



*Image Courtesy: PMO India*

## **MODI IN LAHORE**

### INDIAN AND PAKISTANI REFLECTIONS

December 2015



### **Rana Banerji**

*Member, IPCS Governing Council, and former  
Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, India*

“Prime Minister Modi’s surprising and bold stop at Lahore on his way back from inaugurating the India-financed Parliament in Kabul on December 25, 2015, ostensibly to wish Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif on his birthday, certainly signified a clever use of symbolism

to add impetus to the recently revived Indo-Pak peace process. It was the first visit by an Indian PM to Pakistan after 11 years and expectedly grabbed international headlines. Except the Jamaat-e-Islami, all other mainstream opposition parties in Pakistan and civil society in general welcomed the gesture. In India, the Congress party was critical of the “knee-jerk flip flops, U-turns and unstructured manner of decision making.”

However, they clearly seem to have been diplomatically outplayed. The Indian delegation included NSA Ajit Doval, Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar and the Indian High Commissioner in Pakistan, TCA Raghavan. On the Pakistani side, only Foreign Secretary Aijaz Chaudhry was present. When asked about this ‘thin’ representation, Foreign Policy Advisor Sartaz Aziz pointed to the paucity of time to come down from Islamabad, also for NSA Lt Gen (Retd) Nasser Janjua. If they really wanted, they could have come. Instead, they chose perhaps to play it low key, keeping the interaction between the PMs personalised, as not much progress on substantive issues could be expected. The military leadership in Pakistan seemed to be on board, sensing the positive civil society mood. The scene now shifts to the Foreign Secretaries’ dialogue in Islamabad, expected to begin in mid- Jan 2016.”

## **Aryaman Bhatnagar**

*Policy Advisor, Peace & Security Programme,  
Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), India*

“It is very easy to dismiss PM Modi's supposedly spontaneous visit to Lahore as mere 'optics'. The importance of just the symbolism of this gesture should however not be understated. The visit should help in dispelling the notion in Pakistan that Modi is not sincere about engaging with Pakistan, a view that has been strengthened over the past 20 months by Modi's attempts of resetting the terms of India-Pakistan engagement. Moreover, the fact that Manmohan Singh was unable to visit Pakistan even once in 10 years lent further credibility to the Pakistani belief that for all its talk of wanting better ties, New Delhi was not willing to walk the talk.



Perhaps the best way of describing this short visit is as the latest in a series of “pre-talk talks,” following Paris, NSA-talks in Bangkok, and Sushma Swaraj’s visit to Islamabad. This will not only help in charting out the future course of action but also ensure that a minimum level of understanding and bonhomie can be generated before the official talks commence.”



### AS Dulat

*Member, IPCS Governing Council, former Special Director, Intelligence Bureau (IB), & former Chief, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India*

*“Modi’s pitch for peace - der aaye par darust aaye.*

Modi’s surprise stopover in Lahore on Christmas Day was the best birthday present for Mian Nawab Sharif, for Pakistan, and for peace in South Asia. The long-awaited imaginative gesture demonstrates that even though Modi may not be Vajpayee, he still has it in him to excel the great man. Most of all, he is not lacking in gumption - the essential prerequisite of a leader. If he follows his instincts, the sky is the limit for him. Who knows, Modi may end up doing what no one in India has succeeded in so far - bringing permanent peace to the sub-continent. *Ache din aane chahiye.*

In today's world, national interest lies in embracing one’s neighbours rather than confronting them permanently. War, as the world has long realised, is the most disastrous last option.”

## Muhammad Faisal

*Research Fellow, Center for International Strategic Studies (CISS), Pakistan*

“The ‘surprise’ visit of PM Modi to Lahore on Friday signals that both sides are willing to engage actively, even at a quick pace. Bilateral ties are thawing. India and Pakistan have engaged at various levels in the last four weeks.



