

## Indo—Pak Bridges of Peace

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Ever since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, India and Pakistan have always been at loggerheads. They fought three open full-scale wars in the years 1948, 1965 and 1971. Later, only a few years ago, there was yet another major fight at Cargill when Pakistan intruders pushed into the India Territory in Kashmir in a big way. In all these wars, the Pak forces had to lick the dust. IN spite of all this, Pakistan continues to harbor ill will against India and has been regularly sending armed and trained infiltrators into India from across the border. Pakistan has been doing all this because it has an eye on Kashmir and it claims and propagates that the Indian occupation of Kashmir is illegal. The accession of Kashmir to India is a fact of history that cannot be denied but it continues to be a bone of contention between the two countries.

When the National Democratic Alliance was in power in New Delhi, the then Prime Minister of India, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee initiated peace talks with Pakistan to break the impasses. The Indian cricket team was sent to Pakistan to play a series of goodwill matches. This was followed by Prime Minister's visit to Pakistan in an attempt to clear the dust of misunderstanding between the two countries.

The UPA, headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, kept up the momentum of coming closer to the neighbor through different channels. General Musharraf, the President of Pakistan, also reciprocated and said that he had a keen desire to sort out Indo-Pak problems through bilateral meetings. Cricket once again provided an opportunity to the people on both sides of the border to forget their animosity and meet like friends on the playing field. In a cricket series organized in India, thousands of Pakistanis came to India and enjoyed the affectionate hospitality of several hundred India families.

The President of Pakistan, General Musharraf, also came to India to witness one of these matches. Wherever he went, he was received with open arms. Those who came to India said," Cricket is only an excuse. It is a great opportunity to meet long-parted friends and promote the cause of peace between the two countries."

Even though the major problem of Kashmir continues to defy and solution, yet the two sides appear to be quite sincere in their efforts to establish permanent peace between the neighbours. They have already taken up several confidence-building measures to narrow down the gulf between the two nations.

On April 7, 2005, after a long wait of 58 years, the two sides agreed to start a bus service between Srinagar (Indian Kashmir) and Muzzafarbad (Pak – occupied Kashmir). They also agreed to start a similar bus service between India and Pakistan through Waghah Border in Punjab. Pakistan has also expressed its willingness to work for peace in the Siachen glacier area and the Sir Creek region. Military officers of both sides are already in the process of holding talks to sort out such border problems. The bridges of peace are thus being built between the two countries but a lot still remains to be done.

Winds of change are blowing slowly but surely. It is a long road to peace. There are some prophets of doom who believe that peace between the India and Pakistan is only a utopian dream. But one should not be pessimistic. Hope must sustain life. The people of India and Pakistan are not enemies. The day is not far when the existing mistrust and animosity would become a thing of the past. Let us pray that God may kind and peace may prevail!