

SOUTH ASIAN VOICES

GENERATION WHY

Arun Vishwanathan

Assistant Professor, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, India.

Published

August 30th, 2013

CBMs, Culture, India, Pakistan

India-Pak CBMs and Cricket: Duck, Six or Somewhere in Between?

By: **Aryaman Bhatnagar** and **Arun Vishwanathan**

A simple search will throw up several **definitions** (<http://www.stimson.org/topics/confidence-building-measures/>) of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). Given deep suspicions of the 'other' and unresolved bilateral disputes, Indo-Pak CBMs are seen as a means to establish channels of communication and increase transparency between the two countries. Currently such mechanisms exist to increase military to military ties, greater people to people contact, provide advance notification of military manoeuvres and missile tests among others.

Given cricket's popularity in both countries, it has been seen as a possible CBM. This perception has been strengthened over the years following the 'cricket diplomacy' of President Zia-ul-Haq in 1987 during the Brasstacks crisis and President Musharraf's visit in 2005 to India to watch an India-Pakistan cricket match. More recently, President Asif Ali Zardari too had **written** (<http://ibnlive.in.com/news/asif-ali-zardari-writes-to-manmohan-singh-on-cricket-ties-resumption/272229-56.html>) to the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2012 requesting the resumption of cricket ties as it could create a positive atmosphere beneficial for improving bilateral relations.

Cricket as a possible CBM has its basis in the game's popularity in the sub-continent. In both countries, cricketers are conferred god-like status; with a cricket scandal being touted as a national tragedy. In India even the mighty Bollywood bows to cricket's popularity while scheduling its summer releases according to the IPL calendar. Nothing tends to get people more excited than an India-Pakistan match, especially in a World Cup. For Indian fans, this excitement comes with the added anxiety of maintaining India's unbeaten record against Pakistan in the World Cup.

Seen as a 'quick fix' to improve relations, given the sport's popularity, in reality cricket might not translate into much in terms of better Indo-Pak relations. For starters, it hardly creates the 'positive atmosphere' that Zardari spoke about. The emotions attached with the fate of your team are naturally higher in case of an India-Pakistan match. It tends to bring out the jingoistic patriotism in the best of us, where wishing the worst for the other becomes acceptable. Rooting for the failure of the Indian or Pakistani cricket team, depending on your nationality, is one of the main characteristics of the Indian and Pakistani cricket fans. This was evident during the 1999 World Cup, where Pakistan's loss in the finals to Australia was celebrated in India as if India itself had won the cup. Or when Indian fans took solace in the fact that despite its own shock early exit from the 2007 World Cup, Pakistan met the same fate.

One can make the argument that such 'friendly banter' has never degenerated into violence as is sometimes the case during football matches in Europe and South America. However, such hyperbole hardly creates the most conducive environment for enhanced people-to-people interaction to take place. It is therefore no surprise that one of the suggestions made in the past to improve bilateral relations has been to tone down the aggression displayed during the Wagah Border Ceremony.

Moreover, cricket, just like any other cultural 'event', be it films, theatre or a literary festival will always be subservient to more important issues plaguing India-Pakistan relations like Kashmir, terrorism and Siachen. Any amount of progress on these softer issues would always be hijacked by the smallest of problems in these larger issues. The dispensable nature of cricket as a CBM is further enhanced by the fact that it does not bring forth immediate political or economic benefits associated with enhanced trade or investment opportunities. Thus, cricket ties, even if capable of creating a conducive environment for improving relations, are not much of a CBM and are instead used as a form of 'punishment' by the aggrieved country to show its displeasure at the other. For instance, post-26/11, the Indian government responded to Pakistan's lack of willingness to bring the culprits to justice or dismantle the existing terror infrastructure on its soil by preventing Pakistani players from playing in the IPL.

In order for a CBM to be successful, it has to be able to draw upon mutual dependencies of countries as well as build trust. The Indo-Pak agreement, initiated in 1989, not to attack each others' nuclear installations resulting in the yearly exchange of list of nuclear facilities and **advance notification of missile launches (<http://www.stimson.org/research-pages/agreement-between-india-and-pakistan-on-pre-notification-of-flight-testing-of-ballistic-missiles/>)**, initiated in 2005, are examples of two limited yet successful Indo-Pak CBMs. They can be termed successful firstly because both countries have continued the measures even during extreme lows in bilateral relations; and secondly because it forces both countries to communicate with each other and place certain constraints on their behaviour, however cosmetic it might seem to critics. Similarly, the supply of natural gas from India to Pakistani power plants or deepening the bilateral trade ties

could be successful CBMs that are not only timely, but would also create mutual dependencies while building on trust between the two countries and their people.

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