Chandrawat & Partners



BILATERAL RELATIONS

INDIA - PAKISTAN

INTRODUCTION

India–Pakistan relations refer to the bilateral ties between the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The two countries have a complex and largely hostile relationship rooted in a multitude of historical and political events, most notably the partition of British India in August 1947; the India–Pakistan border remains one of the most militarised international boundaries in the world. Northern India and most of modern-day Pakistan overlap with each other in terms of their common Indo-Aryan demographic, natively speaking a variety of Indo-Aryan languages (mainly Punjabi, Sindhi, Hindi, and Urdu).

Two years after World War II, the United Kingdom formally dissolved British India, dividing it into two new sovereign nations: the Dominion of India and the Dominion of Pakistan. The partitioning of the former British colony resulted in the displacement of up to 15 million people, with the death toll estimated between several hundred thousand and one million people as Hindus and Muslims migrated in opposite directions across the Radcliffe Line. In 1950, India emerged as a secular republic with a Hindu-majority population and a large Muslim minority. Shortly afterwards, in 1956, Pakistan emerged as an Islamic republic with a Muslim-majority population and a large Hindu minority, most of whom resided in East Pakistan prior to its secession as the independent country of Bangladesh following the 1971 Liberation War.

While both countries established full diplomatic ties shortly after their formal independence, their relationship was quickly overshadowed by the mutual effects of partition and conflicting territorial claims over various princely states, most significantly Jammu and Kashmir. Since 1947, India and Pakistan have fought three major wars, one undeclared war, and a four-day aerial and missile conflict in May 2025, alongside numerous armed skirmishes and military standoffs; the Kashmir dispute has served as the catalyst for every confrontation between the two states, with the exception of the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, which occurred alongside the Bangladesh Liberation War.

There have been numerous attempts to improve the relationship, notably the Shimla, Agra, and Lahore summits, alongside various peace initiatives. Despite those efforts, relations deteriorated sharply following repeated acts of cross-border terrorism. Diplomatic ties and trade were severely downgraded in 2019 after the Pulwama attack and India's revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status. Following the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack and the ensuing May 2025 hostilities, India placed the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance and closed land borders, while Pakistan closed its airspace to Indian aircraft. Entering 2027, formal bilateral diplomacy and trade remain frozen, with engagement largely restricted to essential military hotlines, annual prisoner and nuclear installation exchanges, and multilateral forums.

TALKS AND OTHER CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES

After the 1971 war, Pakistan and India made slow progress towards the normalisation of relations. In July 1972, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto met in the Indian hill station of Shimla. They signed the Shimla Agreement, by which India would return all Pakistani personnel (over 90,000) and captured territory in the west, and the two countries would "settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations." Diplomatic and trade relations were also re-established in 1976.

1990s

In 1997, high-level Indo-Pakistan talks resumed after a three-year pause. The Prime Ministers of Pakistan and India met twice and the foreign secretaries conducted three rounds of talks. In June 1997, the foreign secretaries identified eight "outstanding issues" around which continuing talks would be focused. The conflict over the status of Kashmir, (referred by India as Jammu and Kashmir), an issue since Independence, remains the major stumbling block in their dialogue. India maintains that the entire former princely state is an integral part of the Indian union, while Pakistan insists that UN resolutions calling for self-determination of the people of the state/province must be taken into account. It however refuses to abide by the previous part of the resolution, which calls for it to vacate all territories occupied.

In September 1997, the talks broke down over the structure of how to deal with the issues of Kashmir, and peace and security. Pakistan advocated that the issues be treated by separate working groups. India responded that the two issues be taken up along with six others on a simultaneous basis.

Attempts to restart dialogue between the two nations were given a major boost by the February 1999 meeting of both Prime Ministers in Lahore and their signing of three agreements.

A subsequent military coup in Pakistan that overturned the democratically elected Nawaz Sharif government in October of the same year also proved a setback to relations.

2000s

In 2001, a summit was called in Agra; Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf turned up to meet Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. The talks fell through.

On 20 June 2004, with a new government in place in India, both countries agreed to extend a nuclear testing ban and to set up a hotline between their foreign secretaries aimed at preventing misunderstandings that might lead to a nuclear war.

After Dr. Manmohan Singh become prime minister of India in May 2004, the Punjab provincial Government declared it would develop Gah, his place of birth, as a model village in his honour and name a school after him. There is also a village in India named Pakistan, despite occasional pressure over the years to change its name the villagers have resisted.

Violent activities in the region declined in 2004. There are two main reasons for this: warming of relations between New Delhi and Islamabad which consequently lead to a ceasefire between the two countries in 2003 and the fencing of the Line of Control being carried out by the Indian Army. Moreover, coming under intense international pressure, Islamabad was compelled to take action against the militants' training camps on its territory. In 2004, the two countries also agreed upon decreasing the number of troops present in the region.
Under pressure, Kashmiri militant organisations made an offer for talks and negotiations with New Delhi, which India welcomed.

India's Border Security Force blamed the Pakistani military for providing cover-fire for the terrorists whenever they infiltrated into Indian Territory from Pakistan. Pakistan in turn has also blamed India for providing support to terrorist organisations operating in Pakistan such as the BLA.

