

## ***Pak-India Relations: 1985-88***

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The military rivalry between India and Pakistan that took birth with the partition of the sub-continent in 1947 has never abated. The two countries have already fought three major wars.<sup>1</sup> Fighting between their armies at the Siachen Glacier in the Karakorum Mountains near the Chinese border in 1984 was the worst after the 1971 war.<sup>2</sup> It broke out despite Pakistan's offer of a non-aggression pact to India in June 1982.<sup>3</sup> One of the main reasons for hostilities in Siachen was India's apprehension about Sino-Pakistan military collaboration and its location close to the Kashmir border.<sup>4</sup> Among other irritants was the Kashmir issue itself that had been the main cause of the three major wars between the two countries. Though Kashmir, during the period under review, was not a burning issue, Pakistan was never ready to recognize the Line of Control as the border between the two countries. Moreover, Pakistan and India were charging each other with fomenting trouble in Sindh and Indian Punjab, respectively.

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1. The wars were fought in 1948, 1965, and 1971.
2. Robert G. Wirsing, *Pakistan's Security under Zia, 1977-1988: Policy Imperatives of a Peripheral Asian State*, (Hampshire: Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991), 81. Siachen is in the Numre valley, which separates Aksai Chin in Ladakh from Baltistan — a strategic link-up between Pakistan and China. Northwest of Siachen Glacier lies Khunjerab pass through which the Karakoram Highway has been built. See Mujtaba Razvi, "South Asia and the SAARC", *Pakistan Horizon*, Karachi, Vol.XXXIX, No.1, 1986, 121.
3. Robert G. Wirsing.
4. Mujtaba Razvi.



Their rivalry led them to double their armed forces during the period from 1963 to 1984.<sup>5</sup> India's defence budget rose to Rs.7, 860 crores. Among other threatening factors for Pakistan was India's rising nuclear capability after its first nuclear test in 1974. Another point of disagreement was the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, as India was bound to take the Soviet side as a consequence of the Indo-Soviet treaty signed in August 1971.<sup>6</sup> Moreover eighty percent of India's arms imports were from the USSR. These are some of reasons why India supported the Kabul regime, a puppet of the USSR.

The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan since 1979 and the installation of the cat's-paw regime in Kabul posed a direct threat to the security of Pakistan. The demands of military strategy did not permit Pakistan to take on two hostile elements on two borders at the same time. Hence, Pakistan continuously tried to normalize its relations with India. President Zia-ul-Haq met with Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on 14 March 1984 during their visit to Moscow in connection with the funeral of the Soviet President Chernenko. They discussed the issues between the two countries, and agreed that Indian Foreign Secretary Ramesh Bhandari would soon visit Pakistan to discuss the normalization of relations between the two countries. After returning home Rajiv Gandhi and Zia-ul-Haq announced their decision to hold a dialogue in the near future.<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that the announcement regarding holding of talks came after Pakistan's decision to start the trial on 9 March 1985, of five Sikhs who were involved in the hijacking of an Indian airliner to Lahore on 29 September 1981. This was done after prolonged insistence from India. The trial of other nine hijackers who took an Indian Airbus to Lahore from Srinagar on 5 July 1984, also began on 2 April 1985 i.e. two days before the Indian Foreign Secretary's visit to Pakistan.<sup>8</sup>

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5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, 122.

7. *Pakistan Horizon*, Karachi, Vol.XXXVIII, No.2, 1985, 8-9.

8. *Ibid.*, 9.



