

TALKS WITH PAKISTAN?

Is it time for India to ask Pakistan to come to the negotiating table and put the bilateral relations of the two south Asian nations back on the tracks? This question becomes relevant in the light of some recent statements from some highly placed Indians suggested this approach. While it's true that the enmity should not be stretched beyond a point and that one day even the worst enemies have to talk. Those wanting talks must explain as to what has changed from the time India decided to treat Pakistan in a manner it is doing right now. Let's get back to bare facts. All regimes in India have tried working out peace with Pakistan. Each time, one power center in Pakistan responded in equal measures, soon the other power center managed to sabotage the goodwill generated in the first place. Also Pakistan has not jettisoned its policy of sending terrorists to India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has changed India in many ways. His government has made revolutionary changes in Kashmir. He has given clarity on India's relationship with Pakistan and called out the policy of terrorism and diplomacy cannot go together. The approach has given clarity to the jawan on the border, and ended support for terrorism in Kashmir. The government's policy of isolating Pakistan and not pursuing common interests with it has paid off. On the other hand Pakistan continues to live in denial; The UN designated terrorists are roaming freely in that country. Islamabad continues to train and try to push in terrorists into India. So what is there to talk with Islamabad at this stage? India has moved beyond Pakistan, Today we are one of the largest and the fastest economy; out youth have aspiration and dreams. Pakistan, on the other hands is still begging for funds. India doesn't need a Pakistan with fractured power structure.

Chaitanya K Prasad

Since its inception, every edition of IPL has brought a new wave of enthusiasm and expectation among cricket followers, passionate fans and key stakeholders. Each IPL season has brought with it a new kind of aggression, overdrive and unfiltered innovation in how cricket is played, packaged and understood in this new format.

Nonetheless, in 2026, something new seems to be missing in the IPL season. The flavour and variety are still there, yet the contrasts and the winning matrix seem to be missing in the overall IPL architecture. The general feeling among enthusiasts is that a kind of 'cricket fatigue' has entered the IPL domain, and the perception is that the IPL needs to detox to fully energise the minds and hearts of sports lovers once again.

Cricket over the years, has reconfigured itself, keeping in mind the changing taste of audiences. A gentleman's game, as it was popularly called in the yesteryears, has now become part of the "Masala Cricket" bandwagon. Has

the game reached a litmus testing point in the 2026 edition?

There is no doubt that the emotional connect of the format is still wired to the audiences. The outreach tools, sporting traits, ideas and entertainment touchpoints still dominate the ecosystem. Nonetheless, there is growing scepticism around IPL as a brand and an idea, with concerns that it may be overstretched, over-expanded or even over-optimised.

The fear among followers of the game is that the design quotient, or the novel experiment of the IPL format, is beginning to dry up for want of fresh ideas, over-monetisation and over-extension of cricket as a game vis-à-vis entertainment, skills and unpredictability.

The thrill factor of IPL, which acted as a catalyst in previous editions, is waning. The craze and idol worship of foreign players has perhaps outlived its utility. What was unique in the past is now the new normal. Consistency in viewing the IPL matches still commands TV advertisement, but audience attention has been divided into several segments. There is what we may call

Modi's Europe Push Redefines India's Global Strategy

Ambassador Anil Trigunayat

Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid a five-nation visit to Europe from May 15-20, which included a short and substantive visit to UAE and strategic outreach to Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Italy. He conferred with his counterparts not only from these host countries but also leaders of the European Union and all five Nordic countries, including Finland, Denmark and Iceland, under the rubric of 3rd India-Nordic Summit which was held in Oslo, focusing on a green and Innovative strategic partnership. Sweden and Norway conferred their highest civilian award on PM Modi to acknowledge and reiterate the importance of India, the largest democracy and one of the fastest-growing and resilient major economies, despite unprecedented global churn and disruptions caused by the Eurasian and Middle Eastern wars. The Agricola Medal was conferred upon him by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in Rome. A total of 57 agreements and MoUs were signed, and according to Randhir Jaiswal, Spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs, several deals worth at least \$ 40 bn were signed during various B2B interactions of the Prime Minister with local business leaders. The relationship with the Netherlands was turned into a strategic partnership and that with Italy into a Special Strategic Partnership, given the importance and the convenience of political, economic, technological and security interests with two major trading, inexpensive and technology partners in Europe.

Not only did he have bilateral meetings with the leaders of these countries but in Gotenburg, Sweden he addressed a joint business meeting with Swedish Prime Minister and European Union Commission Chief Ursula Von der Leyen focussing on greater B2B engagement and investments in 'Make in India for the world' enterprise especially in the context of full activation of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement -the so called 'Mother of All

deals' by the year end. In the Netherlands, apart from defence technology, 6G, critical minerals, semiconductors, green technologies the focus was also laid on collaboration in WAH- Water, Agriculture and Health sectors. The agreement between Tata and ASML Netherlands was path-breaking for India's Semiconductor Mission given the global edge the ASML uniquely possesses in this techno domain. Tata Electronics and ASML will partner together for India's first front-end semiconductor Fab in Gujarat. As bilateral relations have acquired a huge strategic matrix and impetus the two leaders agreed to establish a Strategic Partnership between the two countries to steer the critical projects.