In 2005, Pakistan's information minister, Sheikh Rashid, was alleged to have run a terrorist training camp in 1990 in N.W. Frontier, Pakistan. The Pakistani government dismissed the charges against its minister as an attempt to hamper the ongoing peace process between the two neighbours.

Both India and Pakistan have launched several mutual confidence-building measures (CBMs) to ease tensions between the two. These include more high-level talks, easing visa restrictions, and restarting of cricket matches between the two. The new bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad has also helped bring the two sides closer. Pakistan and India have also decided to co-operate on economic fronts.

Some improvements in the relations are seen with the re-opening of a series of transportation networks near the India–Pakistan border, with the most important being bus routes and railway lines.

A major clash between Indian security forces and militants occurred when a group of insurgents tried to infiltrate into Kashmir from Pakistan in July 2005. The same month also saw a Kashmiri militant attack on Ayodhya and Srinagar. However, these developments had little impact on the peace process.

An Indian man held in Pakistani prisons since 1975 as an accused spy walked across the border to freedom 3 March 2008, an unconditional release that Pakistan said was done to improve relations between the two countries.

In 2006, a "Friends Without Borders" scheme began with the help of two British tourists. The idea was that Indian and Pakistani children would make pen pals and write friendly letters to each other. The idea was so successful in both countries that the organisation found it "impossible to keep up". The World's Largest Love Letter was recently sent from India to Pakistan.

2010s

In December 2010, several Pakistani newspapers published stories about India's leadership and relationship with militants in Pakistan that the papers claimed were found in the United States diplomatic cables leak. A British newspaper, The Guardian, which had the Wikileaks cables in its possession reviewed the cables and concluded that the Pakistani claims were "not accurate" and that "WikiLeaks [was] being exploited for propaganda purposes."

On 10 February 2011, India agreed to resume talks with Pakistan which were suspended after 26/11 Mumbai Attacks. India had put on hold all the diplomatic relations saying it will only continue if Pakistan will act against the accused of Mumbai attacks.

On 13 April 2012, following a thaw in relations whereby India gained MFN status in the country, India announced the removal of restrictions on FDI investment from Pakistan to India.

The Foreign Minister of Pakistan on 11 July 2012, stated in Phnom Penh that her country is willing to resolve some of the disputes like, Sir Creek and Siachen on the basis of agreements reached in past.

On 7 September 2012, Indian External Affairs Minister would pay 3-day visit to Pakistan to review the progress of bilateral dialogue with his Pakistani counterpart.

In August 2019, following the approval of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill in the Indian Parliament, which revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, further tension was brought between the two countries, with Pakistan downgrading their diplomatic ties, closing its airspace, and suspending bilateral trade with India.

2020s

On 25 February 2021, India and Pakistan issued a joint statement indicating that both sides agreed to stop firing at each other at the disputed Line of Control border in Kashmir.

Response to natural calamities

2001 Gujarat earthquake in India

In response to the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, Pakistani President Pervez Mushrraf sent a plane load of relief supplies from Islamabad to Ahmedabad. They carried 200 tents and more than 2,000 blankets. Furthermore, the President called Indian PM to express his 'sympathy' over the loss from the earthquake.

2005 earthquake in Pakistan

India offered aid to Pakistan in response to the 2005 Kashmir earthquake on 8 October. Indian and Pakistani High Commissioners consulted with one another regarding cooperation in relief work. India sent 25 tonnes of relief material to Pakistan including food, blankets and medicine. Large Indian companies such as Infosys offered aid up to $226,000. On 12 October, an Ilyushin-76 cargo plane ferried across seven truckloads (about 82 tons) of army medicines, 15,000 blankets and 50 tents and returned to New Delhi. A senior air force official also stated that they had been asked by the Indian government to be ready to fly out another similar consignment.

On 14 October, India dispatched the second consignment of relief material to Pakistan, by train through the Wagah Border. The consignment included 5,000 blankets, 370 tents, 5 tons of plastic sheets and 12 tons of medicine. A third consignment of medicine and relief material was also sent shortly afterwards by train. India also pledged $25 million as aid to Pakistan. India opened the first of three points at Chakan Da Bagh, in Poonch, on the Line of Control between India and Pakistan for earthquake relief work.

2022 Pakistan floods

Amid the 2022 Pakistan floods, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his "heartfelt condolences to families of the victims". As of 30 August, it has been reported that the government of India is considering sending relief aid to Pakistan.

SOCIAL RELATIONS

CULTURAL LINKS

India and Pakistan, particularly Northern India and Eastern Pakistan, share similar cultures, cuisines, and languages due to a common Indo-Aryan heritage spanning much of the northern subcontinent, underpinning their historical ties. Historically, Pakistani singers, musicians, and entertainers enjoyed widespread popularity in India, with many achieving fame in Bollywood, while Indian cinema and music remained hugely popular in Pakistan. However, following bilateral crises in 2016, 2019, and May 2025, formal cultural exchanges, artist visas, and cinema releases were suspended, leaving shared media consumption largely restricted to digital platforms. Being located in the northernmost region of South Asia, Pakistan's culture remains closely aligned with North India, especially the northwest.