The Indian Foreign Secretary was in Pakistan on 4-6 April 1985 and held formal talks with his Pakistani counterpart Niaz A. Naik. There was no fixed agenda for the talks. The talks were primarily aimed at paving the way for future contacts between the two countries. A joint statement at the end of the dialogue on 6 April 1985, referred to the resolve of both sides to develop harmonious relations on the basis of the 1973 Simla Agreement.<sup>9</sup> They also agreed to take various measures to strengthen cooperation in a number of fields. The Indian Foreign Secretary extended an invitation to his Pakistani counterpart to visit India to continue their discussions. Niaz A. Naik accepted the invitation. The date of the visit was to be finalized during the forthcoming meeting of the Foreign Secretaries of SAARC countries at Thimpu (Bhutan) in May 1985.<sup>10</sup>

In the meantime, Foreign Minister Sahabzada Yaqub Khan, optimistic about good neighbourly relations with India, visited New Delhi in connection with the Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Conference held in April 1985. The Conference was scheduled to begin on 19 April 1985 but the Foreign Minister reached New Delhi two days earlier i.e. on 17 April 1985 to hold talks with the Indian leaders, particularly with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.<sup>11</sup>

Pakistan's Foreign Minister had a meeting with the Indian Prime Minister on 18 April 1985. Before this meeting the Foreign Minister also held discussions with the Indian Minister of State Khursheed Alam Khan and the Chairman of the Policy Planning Committee of the Indian External Affairs Ministry, G. Parthasarthy. These meetings proved "very useful and highly constructive" and, as a result, both the countries agreed to convene the meeting of the Indo-Pakistan Joint Ministerial Commission in New Delhi from 27 to 29 June 1985.<sup>12</sup> A spokesman of the Pakistan delegation said:

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9. *Dawn*, Karachi, 7 April 1985.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *The Muslim*, Islamabad, 19 April 1985.

12. *Dawn*, Karachi, 19 April 1985. The Joint Commission had set up in March 1983, scheduled its meeting for August 1984. See *Pakistan Horizon*, Karachi, 11.



We are happy to have decided upon the date of the meeting. We feel this is a positive development flowing from discussions the Indian Foreign Secretary recently had in Islamabad, and basically from the useful discussions that President Zia-ul-Haq had with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in Moscow.<sup>13</sup>

Sahabzada Yaqub Khan, on return from India on 22 April 1985, told newsmen that, during his stay in New Delhi, he had conveyed messages of good wishes from the President and Prime Minister of Pakistan to Rajiv Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister. He also told the Indian Prime Minister "Both the Pakistani leaders view with satisfaction the positive developments that have recently taken place in Indo-Pak relations".<sup>14</sup> The Foreign Minister viewed the decision to hold meeting of the Pak-India Joint Ministerial Commission as "a positive and concrete step forward".<sup>15</sup> He informed the press that the four sub-commissions of the Commission would meet simultaneously to consider ways and means of expanding contacts and to review prospects of strengthening relations in a number of fields including trade, culture, travel, tourism and information.<sup>16</sup> The Foreign Minister's visit to India also cleared the way for Finance and Planning Minister Dr. Mahbubul Haq's visit to India on a standing invitation from Dr. Manmohan Singh, Governor of the Reserve Bank of India.<sup>17</sup>

The second meeting<sup>18</sup> of the Joint Ministerial Commission scheduled for 27-29 June was postponed till 2 July due to the Foreign Minister's preoccupation with the Geneva Proximity Talks on Afghanistan.<sup>19</sup> Talking to newsmen at Islamabad airport before flying to New Delhi, he said, "Pakistan would have a constructive and positive approach towards the talks with a view to building up mutual confidence and having tension-free, good neighbourly

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13. *Pakistan Horizon*.

14. *The Muslim*, Islamabad, 22 April 1985.

15. *Ibid*.

16. *Ibid*.

17. *Dawn*, Karachi, 19 April 1985.

18. The first meeting of the Commission was held in June 1983.

19. *Dawn*, Karachi, 23 June 1985.



relations with India".<sup>20</sup> He further said, "Cordial contacts between President Zia-ul-Haq and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi have fostered an excellent atmosphere".<sup>21</sup> In New Delhi, Sahabzada Yaqub Khan met Indian President Zail Singh and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on 2 July 1985. In his meeting with the Indian Prime Minister it was agreed that expansion of contacts and exchanges between the two countries at official as well as non-official level would lead to good neighbourly cooperation, mutual trust and confidence, and that would help in strengthening peace and stability in the region.<sup>22</sup>