His visit to Norway was the first time in 43 years by any Indian Prime Minister. Norway is also an energy rich highly developed country with a unique model of saving and judiciously investing its sovereign wealth funds for future generations. As the energy disruptions due to Iran-Israel-US war have impacted India a great deal, discussions were also held on procuring hydrocarbons from Norway and even more from UAE -as New Delhi diversifies its supply chains and risks. Speaking at the India-Nordic Summit, PM Modi highlighted that during the last decade alone the bilateral trade with these countries had increased nearly fourfold. He further emphasised "Investment funds from the Nordic countries are also becoming important partners in India's rapid growth journey. Over the past decade, investments from the Nordic countries into India have grown by nearly 200 percent." As such the India Europe FTA-TEPA with Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, operationalised since October 2025, has created an additional platform for closer economic engagements among the businesses. Under this Agreement \$ 100 bn project investments are expected to be made in various sectors in India

The rapidly growing trade and investment have not only contributed to India's

growth story, but have also played a highly positive role in the economies of the Nordic countries and created thousands of new jobs. Building upon this strong foundation, we have recently undertaken several important initiatives to take our relationship to the next level, added PM Modi.

Each of these strategic partners have their unique strengths not only in green and innovative technologies and developmental partnership models where synergies have been found and a roadmap for collaboration and harnessing this potential even more has been institutionalised through five dozen agreements. PM Modi also referred to the key strategic geo-economic significance of each of our partners. He underscored that 'we have decided to shape India-Nordic relations into a Green Technology and Innovation Strategic Partnership. Through this Green Technology Partnership, we will combine Iceland's expertise in geothermal energy and fisheries, Norway's strengths in the blue economy and the Arctic, and the maritime and sustainability expertise of all the Nordic countries with India's scale, in order to secure a better future for the entire world. And through the formation of this unique strategic partnership between us, we will combine Sweden's advanced manufacturing and defence capabilities, Finland's expertise in telecommunications and digital technology, and Denmark's strengths in cybersecurity and health-tech with India's talent pool, to develop trusted solutions for the world.' Same will apply in the new emerging geo-economically contested geography in the Arctic where Nordic countries have a critical role. As such India has been engaged in scientific expeditions and R&D in the Arctic and Antarctica and the Polar Regions with them which will be further intensified so that the shared prosperity through research and innovation could be achieved in a sustained manner.

As this 'Sambandh', which was also highlighted by PM Modi and Iceland Prime Minister as being a common word

in Iceland and India, further intensifies the relationships. Both sides also discussed the wars in West Asia and Russia-Ukraine which have been a common concern and they expect India to play a greater role especially given Delhi's special and strategic partnership with Moscow. PM Modi also assured them of India's continued efforts to deescalate these crises. Since global governance and security architecture are in shambles and heading towards irrelevance, during all the interactions urgent need for their reforms and expansion of UNSC and India's legitimate place in it re-emphasised.

On the final leg of the visit to Italy interestingly the gift of "Melody Chocolates by PM Modi to PM Meloni got much greater social media attention. While personal bonhomie and respect between the leaders drives a relationship in a trusted manner, the strategic dimensions of this very important bilateral relationship from Indo-Pacific to the Mediterranean must be appreciated, as India focuses on it even more in the maritime domain. No wonder, it was upgraded to Special Strategic Partnership in less than three years since the exceptional convergences across the relationship spectrum from defence and security, to industry to economy to energy to high tech and design and fashion are all encompassed within the 'The India-Italy Joint Strategic Action Plan 2025-29' which provides a practical and futuristic framework for the partnership, which is being pursued in a time-bound manner. A bilateral trade target of 20 billion euros has been set from the current 14.6 Bn Euros. Italy is one of the most enthusiastic partners in the India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).

In a destabilising world, driven by utter unilateralism, India is continuing to expand its strategic engagement with Europe and the Nordic countries for a win-win cooperation through its strategic autonomy and multi-alignment policies for creating dependable constituencies and reliable techno friendships for the 21st century.

HEALING REQUIRES MORE THAN MEDICINE

Sanjay Chandra

I was recently at a well-known hospital for a follow-up consultation when I noticed an elderly couple standing hesitantly near the billing counters, visibly uncertain about the procedure they were expected to follow. What struck me was the absence of anyone attentive enough to recognise their discomfort and assist them. My wife, standing some distance away, sensed their unease and quietly walked forward to help. A little later, I saw the same couple again at the coordinator's desk, trying to make sense of a junior doctor's instructions. They returned a few minutes later, still uncertain about the directions. The doctor repeated the explanation politely, though a trace of irritation had now entered his voice. Nearby, another young doctor was explaining something to a rustic-looking patient with far less patience and sensitivity.