The Punjab region was split into Pakistani Punjab and Indian Punjab following partition in 1947. Punjabi people remain the largest ethnic group in Pakistan and a major demographic in northern India. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was born in Nankana Sahib in present-day Pakistani Punjab. Thousands of Indian Sikh pilgrims visit sacred shrines there and via the Kartarpur Corridor—opened in 2019—under bilateral pilgrimage protocols, though access has faced periodic suspensions during diplomatic freezes. The Sindhi people are native to Pakistan's Sindh province; many Hindu Sindhis migrated to India in 1947, creating a sizeable Indian community. Similarly, millions of Muslims who migrated from India to Pakistan became known as Muhajirs; settled predominantly in Karachi, many still maintain family links across the border.

GEOGRAPHIC LINKS

The India–Pakistan border is the official international boundary demarcating the Indian states of Punjab, Rajasthan, and Gujarat from the Pakistani provinces of Punjab and Sindh, alongside the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir. The Attari–Wagah border on the historic Grand Trunk Road, connecting Lahore with Amritsar, is the primary overland crossing between the two nations. Historically, the evening Attari–Wagah ceremony featured synchronized flag-lowering drills, theatrical marches, and handshakes between border guards; however, following the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack and May 2025 hostilities, India closed the land crossing to routine transit and scaled back ceremonial gestures, including suspending the customary handshake.

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LINGUISTIC TIES

Hindustani is the lingua franca of North India and Pakistan, as well as the official language of both countries, under the standard registers Hindi and Urdu, respectively. Standard Urdu is mutually intelligible with standard Hindi. Hindustani is also widely understood and used as a lingua franca amongst South Asians including Sri Lankans, Nepalis and Bangladeshis, and is the language of Bollywood, which is enjoyed throughout much of the subcontinent.

Apart from Hindustani, India and Pakistan also share a distribution of the Punjabi language (written in the Gurmukhi script in Indian Punjab, and the Shahmukhi script in Pakistani Punjab), Kashmiri language and Sindhi language, mainly due to population exchange. These languages belong to a common Indo-Aryan family that are spoken in countries across the subcontinent.



MATRIMONIAL TIES

Some Indian and Pakistani people marry across the border at instances. Many Indians and Pakistanis in the diaspora, especially in the United States, intermarry, as there are large cultural similarities between the two countries respectively.

In April 2010 a high-profile Pakistani cricketer, Shoaib Malik married the Indian tennis star Sania Mirza. The wedding received much media attention and was said to transfix both India and Pakistan.



SPORTING TIES

Cricket and hockey matches between the two (as well as other sports to a lesser degree such as those of the SAARC games) have often been political in nature. During the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan General Zia-ul Haq travelled to India for a bout of "cricket diplomacy" to keep India from supporting the Soviets by opening another front. Pervez Musharaff also tried to do the same more than a decade later but to no avail.

From 2012, India stopped playing bilateral cricket series against Pakistan. Now it only plays against them in Asian Cricket Council, ICC events such as ODI, T20 world cups etc. In 2017 then Sport minister of India, Vijay Goel said, that Pakistan have to stop sponsoring terrorists, terrorism and sports cannot happen together. Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) also opposed playing with them, citing the reason that, we can not play without the permission of our government. BCCI also do not allow their players to play in IPL.

In tennis, Rohan Bopanna of India and Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi of Pakistan have formed a successful duo and have been dubbed as the "Indo-Pak Express."



DIASPORIC RELATIONS

The large size of the Indian and Pakistani diasporas worldwide has fostered significant diasporic ties. British Indians and British Pakistanis, the largest and second-largest ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom respectively, generally maintain cordial relations, though periodic geopolitical crises in South Asia—such as those in 2019, 2022, and 2025—have occasionally sparked localized community tensions. Across many Western cities, a "Little India" and a "Little Pakistan" often co-exist within broader South Asian enclaves. In British cities such as Birmingham, Blackburn, and Manchester, both communities live side by side under the broader census category of British Asian, supported by initiatives like the Pakistan & India Friendship Forum. In the United States, Indians and Pakistanis fall under the South Asian American category, sharing linguistic, culinary, and cultural ties, with intermarriage and joint community organizations increasingly common among younger generations.

Prominent diaspora figures have also bridged divides. Former British Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Sajjad Karim, who is of Pakistani origin, served in the European Parliament Friends of India Group and actively championed EU–India trade ties. Karim narrowly escaped the November 2008 Mumbai terror attacks at the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel. Following the conviction of lone surviving attacker Ajmal Kasab, Karim stated that while he supported the guilty verdict after a fair trial, he opposed the death penalty on principle and favored a whole-life sentence; Kasab was subsequently executed by India in November 2012.



TRADE LINKS

The size of India-Pakistan trade is very small relative to the size of their economies and the fact that they share a contiguous border. Trade across direct routes has been curtailed formally, so the bulk of India-Pakistan trade is routed through Dubai.





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