**India: Trick or Trade?**

**Can Pakistan decide and start bilateral trade with India entirely on its own?**

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The diplomatic bruises sustained by Pakistan in the wake of the August 2019 developments will take a long time to heal. Bilateral relations between the two South Asian nuclear states have nosedived ever since the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. From downgrading diplomatic presence in each other’s capital to the talk of changes in the Indus Waters Treaty and even the future of AJK, the South Asian geopolitical landscape has been witnessing a tense situation. The accidental landing of the Brahmos missile in Pakistan and a few incidences of violation of sea, ground, and air space would keep strategists on both sides busy - wondering.

The voices of human rights violations particularly in Indian-held Kashmir coupled with allegations of export-import of cross-border terrorism would keep generating intangible yet conceivable anxiety – what next?

Question: In such an environment of sheer mistrust and animosity, could anyone even think of commencing bilateral trade between the two countries? Is the idea even conceivable?

[Pakistan’s startups need strategic support for growth](https://www.nation.com.pk/04-Apr-2024/pakistan-s-startups-need-strategic-support-for-growth)

Narendra Modi’s meaningful smile and occasional mocking remarks coupled with Jayshankar’s outright dismissive attitude towards Pakistan would cause severe distress to Pakistani Think Tanks and the Foreign Office alike. At multilateral forums, Pakistan and India were seen using the K and T words frequently as the international community would look the other way. Neither would Kulbhushan Yadav’s capture nor dissemination of dossiers on India’s statesponsored terrorism caught the world’s attention. The announcement that Pakistan was ‘irrelevant’ to India would further aggravate matters. Issuance of regular PRs from Islamabad on various ‘matters of concern’ and its insistence that no talks were possible unless India adhered to the relevant UN Security Council’s resolutions on Kashmir clearly stated Pakistan’s policy towards normalizing relations with India.

Question: Can Pakistan start trade without establishing any formal or informal links with India or be able to at least start a dialogue? How could Islamabad presume that India, which has been outrightly rebuffing the idea of talks, would even respond to such a proposal?

[US wants to see everyone is treated according to law in Pakistan, says Miller](https://www.nation.com.pk/04-Apr-2024/us-wants-to-see-everyone-is-treated-according-to-law-in-pakistan-says-miller)

For India under Modi, even Europe and Canada are not relevant. For that matter, does any country of the world including the United States of America matter to India right now? On the other hand, does India care? Looking at the saga that started from the EU DisinfoLab and continued through Hardeep Singh Nijjar’s assassination, one could easily deduce that an ‘economically sound’ India’s presumed role in containing China’s economic and military advancement is considered far more important than calling a spade a spade. Otherwise, why would the Five Eyes or FATF just let India go scot-free? Is it then surprising that the international community could not go beyond labeling India as a ‘country of particular concern’?

History tells us that any Indian PM would not let any opportunity go by without castigating Pakistan, especially during election campaigns. This time around, the beginning of the election year also witnessed the Congress facing all sorts of problems including its frozen bank accounts. The ruling party would not hesitate to apprehend even a couple of Chief Ministers on frivolous charges. Indeed, the world’s largest democracy is reinventing the concept and requirements of democracy. However, in the process, an ‘irrelevant’ neighbor becomes temporarily relevant as its ‘bashing’ sells in the market as hot cakes. It is then no surprise that the ‘homework’ on winning a third term for Modi necessitated Jaishankar to reiterate his ‘views’ on Pakistan. A few days ago, it was during a Q&A session that the Indian Foreign Minister once again hurled serious threats to Pakistan - in no uncertain terms.

[Rehman Baba train stop at Bandhi extended](https://www.nation.com.pk/04-Apr-2024/rehman-baba-train-stop-at-bandhi-extended)

At almost the same time, hundreds of miles away, in London, Jaishankar’s Pakistani counterpart was looking into the possibilities of commencing bilateral trade with India. Amazing timings…!! Question: Can Pakistan decide and start bilateral trade with India entirely on its own?

Foreign Minister Dar’s wishful thinking about commencing bilateral trade with India was the first official statement made in the realm of Pak-India relations by the recently installed government in Islamabad. The statement raised many eyebrows as well as questions. To begin with, should we consider the FM’s statement as the result of the collective wisdom of the Foreign Office? Was it a goodwill gesture towards the enemy? Waiving a white flag? An effort to diffuse tension or look mature and peace-loving? Or was it simply an innocent act of appeasement?

Delving deeper, was the age-old military strategy of ‘surprising’ the enemy employed in a civilian way? Wait a minute. Was the Foreign Minister conveying the PML (N)’s position viz-a-viz India? Or was it an effort to manufacture Pakistan’s ‘relevance’ to India, particularly in its election year? More importantly, would it mean a change in Pakistan’s overall policy on Kashmir? As the K-word was not mentioned anywhere, the idea might have been to convey that trade could commence while ‘overlooking’ the core issue of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJ&K). Is the expression ‘IIOJ&K’ going to disappear for good?

[LHC CJ appoints new registrar](https://www.nation.com.pk/04-Apr-2024/lhc-cj-appoints-new-registrar)

Question: Were all stakeholders on board?

Perhaps, it was just a slip of the tongue and in the heat of a moment, while addressing the traders’ grievances, the FM tried to allay their fears or make a ‘political’ promise to look ‘favorable’ to Pakistan’s business community…!! To be fair to him, perhaps he forgot that cameras were on, and his address was being recorded. Perhaps, he overlooked the fact that being Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, every word that he uttered would be taken seriously – and as a policy statement. Otherwise, a seasoned politician like him, with a wealth of experience in politics and international affairs, would have explored all possible corners of his statement. Fortunately, there has been a complete silence on his most innovative initiative.

Question: Do the words like ‘dignity’ and ‘self-respect’ matter when it comes to running the day-to-day affairs of any government?

[Lahore police detain 2,720 drug dealers amid continued campaign](https://www.nation.com.pk/04-Apr-2024/lahore-police-detain-2-720-drug-dealers-amid-continued-campaign)

The Foreign Minister’s remarks are likely to be forgotten as ‘one of those’ statements that are made with an ‘immediate’ objective in mind such as addressing any pressure or diverting attention or simply to look ‘relevant’. Or is it already forgotten? All said and done, commencing trade with India, particularly under the prevalent geopolitical and geoeconomic circumstances will be nothing short of a miracle. And miracles do not happen these days.

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