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## THE FIRST VAJPAYEE GOVERNMENT: GOLDEN YEARS OF NON-MILITARY CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN

Shivalingayya Gothe<sup>1</sup> and Dr.Prakash kattimani<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Dept. of political Science, Rani Channamma university, Belagavi.

<sup>2</sup>Asst. Professor, Dept. of political Science, Rani Channamma university, Belagavi.

### ABSTRACT

*Since the very outset of their formation, politics has always been crucial and conflict ridden between India and Pakistan. In the long seven decades of political history of India and Pakistan, there have been countless diplomatic strategies including both military and non-military confidence building measures to re-install faith and peace between India and Pakistan. Focusing on the multifarious non-military confidence building measures introduced by the first A.B Vajpayee Central Ministry of India, this paper goes on to argue that the tenure of A.B Vajpayee ministry (1998-2004) was the golden years that witnessed the full-fledged activity of the diplomatic mechanism between India and Pakistan. The paper differentiates A.B Vajpayee ministry from the other Indian governments in its enthusiasm in reinstating peace between India and Pakistan through the non-military confidence building measures such as summits, sports diplomacy, and ceasefire agreements and so on. This paper exclusively centring on the A.B Vajpayee ministry (1998-2004) also examines the relevance of non-military confidence building measures as opposed to the military confidence building measures in improving bilateral relations between the neighbour countries.*



**KEY WORD:** A.B Vajpayee, diplomacy, India, Non-military Confidence Building Measures, Pakistan.

### INTRODUCTION

Political rivalries between modern nation states are quite a universal phenomenon especially between the countries those have a shared common past with similar, yet, painful histories of partition or new state formation. The relationship between India and Pakistan, an excellent example of the said case, speaks of seven decade long saga of hostility, rivalry and conflicts than about friendship and cooperation. Apparently, the conflicts had started since the inception of the two independent countries; both formed in 1947 after the independence from British India and the subsequent partition. During the seven decades of the history of India and Pakistan, there were three major wars and unending disputes over the territory of Kashmir leading to strong contentious political climate between India and Pakistan. The seven-decade long legacy of the cross-border disputes between India and Pakistan set on fire immediately after the partition of erstwhile British India has witnessed three major wars and numerous battles, proxy wars, infiltration issues and territorial disputes. Looking back after long seventy years, the India-Pakistan relations, and hence the South Asian political scenario, was most often intermittently marred by cross-border conflicts and border battles. From the very outset, the Kashmir issue has been the major irritant that spoils all the peace efforts between India and Pakistan. Even though rivalry and conflicts are very common, and perhaps inevitable between both states, this paper highlights some of the significant aspects of the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), especially the NonMilitary Confidence Building Measures including bilateral talks, cultural

and academic exchanges, trades, sports, and transportations and so on that are very crucial in establishing the peace between India and Pakistan. In this specific context, this paper closely examines the attempts made by the Vajpayee-led first NDA government (1999-2004) in bringing about strategic diplomatic peace between India and Pakistan. The A.B Vajpayee government stands out unique among other Indian governments in handling the international relationship with Pakistan..

### **CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES (CBMS)**

Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), an important component in the international peace process, witnessed its systematic development as a diplomatic measure in the international relations in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. “At its 33rd session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 33/91 B of 16 December 1978 under the item entitled “General and complete disarmament”, in which it recommended consideration of confidence building measures and invited all States to inform the Secretary General of their views and experience on confidence building measures”.<sup>1</sup> Earlier, the 10th session had concluded the final objective of CBMs, which was to strengthen international peace and stability. Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) are essentially designed to increase mutual understanding by reducing suspicions. “They are separable into military and non-military Confidence Building Measures and into those having a unilateral, bilateral or international content. Military Confidence Building Measures are also classifiable into transparency, communications and constraint measures to perform the related functions of information, notification, observation and stabilization.

### **INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS AND INDIAN GOVERNMENTS OVER DECADES**

Beginning with the first Central Ministry of India headed by Jawaharlal Nehru that assumed office on 15 August 1947, there have been innumerable diplomatic measures and peace talks initiated by India attempting for a peaceful settlement of the post-partition differences with Pakistan. The Indo-Pakistan War of 1947-1948, popularly known as the First Kashmir War, over the decision of the princely state of Kashmir and Jammu to join Indian nation was the first notable event that marked the disrupted peace at the borders. Thereafter, there had been two major wars between India and Pakistan at the borders, one in 1965 and another in 1971. In 1965, the second India-Pakistan war broke out following continuous ceasefire violations at the borders, when India, under the Prime Minister ship of Lal Bahadur Shastri, was armed up to defend and protect Ran of Kutch from the Pakistan attempt to conquer the same. In 1971, when the Pakistan attacked India at the Kashmir borders opposing the latter’s pro-East Pakistan standpoints, the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi opened up a full-fledged war against Pakistan resulting in declaring Bangladesh, the erstwhile East-Pakistan an independent new nation. Quite a notable aspect of the above historical events is that the Indian National Congress led Indian governments had always held an iron hand policy in the matter of disputes and conflicts with Pakistan. After the defeat and loss of territory in the India-Pakistan War of 1971 Pakistan gave up the efforts of direct conflicts and wars with India and resorted to infiltrations, border disputes and constant ceasefire violations in the India- Pakistan border region in order to generate a general opinion that Kashmir is a constant conflict-ridden region.