The sequence of events since the brief chat in Paris indicates progress in back-channel negotiations. It demonstrates an understanding between the leadership that the process will be carried forward. After a year of twists and diplomatic dances, the successive rounds of talks suggest that a new normal is being set in India-Pakistan relations. This new normal is taking incremental steps towards enhanced engagement and broader dialogue. Another normal is exercising ‘precaution’. The Bangkok talks were announced after the event. PM Modi’s impromptu Lahore yatra was announced a few hours before the trip. It keeps spoilers away. To reduce space for hardliners, the leadership of both nations have to continue to lead the conversation on bilateral ties. Another normal is a gradual building of personal rapport between premiers Modi and Sharif. Despite the deep mistrust between India and Pakistan, mutual trust between Modi and Sharif is growing. These confident steps indicate that the process is moving forward. It is only with such steps that more breakthroughs will happen.

Sustained engagement at the highest levels will lead towards a ‘historic’ moment.”



### **Amb (Retd) Salman Haidar**

*Patron, IPCS, & former Foreign Secretary of India*

“Mr Modi sprang a genuine surprise with his visit to Lahore. All of a sudden, there is a thaw in the congealed Indo-Pak relationship and genuine expectation of imminent progress. There have been recent indications of change in the offing, with the NSAs finally consummating their long-delayed meeting, the visit of Ms Sushma Swaraj to Islamabad and her meetings with senior Pak leaders, including Mr Nawaz Sharif, and the announced resumption of Foreign Secretary-level talks. But these preliminaries have been eclipsed by the drama of Mr Modi’s visit. India’s PM has a flair for the dramatic to underline his decisive leadership. This time his unexpected gesture of dropping in at Lahore is substantive as well as attention-grabbing, for the relationship with Pakistan is fraught with challenge and demands bold commitment if anything is to be achieved.

Together, Mr Modi and Pak PM Nawaz Sharif have made a highly significant effort that merits real appreciation. Now that the leaders have shown positive intent, it is to be hoped that the soon to be held meeting of the Foreign Secretaries will be productive, and resumed official dialogue will resolve several bilateral issues.

Mr Modi’s few hours in Lahore have revived hope and expectation.”

## Suhasini Haidar

*Strategic and Diplomatic Affairs Editor, The Hindu,  
& member, IPCS Governing Council, India*



“PM Modi’s seemingly surprise stopover to Lahore last week was timely and will give the just-renewed dialogue process a firmer foundation. It is unnecessary to cavil about whether the visit was ‘pre-arranged’, who arranged it and whether the PM received the correct protocol or not. What is important is that the Indian PM addressed the relationship with Pakistan by seeing it as a neighbour first, before speaking of the differences we must resolve, and the Pakistani PM reciprocated that gesture. It is equally important that the foreign secretaries and NSAs of both countries take their dialogue ahead similarly, as they sit down to put substance to the PMs ‘shock and awe’ style of rapprochement. They could start with the measures already agreed upon from cross-LoC CBMs, visas and trade facilitation, before they work on issues that have seen some traction in the past, such as water, Sir Creek, even Siachen. Even on the intractable knots on terrorism and Kashmir, the path to peace is already dotted with markers: credible action by Pakistan on those responsible for the 26/11 attacks, and the inauguration of a more inclusive dialogue on Kashmir by New Delhi would go a long way in easing that path.

A note of optimistic caution is necessary too and both sides must guard against the hyperbole of the past, while remembering that just three months before the two leaders walked hand-in-hand down the tarmac in Lahore, they had failed to even shake hands when seated in the same room at the UN. What is needed the most now is realism and practicality, aided at intervals with a show of the bonhomie and full support to the dialogue process from the leadership that was on display on Christmas day.”



## **Fahd Humayun**

*Programme Manager, Jinnah Institute, Pakistan*

“No matter how you look at it, Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Lahore drop-in is a transformational development for a relationship that has been mired in uncertainty and stagnated because of mutual suspicion for over a decade. The Indian premier’s decision to stop over in Pakistan is demonstrative of the same political courage that was displayed by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif when he travelled to New Delhi for his counterpart’s swearing-in in May 2014. But beyond the initial euphoria of an Indo-Pak détente, which will subside quickly, it is clear that the road ahead for the bilateral relationship is still a tricky one. A date has to be set for the Foreign Secretaries to meet, and the role of anti-peace spoilers in both countries to upend the unprecedented political progress of the past 30 days should not be underestimated. The positive takeaway is that both statesmen have shown that they have the will and capacity to not be held hostage to the scar tissue of Indo-Pak history.