The three day meeting of the Pak-India Joint Ministerial Commission ended on 4 July after reaching a number of important decisions aimed at promoting mutual cooperation and friendship between Pakistan and India. These decisions included the signing of an agreement on cooperation in agricultural research, finalization of the draft for a cultural agreement; formulation of a cultural exchange programme; relaxation of travel regulations including exemption of police reporting for businessmen and transit visitors; finalization of facilities for railway bookings between designated railway stations and the decision to facilitate exchange of visits by various groups and social organizations and holding of an exhibition of Urdu books in Pakistan by India later in 1985. Both the sides gave assurance to implement the decisions seriously.<sup>23</sup> Pakistan and India could sign no agreement on trade.<sup>24</sup> It was, however, decided that Pakistan's Finance Minister would visit India in the last quarter of 1985 to discuss bilateral economic cooperation.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, the proposed no-war pact and the treaty of friendship were not discussed in the meetings, which were basically aimed at generating mutual confidence and goodwill. The

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20. *The Muslim*, Islamabad, 2 July 1985.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, 3 July 1985.

23. *Ibid.*, 5 July 1985.

24. *Pakistan Horizon*, 8.

25. *The Muslim*, Islamabad, 5 July 1985.



proposals were, however, left to be discussed in the next Foreign Secretary level meeting.<sup>26</sup>

The meeting of the Foreign Secretaries was held in New Delhi on 30-31 July 1985 without significant results. According to the joint statement issued after the meeting "Both sides sought further clarifications and agreed to continue efforts aimed at the conclusion of a comprehensive treaty between the two countries".<sup>27</sup>

In such a condition of Indo-Pakistan relations, Zia-ul-Haq undertook a tour of India's three smaller neighbours, i.e. the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in December 1985. On his way back home he made a brief stop-over in New Delhi on 17 December 1985 and that provided him a chance to have his sixth meeting with Rajiv Gandhi in just over a year.<sup>28</sup> At the end of the talks, which spread over two sessions, the two leaders, in a joint press conference, declared that they had "agreed not to attack each other's nuclear installations".<sup>29</sup> Moreover, they announced their agreement in principle on other issues like economic cooperation, merger of Pakistan's no-war pact and India's peace and friendship treaty proposals into a single draft. They also agreed on exchange of visits between the two countries, including Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Pakistan in the first half of 1986.<sup>30</sup>

As a consequence of this New Delhi meeting, the Defence Secretaries of Pakistan and India discussed the Siachen Glacier issue inconclusively in their meeting held in Islamabad on 11-12 January 1986. They, however, agreed to meet again in March or April 1986 in New Delhi.<sup>31</sup> It is interesting to note that the Finance Ministers' meeting held on 8-10 January 1986 in Islamabad was encouraging in promoting bilateral economic relations between Pakistan and India. At the end of the talks on 10 January, Pakistan

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26. *Pakistan Horizon*, 9.

27. *Dawn*, Karachi, 2 August 1985.

28. *Pakistan Horizon*, 9-10.

29. *Ibid.*, 10.

30. *Ibid.*, 9-10.

31. *The Muslim*, Islamabad, 13 January 1986.



Finance Minister Dr. Mahbubul Haq and Indian Finance Minister Vishvanath Partap Singh declared that "Economic relations between the two countries have entered a new and promising phase".<sup>32</sup> Among the major decisions taken in the meeting was Islamabad's readiness to allow the Pakistani private sector to import forty-two items from India on a competitive basis.<sup>33</sup>

In the same month (January 1986), the third high level contact between Pakistan and India was the Foreign Secretaries' meeting held in Islamabad on 17-19 January 1986. But no significant progress on the question of the proposed no war/friendship treaty took place. It failed because Pakistan refused to commit that it would not give any base to any foreign power on its soil.