### **A.B VAJPAYEE MINISTRY AND NON-MILITARY CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES**

The year 1998 was crucial for both the countries for, in this year both emerged as a nuclear power after their successful nuclear experiments. Moreover, the entry of these prominent countries into the nuclear club increased the existing tension at the respective national borders and inevitably it took the issues to more problematic dimensions from decades-long border issues to new threats. The peace and security of the Indian subcontinent is highly depended on how India and Pakistan would deal with their strained relationship. Since the nuclear developments in India and Pakistan, the South Asian region had become a scenario of potential nuclear threat. The nuclearisation added further worries to the hostility between India and Pakistan. These developments carved the South Asian region to be the most volatile

subcontinent and, turned the relation between India and Pakistan more critical. Hence, it is important to take a look at the impact of the nuclear tests on the process of dialogue between the two states. “In a climate of newly created tensions and suspicions, in the wake of nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, both countries felt the need to talk to each other at sufficiently high levels to find a meeting ground and to instil mutual confidence”.<sup>3</sup> This was the political context in which the first NDA government was sworn in India under the leadership of Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee. Though he was responsible for the nuclear experiment the previous year, from 1999 onwards the government had implemented a series of peace initiatives or the non-military Confidence Building Measure.

### DELHI-LAHORE BUS DIPLOMACY

The Delhi Lahore bus service, a passenger bus service between India and Pakistan, connecting the Indian capital city of Delhi and Pakistan city of Lahore was a hopeful start to a new history. “The Bus service originally intended to enhance people to people contact between India and Pakistan was first agreed up on during the meeting held between Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Prime Minister Vajpayee in New York in September 1998”.<sup>4</sup> On the occasion of the inaugural run of the bus service from Delhi to Lahore on February 19, 1999, Indian Prime minister A.B.Vajpayee made a historical and landmark visit to Pakistan. “He was the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Pakistan since Rajeev Gandhi’s visit in 1989. While the first ever Prime Minister of India to visit Lahore since Nehru’s visit in 1951”.<sup>5</sup> The Lahore bus diplomacy had contributed to alleviate the tension between India and Pakistan arising from the nuclear experiments executed by both the countries in 1998. The bus service has facilitated the rejoining of the separated families of both countries and also promoted the economic and cultural connections beyond the borders. The cultural and economic contacts strengthen the faith between the peoples of the two hostile countries.

### LAHORE DECLARATION

The Lahore Declaration was a bilateral agreement between India and Pakistan signed on February, 21, 1999 by the then Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and his Pakistan counterpart Nawaz Sherriff at the conclusion of the historic Lahore summit. It was the first major political agreement between India and Pakistan since the Shimla agreement in 1972. The Lahore Declaration was historically very significant for Vajpayee was the first Prime Minister to visit Lahore since Jawaharlal Nehru had paid a visit to Lahore in 1951. The Lahore summit was significant in the development of a bilateral relation in the context of the nuclear advancements in India and Pakistan. The historic Lahore summit provided a crucial opportunity for the discussion on all the outstanding issues between the two countries including Kashmir at the highest political level. The declaration brought about a major breakthrough in overcoming the strained bilateral relations between the two countries since the two leaders had given up their traditional stand on Kashmir issue. On February 21, 1999, at the Governor’s house in Lahore, both the Prime Ministers expressed their readiness to move beyond their traditional political standpoints to find a stable solution for the Kashmir issue between India and Pakistan. The strained relationship between India and Pakistan became normal after Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee had signed the declaration at Lahore summit in 1999. “

### AGRA SUMMIT

The historic Agra summit was held between Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee from 14-16 July 2001 at Agra. “The summit started with a highly expectation which would resolve all the disputes between the two countries including the five decade old Kashmir issue. “Both sides started the summit with hopefulness and in a spirit of goodwill; especially President Musharraf used the phrases “cautious optimism”, “flexibility” and “open mind” to describe his buoyant views for the summit The Indian President also promised to take “bold and innovative” measures and to discuss the “core issue” between the two countries”. Agra summit was a modest beginning in the attempts to evolve a structure for a sustained dialogue process to embrace all the unresolved issues. The summit addressed the Kashmir issue, cross-border terrorism, nuclear risk reduction, release of prisoners of war, and commercial

ties in various rounds of discussions. The opening remarks of the Indian Prime Minister A.B.Vajpayee during the first official meeting with the Pakistan President Mr. Pervez Musharraf contained a mention that issues such as poverty, hunger and depression were the core concerns of the people. Thus the summit gave a political space to address these issues with a multidimensional approach from both the governments of India and Pakistan.