Going forward, however, engagement may have to move beyond the secret diplomacy that brought the NSAs to Bangkok, and PM Modi to Raiwind; rather, it will be important to keep policy stakeholders and parliamentarians on both sides on board when it comes to foreign policy decision-making, in a bid to cultivate long-term parliamentary stakeholders who are genuinely invested in regional normalisation.”



## Rajeshwari Krishnamurthy

*Research Officer, IPCS*



“Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s stopover in Lahore, Pakistan, on his way back from inaugurating the new Afghan parliament building in Kabul indeed took South Asia and all interested parties by surprise. Although there were some pessimistic voices, there was more cheer than scorn for the most part. This unprecedented move is a welcome development, and potentially sets the tone not just for India-Pakistan relations and the upcoming SAARC summit in Islamabad, but also for movement on other regional issues, especially security, stability, and economy. That this came as the last leg of his journey to Moscow and from there to Kabul, onward to New Delhi, is also telling.

While Modi’s whirlwind Lahore visit to partake in his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif’s birthday as well as granddaughter’s wedding was not announced until just before the trip commenced, it would be prudent to remember that nothing in diplomacy is a surprise - everything is pre-planned. Regardless, this visit achieved three things:

- a. The date was symbolic, and it has restored hope and optimism for progress in India-Pakistan relations and regional stability.
- b. Regionally, it could be India vocalising its stance that it wishes to cooperate with Pakistan on resolving issues regarding Afghanistan, regional security, and energy trade.
- c. Given the recent developments in the bilateral, that this visit went smoothly indicates that the Pakistan army might not be entirely averse to improving relations with India for various reasons.

However, one still needs to wait and watch if this momentum is built upon.”



## **Lt Gen (Retd) AS Lamba**

*President, IPCS, & former Vice-Chief of Army Staff, India*

“PM Modi’s stopover in Pakistan to engage with PM Nawaz Sharif has taken the world by surprise. Coming in wake of rejections witnessed in recent diplomatic and foreign policy interactions between the two countries, this is indeed an extraordinary outreach.

This top-down diplomacy will be high in expectations as a first-ever effort cutting across party lines and bureaucratic procedures of the conventional approach. Foremost among expectations will be a new political will and earnestness towards evolving and implementing a workable strategy.

The challenge in this meeting would have been to ensure a high-level of statesmanship in diplomacy, discussion on opportunities and options for peace and de-escalation, a pledge to eliminate terrorism and confidence in evolving a peaceful solution. Decision-making between the two leaders would have had to be firm in political will, uninhibited by disruptive inflections and guarded from military escapades.

The scheduled meeting of the foreign secretaries on 15 January 2016 is a significant outcome that would be followed on by NSA and DGMO-level meetings. PM Modi has perhaps replicated the famous Nixon visit to China in 1979, and proved many a political and strategic pundit wrong by showing that he has the political will, a plan, and a strategy to deal with Pakistan.

Cutting down on rhetoric, sentiment and mindsets, this outreach by PM Modi reflects the daring, dynamism and political will to work top-down with strategic clarity and intent. The warm welcome extended by PM Nawaz Sharif reflects the vision of the two leaders, and the aspirations of the people on both sides.

This effort may well be closest in comparison to the inspiring roles of Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev in diffusing the Cold War. Gorbachev’s role in revolutionising

Soviet relations with the West and later breaking the Cold War's ideological straitjacket altered the course of the war away from dangerous consequences.

Michael Krepon's recent statement regarding "Mr Modi's capability for good surprises after missteps, or enough of this daydreaming," appears at least for now, vindicated."

