

# Pakistan-India relations: let's play by the rules

OP-ED



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**T**he buzz cannot be better. The words all come outright. Everyone of any significance is calling for cooperation not confrontation, development not destructive war between India and Pakistan. Lessons seem to have been learnt; animosity is unaffordable. Above all it traumatises national souls.

Hours before his death in January 1966, India's Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri said peace with Pakistan was important for India's soul. Those were prophetic words. His friends were opposed to his decision to sign the 1965 Tashkent Agreement with Pakistan. Fifty bruised years testify that hating has a bitter

yield. There is nothing deadlier than hating in the name of Allah or Ram just as there is nothing more beautiful than promoting universal humanism in the name of Allah and Ram. But today hate has killed tolerance in India, the most vital ingredient of multi-communal existence. It is tragic, and in the same measure as when Allah's name becomes divisive within an overwhelming Muslim nation.

But is that the only lesson of our bruised history? No. Indeed, the highest cost in South Asia has been extracted by those who are not prepared to play by the rules. The price of this is even more than that extracted by hate. Not playing by the rules is a cardinal sin, in fact the original sin. Many third-party historians, including Stanley Wolpert, know how much it contributed to the break-up of India. After all, it was only when Mohammad Ali Jinnah was faced with the fact that the other side would not play by the rules that he, who had earned the sobriquet of the ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity, was forced to demand an independent state for the Mussalmans of India.

At the core of a paralysing, if not pathological animosity, has been the near-abandonment of any objective rules that would define interstate relations. Such rules alone provide the framework for thriving relations. Hence the inevitability-of-animosity thesis is intellectually irresponsible, politically self-serving and historically incorrect. Intellectually we need to admit hard facts. India violated the rules for the accession of states; it used one argument to take over Hyderabad and Junagadh and then reversed the same to occupy Kashmir. Ironically, this was done at the time when Pakistan had appointed an Indian national, a Muslim jurist from Lucknow, as its first ambassador to India.

Pakistan opted for covert ways to right the wrong. India's political giant Pandit Nehru took the matter to the United Nations but then ignored the rules laid down by the UN to resolve the Kashmir dispute. Pakistan again opted for the

armed option culminating in war. Pakistan's East Pakistan crisis demonstrated India's neighbourly ethos; 'get 'em when the going is bad'. Pakistan withdrew to strengthen itself through its nuclear programme and opted for engagement in the Middle East. The decade of eighties saw many parallel tracks: a near-agreement on Siachin; agreement to not attack nuclear installations; covert help to the Khalistan movement to weaken India's Kashmir occupation; India's brinkmanship through Operation Brasstacks. Nineties saw the low-intensity conflict over the unsettled Kashmir dispute. The strong side overtly violated 'rules'; the weak covertly and deceptively conducted affairs. Both created an 'underworld' of death, destruction and dangerous divides. Behind the smiles and handshakes of smiling Heads of States were distrusting hearts and suspicious minds.

The nuclear tests provided the strategic equaliser. The balance of terror created the space for dialogue. The cloud of historical inter-state antagonism and distrust began to lift. At Lahore, guided by a vision for peaceful co-existence, the two prime ministers met in 1998. The first very small and tentative, yet critical, step towards agreeing to play by the rules was taken. Kargil was an unfortunate detour. Indians felt violated; Vajpayee personally felt humiliated. But Vajpayee, the statesmen, for numerous reasons, moved on. He offered Agra to the Kargil-man, General Pervez Musharraf. Musharraf was a serious negotiator at Agra. Together, Vajpayee and Musharraf, and their teams, again drew up rules for bilateral engagement. But Agra fell through and for all those reasons and more that have kept India and Pakistan hostage to the conflictual paradigm so far. We need to pick up the threads again.

Pakistan and India need to agree to play by the rules. This alone must be the thrust and objective of Pakistan-India diplomatic track. Yet, very often, when things fall apart between us, intellectual populism takes over and categories are creat-

ed: doves and hawks, parochial nationalists and romantic South Asians, pro-establishment and anti-state intellectuals clash over the 'blundering' two-nation theory and over India's refusal to accept Pakistan's existence. This is mere shadow boxing; worse, it is intellectual reductionism — grand utterances that blur specificity, facts and logic of causation. India indeed accepts Pakistan's existence. Likewise, the two nation theory finds the unfortunate advocate in a state that promotes communal not citizens' interest.

Ironing out conflicting historical narrative is another process, long-winded and ongoing. Often, nations live with their own narratives. Sometimes the narrative undergoes subtle or overt changes. This is when the message from the state changes and the leadership wants a different approach. This fact is illustrated by the positive impact on the press and people's perception of bilateral relations within hours of the April 23 Vajpayee-Jamali telephonic conversation.

The key thrust of all tracks of Pakistan-India engagement must be agreement between the two to interact in accordance with the rules of inter-state relations. The rule of law alone, not the law of the jungle, provides the framework for a genuinely cooperative Pakistan-India, indeed of South Asian, relations.

Politics in both countries has to be drained of the anti this or that cards. BJP has yet to decide if it will opt for Pakistan-bashing or peace with Pakistan. Our respective domestic challenges require us to focus on issues of human progress. This can only be achieved if the cross-border blame-game ceases. There are enough problems within for both sides to address.

Clearly, sustained dialogue, not sustained subversion, is the way forward. We need to abandon the religion card as an inter-state score-settler. Begin dialogue on all tracks, including Kashmir as it concerns all the parties.