### UNILATERAL CEASEFIRE IN KASHMIR

The two-year deadlock after the failure of the Agra summit and the terrorist attack came to an end followed by India's peace initiatives in 2003, when the Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee announced the reversal policy with Pakistan. The political condition between India and Pakistan after the Agra failure was moving towards a warlike situation. Indian forces were alerted to go for war in any event on a short notice. The crisis got weakened after the U.S intervention, when the American President George W. Bush had sent his defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Richard Armitage to India and Pakistan. "Richard Armitage was successful in extracting the commitment from General Musharraf that Pakistan would end cross border infiltration permanently, which was conveyed to India".<sup>12</sup> In response, India showed the readiness for partial withdrawal of her forces from the border and Arabian Sea. "The High Commissioners would be assigned again, over flights would be permitted, road and rail communications would be revived, cricket would be allowed, and dialogue would be resumed." As part of the peace initiative, India has taken a conscious effort and 'step by step' approach towards Pakistan to normalize the relations with Pakistan. "In consonance with this spirit, Prime Minister Vajpayee extended hand of friendship to Pakistan at a public rally in Srinagar on 18 April 2003".<sup>14</sup> On 28 April 2003 Vajpayee had a conversation with his Pakistan counterpart Mir Zafarulla Khan Jamali. He discussed the importance of a conducive atmosphere between India and Pakistan before discussing any difficult issue. On 22 October 2003 India declared more steps to encourage people to people contact between India and Pakistan.

### NEW PEACE PROPOSAL

"The unprecedented steps, designed to reunite families and expand contacts between the two nations after five decades of conflict, were seen here as another step in keeping with the Indian prime minister's recent moves to jump-start peace initiatives".<sup>19</sup> As part of India's peace initiatives Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf reciprocated the Indian proposal of 12 Confidence Building Measures. Both the nations agreed to each other's proposal and made some suggestions and changes respectively. A meeting was held between Prime Minister Vajpayee and President Musharraf on the sidelines of the SAARC, summit in Islamabad on 6 January 2004. They agreed to proceed further with normalization process and composite dialogues. The foreign secretaries held two rounds of talks from February 15 to 16 and December 27 to 28, 2004 respectively and all the two-year long indifference between India and Pakistan melted off to resume a warm relation. India proposed 12 CBMs given below.

1. "Resumption of talks to restore civil aviation links, including over flights.
2. Resumption of rail links following aviation links.
3. Resumption bilateral sports matches including Cricket.
4. Issuance of visas in cities outside the two countries' national capitals to shorten travel formalities.
5. Permission to individuals aged at least 65 years to cross in to India on foot. Previously only groups could walk across, while individual had to board bus.
6. Initiation of more buses in New Delhi-Lahore routes than now operate.
7. Establishment of links between two country's' coastguard, before and after fishing season.
8. Preventing arrest of each other's fishermen within certain sea areas.
9. Provision of free medical treatment to 20 Pakistani children in India.
10. Increasing the staff of the their respective embassies. Consider a ferry service between Mumbai and Karachi.
11. Start of new bus services, one between Srinagar and Muzafarabad.

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The other would be bus or rail links between Khakrapur in Sindh and Munabao in Rajasthan”.

## CONCLUSION

Seventy years of India-Pakistan relation was characterized by various ups and downs that prolonged a lasting resolution to the hostilities of India and Pakistan. The inception of the continuum of ideological differences and divergent standpoints on various issues ignite out of Pakistan’s claims over Kashmir region. The policy decision and approach of different Indian political parties in dealing the affairs with Pakistan were different in different eras of history. The Indian National Congress, a major party that ruled India since the Indian Independence for more than 45 years, most often as a single-party government, had always maintained a hardliner policy on Kashmir issue that Pakistan must stop all the proxy war and cross border terrorism activities before attempting any peace initiative. On the other hand, the other short-lived Indian Central governments could not leave a long standing impressive mark or policy achievement in the case of dealing with the Kashmir issue. The A.B Vajpayee-led NDA government (1998-2004) was different in its approaches and policies regarding the India-Pakistan conflict. A. B Vajpayee, in his capacity as the Indian Prime Minister, adopted a flexible and popular stand in the Kashmir issue as opposed to the various Congress governments’ uncompromised conventional attitude. He broke all the traditional approaches, and almost in every diplomatic move, continued single handed diplomatic strategic moves such as summits, ceasefire agreements, diplomatic initiatives, cricket diplomacy, even after the failures of Lahore and Agra summits. Though quite optimistic about his unilateral attempts to maintain peace between India and Pakistan, A.B Vajpayee did not hesitate to wage war against Pakistan in times of Kargil infiltration crisis.

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