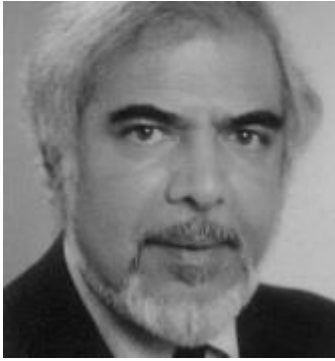
## **Salma Malik**

*Assistant Professor, Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Pakistan*



“There is never a dull moment in the India-Pakistan saga. And the latest to occupy the limelight for all the good or bad reasons, has been none other than Indian premier Modi, who certainly knows how to capture the moment. When in the middle of a happily longish and lazy weekend, the political climate warmed up with the sudden announcement and arrival of the Indian premier in Lahore, on a purely personal and private visit to his counterpart. Given the neighbours’ history, the decades-long high drama is replete with more pitfalls than positive developments, yet optimism prevails. The initial speculations about the visit, the body language and optics, are now being analysed and assessed. Is this a new beginning? Would this mean a time-lined, unconditional, result-oriented resumption of talks? If so, which side benefits more? And most importantly, the conspiratorial question: what is the hidden agenda? Is Sajjan Jindal playing Modi’s RK Mishra or is it the Hajigak mine project that brings Jindal, Sharif and Modi together? Has Modi’s very successful Russia visit that brought about billions worth in defence cooperation projects, or developments in Afghanistan, renewed Delhi’s interest in Pakistan?”

Where the peaceniks scoff off any skepticism, a realistic analysis suggests that one must wait and observe the tone and tenor set at the forthcoming foreign secretary talks in order to determine in which direction the wind blows. The talks’ resumption may also mean buying more time and looking good to the international audience while treading on thin ice. One can hope that less controversial issues can be settled, as both Sharif and Modi enjoy a strong mandate and are in a far better position than their predecessors into authoring a new but positive chapter in history, while one can pray that no spoilers intervene and spill black ink.”



## Prof Onkar Marwah

*Distinguished Fellow, IPCS, & former Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, India*

“Any assessment of Indo-Pak contacts has to begin with a sense of *deja vu*. All our public discussions occur alongside the unspoken thought that nothing much will change. And so it is with the recent ‘surprise’ visit of PM Modi to Islamabad to confer with PM Nawaz Sharif. Most are aware that the visit does not herald any immediate substantive improvement in relations between the two countries. And yet, the ‘surprise’ and therefore a quick return to a softer diplomatic camaraderie between the two cheek-by-jowl nuclearised nations should be welcomed.

It needs to percolate down from the political and diplomatic levels to ordinary citizens that there is no quick-fix to the Indo-Pak stand-off. From India’s stand-point, we have to spread the thought widely among our people that - barring a miracle - our conflicted situation with Pakistan can only be ‘managed’ not ‘solved’ in the foreseeable future. In the preceding context, demands for ‘consistency’ in our policies towards Pakistan are irrelevant, and contain no intrinsic value. As long as our ‘national interest’ is not abridged at any stage, ‘unpredictability’ of response may be the new real virtue. In the environment of Pakistani peripatetic firings across the LoC, cross-border incursions, a flood of fake Indian currency, and the infiltration of jihadi *tanzeems* and ‘*antakvadis*’ bearing Kalashnikovs and exploding IEDs in our cities, Indian reactions could from time to time be as undecipherable as theirs.

My hope if not an assumption is that our government has adopted such an approach when the SAARC leaders were invited to Shri Narendra Modi’s inauguration as Prime Minister; when the Foreign Secretaries’ and National Security Advisors’ meetings were cancelled abruptly, and when the security forces were ordered to respond robustly to Pakistani firings on the LoC. And, of course, the same applies to the Indian PM’s surprise visit with Nawaz Sharif on 25 December 2015.

In strategic terms, we have thwarted most of Pakistan's violent ploys in the past. Our growth and governance trajectory is very different to theirs - and likely to increase further. In the larger picture Pakistan is on a losing wicket unless it changes track. We just need to be grittily patient and wear them out in the long-run."

