

BAD TO WORSE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON INDIA-PAKISTAN TIES

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Pakistan

In another round of tit-for-tat manoeuvres, India, followed by Pakistan, has decided to [halve the strength of diplomatic missions](#) in each other's capital. The government's decision, conveyed in a démarche to the Pakistani Chargé d'affaires on Tuesday, follows the ill-treatment and torture of Indian personnel posted in Islamabad, in clear violation of their diplomatic rights. Pakistan's contention was that the [two men arrested](#) were carrying fake currency, but it is more likely the action was a response to arrests and the expulsion of two [Pakistani High Commission officials](#) accused of espionage last month, who were also taken into custody by Indian security officials. New Delhi also accused Pakistan High Commission officials of maintaining "links to terror organisations" as a reason for its decision. While expulsions of diplomats are not uncommon between countries as inimical to each other as India and Pakistan are, this is the first time such a measure has been taken since 2001. Then, the [Parliament attack in December 2001](#), and the largest military mobilisation of the time along the India-Pakistan border, Operation Parakram, were the triggers. Eventually, after a thaw in ties, and Prime Minister [Atal Behari Vajpayee's visit to Pakistan](#) for the SAARC summit in 2004, the move was reversed and diplomats were gradually taken back to a full strength of over a 100 in each High Commission.

The latest decision follows not one event, but a general downslide in relations in the past year. After the [Pulwama attack last February](#), the [Balakot air strike](#) and the [August 5 decision to amend Article 370](#) of the Constitution and reorganise Jammu and Kashmir, India and Pakistan have snapped all trading ties, downgraded missions — now without High Commissioners — and shut down most diplomatic activities. India and Pakistan have had no talks since 2015, when PM Modi visited Lahore, and the External Affairs Ministers met a few months later. All sporting and cultural exchanges are at an end, and visas are rarely granted, apart from the rare exception being made for the [Kartarpur corridor inaugurated](#) last year. From the LoC, where ceasefire violations continue to claim lives of soldiers and civilians on both sides, to practically every multilateral forum India and Pakistan are a part of, both sides are at daggers drawn. Even on non-contentious issues such as cooperating on the coronavirus pandemic as a part of the SAARC grouping, or collaborating against the recent locust invasion that affected the region, Islamabad and New Delhi are unable to find common cause. While the present seems bleak, the future does not augur well for a change, particularly as India-China tensions occupy New Delhi's concerns and focus. The decision to reduce mission strengths is unlikely to impact working relations between India and Pakistan at present. It is a sign, however, that just when it seems ties between the two neighbours cannot get much worse, they do.

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