plants
12. Cooperation and exchange between institutions of excellence
13. Exchange of youth delegations
14. Exchange sportspersons, teams and coaches
15. Remove ban on Indian TV channels in Pakistan
16. Remove ban on Indian newspapers and periodicals
17. Hold film festivals
18. Annual seminars between groups of journalists
19. Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) could start group tours
20. Both sides to exchange lists of civilian prisoners in each other's custody and initiate their release
21. Offer consular access to jails
22. Pakistan requested to make another effort to trace and release the recorded 54 Indian POWs
23. Increase size of pilgrim groups

All the above proposals are significant in themselves, and indicate that India and Pakistan have now passed the stage of serious tension for them to be discussing such innovative proposals, and their relations although far from normal, are better than the post-December 2001 period. Significantly, on July 5 in a departure from the past, and under the umbrella of SAARC, India allowed a group of Pakistani boy scouts to attend a scout's function in Gulmarg, close to Srinagar. This is being seen as a step further to the CBMs. It has also been suggested by India that the LoC in Kashmir should be turned into a line of peace and tranquility. Meanwhile, Pakistan has suggested that the two countries should evolve mutually acceptable modalities for discussing Kashmir, and how to engage and associate Kashmiris in the process. Pakistan has also suggested the idea of fixing a timeline for these discussions. However, India seems hesitant to put any timeline for accepting the best options and solutions for resolving contentious issues that most certainly will be discussed again and considered for mutually acceptable implementation by the two countries.

While irritants over Baglihar hydropower project have almost been ironed out, both India and Pakistan have yet to move forward in certain difficult security areas, facilitate easier visa regimes, improve economic relations and ease tough posturing over Kashmir. Moreover, unlike the past, the current process of composite dialogue has survived the government changes in the two countries, reflecting an expanding consensus across the borders to move the peace process ahead. As in Pakistan, in India, peace with the former was an undisputed issue among the main contestants in the recent general elections. Both the BJP and the Congress party, and also other important regional players including the Left, campaigned for reconciliation with Pakistan. On the other hand, the Musharraf administration has kept its commitment to pursue dialogue, consider for example Musharraf's four points on resolving Kashmir: recognize Kashmir as the core issue; dialogue, flexibility, and finding alternatives to traditional positions. Also, the leading components of Mutahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA) such as JUI, and the PPP-Parliamentarian in Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy (ARD) have been more or less supportive of the process. It remains to be seen how far the domestic adversaries would rise above their political expediencies in allowing a negotiated settlement of bilateral disputes, including Kashmir.

Thus far, both India and Pakistan have shown willingness for a sustained and serious dialogue, and both sides have responded positively to nuclear CBMs, including a proposal by India for a common nuclear doctrine floated by its External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh. Pakistan has also suggested similar expert level group meetings in the areas of conventional CBMs. Several conventional CBMs are in the pipeline which need follow-up action including an MoU between the maritime security agency of Pakistan and the Indian Coast Guard.

Although differences remain over issues such as troop reduction and a permanent mechanism to sustain ceasefire along the LoC, with a comprehensive and sustained framework of CBMs in place across frontiers, these would not be difficult to bridge if the political leadership remains engaged in building an all-round momentum towards mitigating apprehensions.

These new initiatives are sound in themselves and should not be allowed to fall victim to the mistrust between the governments that has prevented successful implementation in the past. The overall atmosphere that prevailed during the present round of talks has raised a great deal of optimism. Moreover, the media both in Pakistan and India, minus the usual rhetoric of the vernacular press, showed a degree of responsible reporting by both the print and electronic mediums. The officials of both India and Pakistan have shown a professionalism that many previous encounters lacked. There were no abrupt conclusion of talks and no walkouts by either side. Both have in fact managed to impress on the outside world that despite the lack of any concrete progress in these talks, there is still a possibility of some breakthrough in future talks.

The current easing of tensions provide an opportunity to reassess and revitalize the role of CBMs in normalizing relations. The new approach does not require a sweeping shift, but detailed mechanisms to address disputes. The people in and outside the region hold their breath for peace in South Asia, as the train of dialogue in South Asia moves along with the pace in some novel by Rudyard Kipling. But with the growing sense of bonhomie, even as the ‘hawks’ across both sides of the Wagha continue to hope for an end to the dialogue process, people like me can only pray that *inshallah* this time the train will reach its station, minus the massacres so reminiscent of the Partition in 1947. The ‘spoilers’ on both sides of the Wagha divide should by no means be provided any ammunition for raising tensions and put pressure to end the dialogue process. Such a scenario would be disastrous indeed.

Under our present circumstances, when the very sanity of nations lies in question, there is some relevance to the timeline formula, and India must not let this opportunity fritter away as one looks at our shared continent, the poisoning of our environment; the distortion of our economies; erosion of our sovereignty; suppression of social justice; escalation of militarism and terror which multiply at a pace which staggers the mind. India and Pakistan can, as they have for the last five decades, choose to ignore these or decide to correct the wrongs through concerted action. None of our problems are

susceptible to old panaceas, worn-out slogans like Islam in danger or Hindu supremacy and bankrupt approaches. New approaches, new outlooks, and new thinking has to be the order of the day. We can kill each other or choose to live together. One can only hope that both will choose to do the latter. This can only be done by recognizing our common destiny, by focusing on similarities and accepting differences and redirecting energies towards securing a better future. In this endeavor, the progeny of Gandhi, Jinnah and Nanak must not prove to be lacking.

Clearly, both sides have now seen the futility of military brinkmanship and war, given the prevailing nuclear deterrence in the region. However, the race for acquisition of destabilizing weapons systems may undermine the prevailing deterrence. Are we going to choose to blast each other off the map with our missiles, or talk sensibly for the sake of moving our future generations out of the history closets? That, ladies and gentlemen, is choice that we all have to make not in some distant future, but the immediate present.