## **Abhijit Iyer-Mitra**

*Delhi-based defence and foreign policy analyst,  
India*



“Bollywood movies have mostly had an unchanged formula for the last 70 years or so. Boy meets girl, boy marries girl. The only differences are the superficial twists (angry father usually or misunderstandings), different actors and different songs.

In many ways the latest outreach to Pakistan seems to follow the Bollywood pattern - different actors, different songs, different plot twists - but the same tragic ending - failure. The reasons for this have been obvious for quite some time. The Pakistani Army for its part has very little to gain from peace with India - a peace which would see its pre-dominance lost. India for its part has been saddled with can what at best is described as an amateurishly trained foreign service, without the discipline to understand or deliver substantially. Equally important are the divergent political interests within the country which mean that invariably there are way too many variables and hence failure points.

The challenge to the sustained success of this latest outreach then is simple - how does India convince the Pakistani Army that its looming redundancy is a good thing? Similarly how does India give Pakistan breathing space every time a cross-border terror attack happens - especially ones planned by out-of-control elements within Pakistan? It would seem the country is unable to deal with domestic terrorism leave alone provide guarantees to India that would ensure Indian political cohesion in a peace process.

In the midst of the misplaced euphoria, we still do not have answers to these core questions, and till we get them this trip to Lahore will have to go down as a flashy song and dance sequence in a zero-substance Bollywood movie.”



### **Ali Mustafa**

*Adjunct faculty, National Defence University & National University of Science and Technology, Pakistan*

“Whether the ties between India and Pakistan are getting better is less than clear, but what is quite clear is that the ties between Narendra Modi and

Nawaz Sharif are at an all-time best. From shawl diplomacy to sari diplomacy to the latest birthday diplomacy, there is a suggestion of the warming of relations between the two. One certainly hopes that such warmth thaws the bitter cold relations between the two states.

While the recent initiative is bold and proves PM Modi’s penchant for theatrics it may also mean that some backdoor channel is open between two leaders. This may seem an encouraging sign, given the recent Nawaz-Modi meeting in Paris and the subsequent Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj’s trip to Islamabad for the Heart of Asia Conference.

However the nature of this backdoor channel leaves a few question marks as well. In South Asia, where the degree of mistrust between the neighbours is only second to the degree of people’s mistrust in politicians, it would be wise to show transparency on the coincidence of a certain steel magnate Sajjan Jindal being in Lahore at the same time. Absent transparency, the perception of private interest triumphing national interest may seem a possibility, especially since PM Sharif is known as the ‘Man of Steel’, for his steel mills rather than his iron resolve.

Though an etch-worthy trip in history books, this still remains a small step in the overall peace process between the two countries where much needs to be done. Only with transparency can this be a good confidence-building measure between the two states.”



## Prof Varun Sahni

*Professor in International Politics, Jawaharlal  
Nehru University (JNU), India, & member, IPCS  
Governing Council*



“From PM-to-PM to Panmunjom.

The natural state of India-Pakistan bilateral relations is frozen. Recent moves by the two countries to break the ice must therefore be welcomed. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s impromptu decision to drop by his neighbour’s house to personally greet Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in Lahore on his birthday should generate enough heat to melt the ice, at least in the short-term. Modi’s short foreign policy track record would suggest that he is the first Indian prime minister - other than IK Gujral, whose tenure was too short to make a real impact - to truly understand and act on the truism that foreign policy begins where the country’s borders end. But India’s relations with Pakistan, while being the most important part of India’s neighbourhood policy, have always transcended it. India’s conflict with Pakistan has its roots in ideology and identity rather than in an asymmetry of power. For a breakthrough between two enduring rivals, they must engage in the slow and perhaps painful process of refashioning their mutual identities. Modi’s reported comment to Sharif that “*Ab yahan aana jaana laga rahega*” (“Now there is going to be lots of to-and-fro here”) is quite remarkable, but there is the possibility that this would remain limited to what CPM leader Sitaram Yechuri has called “VIP diplomacy.”