It seemed that India was no more in a mood to facilitate the normalization of relations with Pakistan. The steps taken by India were sufficient to support this notion. For instance, on 27 February 1986 the Indian External Affairs Minister talked of some differences on Zia-Rajiv agreement regarding non-attack on each-other's nuclear installations. Before this on 25 February 1986, he supported the postponement of Rajiv Gandhi's committed visit to Pakistan due to Pakistan's so-called "unhealthy interest in the minority community in India".<sup>34</sup>

Pakistan, on the other hand, continued its efforts to create a tension-free atmosphere on its eastern border, as it was facing continuous threat from Afghanistan due to the Soviet military presence there. Foreign Minister Sahabzada Yaqub Khan went on a five-day visit to New Delhi in mid-April 1986 and held talks with his Indian counterpart B.R. Bhagat. Both the countries agreed to continue discussions on the Siachen issue. Sahabzada Yaqub Khan was of the view that "there was desire on the part of the Indian leadership to resume the normalization process with Pakistan".<sup>35</sup>

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32. *Pakistan Horizon*, 10.

33. Previously private sector was not allowed to import these items. Only the Trading Corporation of Pakistan could import them and the procedural barriers had kept the bilateral trade down to Rs.50 million. See *Ibid.*, 11.

34. *Ibid.*, 12.

35. *Ibid.*, 8.



But subsequent developments did not prove that the Indian government was in favour of normalization. Rajiv Gandhi cancelled his promised visit to Pakistan, while other scheduled bilateral talks were also delayed. In the meantime India had deployed as many as 250,000 troops on its northern and western borders causing a serious security threat to Pakistan.<sup>36</sup> In such a tense atmosphere, Prime Minister Junejo visited India to attend the SAARC summit in Bangalore in mid-November 1986. After the summit he met privately with Rajiv Gandhi. The talks were termed as "pleasant and useful" by Junejo.<sup>37</sup> Although the Indian Prime Minister assured him that Indian troops deployment was a part of their routine exercises, the situation remained tense. As a result, in January 1987 both India and Pakistan moved their forces in forward positions along the Punjab border. However, the Foreign Secretaries of the two countries in their meeting in New Delhi on 4 February agreed to sector-by-sector de-escalation of the crisis caused by the deployment of 350,000 Indian and 100,000 Pakistani soldiers.<sup>38</sup> The withdrawal of Indian troops from the Rajasthan Sector was also agreed upon as a result of the Foreign Secretary level talks between the two countries held from 12 February to 2 March 1987 in Islamabad.<sup>39</sup>

Zia-ul-Haq's 'Cricket Diplomacy'<sup>40</sup> played an important role in de-escalation of the tension between India and Pakistan. He reached New Delhi on 21 February 1987 and was formally received at the airport by Indian President Zail Singh and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. During his two days' stay, Zia-ul-Haq watched the cricket match at Jaipur and also held fruitful discussions with the Indian President and Premier. About his talks with the latter he informed newsmen that "the meeting was extremely useful and that Rajiv Gandhi had assured him that Exercise Brasstacks, which had caused certain misgivings, would

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36. *Ibid.*, 10.

37. *Ibid.*, 11.

38. *Ibid.*, 137.

39. *Ibid.*, 139.

40. The term "Cricket Diplomacy" was used first by the international press. Shabbir ibn Adil, *General Zia Ke Das Saal*, (Karachi: Shibal Publishers, 1988), 224-25.



be unfolded to foreign observers, heads of missions and relevant attaches shortly after it was concluded".<sup>41</sup> Commenting on Zia-ul-Haq's Cricket Diplomacy, the Times of India, a premier daily, wrote in an editorial on 25 February that President Zia had every right to be satisfied as he had "scored a brilliant propaganda coup and placed New Delhi on the defensive".<sup>42</sup> To have a reasonable picture of the whole exercise and the tension on the Indo-Pak border, Robert G. Wirsing's comments seem to be significant:

Distrust worked in both directions, of course. Conduct by the Indian army in the winter of 1986-87 of Operation Brasstacks, for example, inevitably raised questions in Pakistan about India's real ambitions in the region. Held in the border state of Rajasthan in areas adjacent to Pakistan's politically troubled Sind province, and involving as much as half the manpower of the Indian army Brasstacks was the largest military exercise in India's history. To many observers, it seemed clearly intended to intimidate Pakistan, perhaps to remind Islamabad of India's regional primacy, to persuade Pakistan to terminate alleged support for Sikh terrorists, or simply to provide a foreign distraction for domestic political purposes. Indeed, it was not an exercise at all, according to one well-known Indian defence analyst, but a calculated attempt to provoke Pakistan into war with India.<sup>43</sup>

This danger of a war was, however, foiled as a result of Pakistan's prompt and effective steps aimed at de-escalation of rising tension between the two countries.<sup>44</sup>

The cold war between the two countries continued throughout the period under study. India carried on its widespread campaign against Pakistan's nuclear programme, even during the early part of the year 1985, when the two countries were engaged in hectic bilateral talks aimed at normalization of relations. Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, in an interview to *The Financial Times* on 4 April 1985, complained that Pakistan was making a nuclear bomb, while the Americans were "looking the other way".<sup>45</sup> He

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41. *Ibid.*, 138.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Robert G. Wirsing, 99-100.

44. Famous Indian journalist Khushwant Sing termed cricket diplomacy as a success but Rajiv Gandhi's response as a failure. See Shabbir ibn Adil, 225.

45. *Pakistan Horizon*, 11.



repeated the complaint in his interview to British Television that was telecast on 10 April 1985; three days after the conclusion of the Indian Foreign Secretary's effective visit to Pakistan. Speaking in the Lok Sabha the same day, Rajiv Gandhi further said "the Americans were not taking enough action to curb the nuclear programme of Pakistan..."<sup>46</sup> Pak-US closer military and economic relations, Pakistan's nuclear programme, its alleged involvement in Indian Punjab and in Siachen Glacier remained the core of the propaganda campaign of Indian leaders. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's statements during his US visit in June 1985, on the aforementioned issues "created an atmosphere non-conducive to betterment of relations between the two countries".<sup>47</sup> But, nevertheless, Pakistan was successful in avoiding a war with India, which would have opened another battle front for it after Afghanistan.

### **The Nuclear Programme**

India's nuclear test in 1974 compelled Pakistan to immediately undertake a nuclear programme.

In 1974, in an obvious response to India's nuclear test, Pakistan pressed for international treaty guarantees against the threat to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states as well as for United Nations endorsement of the concept of a South Asian nuclear weapon-free zone (NWFZ). Until Zia came to power in 1977, however, arms control as a major instrument of security policy was conspicuous mainly in its absence.<sup>48</sup>

In New Delhi, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Agha Shahi, during his meeting with his Indian counterpart in July 1981, proposed a mutually acceptable ratio of armed forces and armaments through bilateral talks.

That set in motion what Agha Shahi called Pakistan's peace offensive, a lengthy string of proposals made to India over the next several years for agreement on bilateral and multilateral arms-control measures regarding both conventional and nuclear weapons.<sup>49</sup>

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46. *Ibid.*

47. For details see *Ibid.*, 3:9.

48. Robert G. Wirsing, 8.

49. *Ibid.*



The following proposals were put forward to India by the year 1987:

- \* Simultaneous mutual ratification of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968, calling for renunciation of nuclear weapons and submission to an international nuclear safeguards regime;
- \* Simultaneous mutual acceptance of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards on all nuclear facilities;
- \* Establishment by treaty of a South Asian Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone (NWFZ);
- \* A no-war pact;
- \* Comprehensive mutual inspection of each other's nuclear facilities;
- \* A joint declaration renouncing the acquisition or manufacture of nuclear weapons; and
- \* A South Asian Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.<sup>50</sup>

India did not accept any of these proposals. Both the countries, however, agreed on negotiating a formal agreement<sup>51</sup> on not to attack each other's nuclear installations. Nothing came of this proposal, however, until Zia's death.<sup>52</sup>

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50. *Ibid.*, 99.

51. It was proposed by Rajiv Gandhi during his meeting with Zia-ul Haq in New Delhi on 17 December 1985. See *Ibid.*, 8.

52. *Ibid.*