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# Structuring the peace dialogue

Pak-E. Relation - India  
Daily Times  
14.8.03

OP-ED



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*There is a consensus to pursue peace among the citizens and their elected representatives in India and Pakistan. The change appears to be occurring among public representatives as well as professionals*

The South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA) has made a significant contribution to Track-II diplomacy by organising a conference earlier this week in Islamabad, on the Indo-Pakistan peace dialogue. On this occasion representatives of the major political parties, prominent journalists and experts from India and Pakistan conferred on why how to move forward.

In a remarkable demonstration of the popular will and in spite of differing premises, a consensus for peace was reached among public representatives from across the political spectrum in both countries: on the flamboyant religious rhetoric of Iqbal-e-Azam Fazlur Rehman of the right wing and the grave tones of Ishaq Durrani Shujaat's fully worded statement in the centre of the passionate iconoclasm of Abid Ali Minto on the left, the common denominator was peace.

Similarly on the Indian side Laloo Prasad Yadav used pre-modern imagery of the 'heart', while Swaraj Kaushal combined cold analytical logic with Amrita Patel's poetry. MJ Akbar in his postmodern style wove resonant human images into a rich tapestry of historical discourse. In the case of the Pakistanis, the common refrain from the Indian speakers was to replace the pain of the past with a healing process of peace.

A significant section of the Indian delegates argued that the prerequisite for the peace process is the creation of a 'con-

ducive' atmosphere. This is a euphemism for India's insistence that an end to 'cross-border terrorism' should precede the peace talks. My argument during the conference

was that placing pre-conditions on a dialogue is inconsistent with the invitation for a dialogue. Clearly India's most important concern is the issue of 'cross-border terrorism' while that of Pakistan is the unresolved Kashmir dispute. Essential to the idea of an India-Pakistan dialogue is that both sides would address each other's concerns. Thus, during the dialogue Pakistan should address India's core concern about cross-border terrorism, while India should address Pakistan's core concern, the Kashmir dispute. Clearly, it is illogical for one side to demand the resolution of what it sees as the most important issue of contention prior to the dialogue. For India to demand a resolution of the problem of 'cross-border terrorism' before a dialogue on other issues, is equivalent to Pakistan's earlier position that the Kashmir dispute should be resolved before a dialogue on economic cooperation.

If a 'conductive' atmosphere has to be created before a dialogue begins, then even if Pakistan does its best to control 'cross-border terrorism', the two sides could continue to argue indefinitely, whether adequate efforts have been made in this regard and what constitutes a 'conductive' atmosphere. In such a situation the dialogue would never begin.

Therefore for a dialogue to begin and end successfully it must have four features: (i) It must be unconditional, i.e., there should be no pre-conditions attached to it. (ii) If it is not to become a dialogue of the

deaf, both sides should be prepared to address each other's concerns. These concerns must be simultaneously addressed so that the sequencing of the discussion does not reflect the priorities of any one side.

(iii) The dialogue should be uninterrupted and as Mr Manishanker Iyer so wisely pointed out, it should be unintermittible. An uninterrupted dialogue is necessary for success to provide confidence to both sides that all issues will continue to be discussed until resolution, even though the time scale of resolution of various issues is necessarily quite different. Similarly an uninterrupted dialogue is necessary in view of the possibility that exogenous factors (such as terrorist acts to derail the dialogue by entities hostile to the dialogue but uncontrollable by either side) could end the dialogue before its successful completion. (iv) Both sides should be prepared to negotiate all issues and allow the dialogue to have its own dynamic without demanding preconceived outcomes i.e., both sides should seek to persuade and be prepared to get persuaded by the other on the basis of logical argument and a spirit of give and take. As Wittgenstein postulated, 'all philosophy is an act of persuasion'. Perhaps the same holds true for diplomacy.

The above four features of an India-Pakistan dialogue imply that the commitment to starting a dialogue should be as total as the commitment to see it through to fruition. The question that now arises is, why should a dialogue with these four fea-

tures be on the historical agenda for India and Pakistan? The answer may lie in the recognition of the following three propositions by State and society on both sides:

- (i) A balance of military power exists between Pakistan and India at both the conventional and nuclear levels, thereby making any military initiative by either side infeasible. This is illustrated by the fact that the Kargil initiative by Pakistan was counter productive just as was the Indian attempt at 'coercive diplomacy' through large-scale mobilisation of conventional forces in a war like posture.
- (ii) A state of no war, no peace with a simmering Kashmir dispute between nuclear armed neighbours creates two grave dangers that are unacceptable for both sides in particular and by the international community in general: (a) An unacceptably high risk of an accidental nuclear war resulting from a misconception about the adversary's intent at any moment during a continued state of military tension. (b) A low threshold of a conventional conflict escalating into a nuclear exchange.
- (iii) The imperative to escalate military expenditure in a state of continued confrontation between the two countries would make the conventional and military deterrence unstable in the long run. This is because the pace of up-gradation of weapon systems may differ between the two sides.

At the same time such an arms race would draw away such a large proportion of the economic resources of the two countries that their ability to overcome poverty and provide economic well-being to their people would be undermined. In such a situation where a significant proportion of the population does not have an economic stake in citizenship, the resulting social polarisation and violence could place an unacceptable stress on society and State. Thus, at the current moment in history, national security in the sense of security of both the Citizen and the State, requires peace between India and Pakistan.

The deliberations at the SAFMA conference earlier this week clearly showed that there is a consensus to pursue peace among the citizens and their elected representatives in India and Pakistan. The change in mindset that I have been advocating in these columns appears to be occurring among public representatives as well as professionals. The imperative of the economic and political forces impelling the two countries towards peace is also apparent. Now is the time to bring our respective civilisations to bear to remove the shadow of war and enhance life. This is the moment to lay the foundations of a lasting peace in the subcontinent and a better life for the next generation. Will the governments of both countries have the courage and wisdom to grasp this opportunity?

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