The best way to make dialogue a permanent feature of India-Pakistan bilateral diplomacy is to set up a Panmunjom-type arrangement, *a la* the two Koreas in the DMZ, perhaps at Attari-Wagah.”



### **Brig (Retd) Naeem Salik**

*Distinguished Visiting Fellow, Centre for International Strategic Studies (CISS), Pakistan*

“Prime Minister Modi’s bolt from the blue descent into Lahore came as a surprise to many, but was it really as spontaneous as it appeared to be? This bold gesture nevertheless followed a series of developments including the exchange of pleasantries between the two Prime Ministers at the Paris Climate Summit, NSAs meeting in Bangkok, Indian Foreign Minister’s visit to Islamabad for the Heart of Asia Conference, and the signing of the TAPI agreement. The visit itself was essentially a social call on PM Sharif more so because its timing coincided with Nawaz Sharif’s birthday and the venue happened to be the family home of the Sharifs. The symbolic value of the visit cannot be underestimated especially since the initiative has been taken by an Indian Prime Minister known for his strident and aggressive stance towards Pakistan. The visit has transformed the atmospherics between India and Pakistan and has created propitious conditions for the forthcoming meeting between the two Foreign Secretaries.

There is no substitute to structured and sustained dialogue to resolve longstanding and intricate disputes between the two countries. However, if past experience is any guide, dialogue led by bureaucrats on either side tend to get bogged down and highest-level political intervention has been needed to get the ball rolling again. From this perspective Modi’s Lahore visit will help kick start the dialogue process and hopefully the two premiers would continue to invest political capital in the efforts to improve bilateral relations that have hit rock bottom. In Pakistan all political parties barring Jamaat-i-Islami have welcomed the move and the media has also been supportive, with a few exceptions. On either side there are strong political governments with proven nationalistic credentials and the next elections are some distance away. One can only hope that this historic opportunity is grasped by the leadership of the two countries.”

**Ruhee Neog**

*Assistant Director, IPCS*

&

**Tanvi Kulkarni**

*PhD candidate, Jawaharlal Nehru  
University (JNU), India*



“And to encapsulate, a relevant though somewhat irreverent poem, written before Modi’s Lahore visit, originally published on the Stimson Center’s *South Asian Voices*<sup>1</sup>:

**Love across the Salt Desert, re-imagined**

Sharif and Modi shook hands in Ufa,  
did they later use a loofah  
to scrub the stage clean  
for the NSAs to then preen?

Aziz said Kashmir, Swaraj said terror  
Aziz said Hurriyat, Swaraj said NEVER.

Alas  
this was not meant to be.  
Like two angsty young lovers,  
they did not see  
how useful  
a heart-to-heart could be.

But all was not lost

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<sup>1</sup> Neog, Ruhee, and Tanvi Kulkarni. "Love across the Salt Desert, Re-imagined." *South Asian Voices*. December 15, 2015. <http://southasianvoices.org/love-across-the-salt-desert-re-imagined/>.

and open were some doors,  
for the Rangers and BSF met  
and so did the DGMOs.

They agreed to be clearer  
on issues such as terror,  
after every naughty interlude  
of erring on the wrong side of error,  
where ceasefire violations  
were the standard-bearer.

Star-crossed lovers  
at the Waldorf Astoria,  
only managed small waves  
despite their secret euphoria,  
which the foreign ministry later denied  
as phantasmagoria.

In chilly November, Nawaz and Modi attended  
a summit, in the city of love,  
where they could have hardly pretended;  
who knew then  
that a good *guftagu* was intended.

Suddenly, like ice-breakers,  
emerged Doval and Janjua.

*Humein lagta hai  
kuch kuch hua.*

Then came Islamabad  
in Sushmaji's travelogue,

this time with Aziz,  
they agreed on a dialogue.

What's in a name?  
Composite, Resumed, Comprehensive;  
isn't it really more of the same?  
Truly, this is all just beginning to sound  
really lame.

Right then.  
Can they hurry up already, we simper,  
and if they have to go back to square one,  
let it be  
“not with a bang but with a whimper.”



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