A few days later, in another reputed hospital, I witnessed a similar moment of confusion. An elderly man and his son were standing in a long queue. The son had already completed the appointment and payment online. They need not have spent more time in the queue after waiting there so long already. I explained the process to them and directed them towards the con-



sultation area.

Another experience stayed with me even more strongly. A hospital had recently opened a geriatric department, and impressed by the idea, I took my father there for consultation. A young doctor listened to him for a few minutes before interrupting midway and writing out a prescription without hearing the complete medical history. We had hoped he would guide us towards appropriate care. Yet, despite having no waiting patients outside, he appeared impatient to engage further.

My grey-haired cardiologist consistently

gives patients the time required to understand complex medical terms and treatment options. My younger ophthalmologist embodies genuine care. She greets patients warmly, explains things calmly, and apologises personally for delays. Both these compassionate doctors work within the same hospital systems where I had witnessed impatience and indifference. The issue lies somewhere deeper-in the gradual erosion of certain human abilities that are becoming increasingly critical in highly system-driven environments. We observe a diminishing presence of patience, attentiveness,

and empathy. Modern systems have become faster, more technologically efficient, and administratively streamlined, but human beings do not always move at the same speed as systems. Healthcare and other institutional spaces are increasingly transactional environments where vulnerability is handled procedurally rather than understood empathetically. The ability to listen patiently and respond with sensitivity is cultivated slowly over time. It is perhaps here that literature and the arts assume deeper relevance than we often acknowledge. Such engagement allows individuals to encounter lives beyond their own. And yet, I increasingly encounter resistance even to such ideas. Parents often oppose such initiatives related to literature and the arts in favour of narrow utilitarian pursuits. In hospitals, senior administrators sometimes ask how literature can possibly be connected to medical intervention. The issue is not whether literature cures disease, but whether societies still recognise the importance of cultivating human beings capable of understanding suffering with patience, dignity, and care. Perhaps this is where institutions must rediscover their human side.

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IPL 2026: Time to Rebalance the Game

'viewing' or 'audience burnout'. The uproar and support for franchise teams has also slid, at times due to the cricketing crossroads syndrome between the old and new generation. The connect of audiences with both the old and the new would need to be worked out for future editions.

A point to ponder for all cricket lovers: has IPL taken the wind out of the sails? This year's edition has perhaps challenged the cricket legacy, professionalism and nitty-gritties associated with the game. Twenty overs have seen skyrocketing scores, and sixes are being hit almost as casually as in gully cricket. Bowlers are thrashed, pitches are flat and masala cricket is blooming. Stadiums are full, advertising is going over the top and moolah is filling the coffers. Somewhere, brand cricket, once called the gentleman's game, is losing. Like an infodemic, the social media splurge around cricket in IPL has weakened the nerve of support for the system and the vision to take the spirit forward.

In this tug of war to gain prominence, the IPL mix is becoming worse than instant coffee. The sanctity associated

with the game has been shaken. The twenty-over blitz, with new twists and turns, has overrun the 22-yard philosophy. There is a new fantasy frontier being unveiled in every match. Bowlers are praying for wickets on flat pitches, and each batsman is firing new weapons for quick-fire scores. Add to this the tournament being played in scorching heat. Ambition has overtaken skill, reputation and professional management of the game. How the game plays out, one will have to wait and watch. Brand IPL is dipping in perception. The craze is being lured through new formats of interaction for audiences and spectators, adding fuzzi and buzz to the game. In hindsight, the game is surely suffering.

One hopes that multiple formats do not lead to a steep decline of the real foundations of the game where talent is nurtured. At the end of the day, will masala cricket triumph over traditional cricket? Look at the real-life heroes of the winning T20 World Cup team crumbling, clueless and wayward in thought and action. Bumrah searching for answers, batters firing wrong shots and crumbling. The craze for overseas

stars is surely on the decline. IPL has new danger signs to tackle now.

The challenge for future editions will be to invoke a fresh thought in presenting franchise teams, players and different narratives representing legacy and continuity. A homogenous balance would need to be laid out for building perception, visibility and advertising. Extreme commercialisation has taken IPL to a point where its identity risks being lost in the attention-span ecosystem. While the advertising kitty has improved and more corporates have joined the bandwagon, the problem today for Brand IPL and brand cricket is the overcrowding of the cricketing ecosystem.

The challenge still remains to ensure the legacy, freshness and continuity of cricket as a sport. IPL must and should remain the nursery and talent pool for future cricketing generations. Overexposed cricket is not the solution to this idea. A reworked social media ecosystem for IPL needs to be re-engineered through fresh minds, fresh thought and new parameters and verticals of cricketing content consumption, ideas and patterns.

"Cricket extortion" should not become the IPL mantra. The sport must not be sacrificed at the altar of the money mantra, nor become a victim of showbiz, charisma, 24x7 digital engagement and consistent spectacle without sporting depth.

Despite these concerns, it would be unfair to dismiss the IPL's larger contribution to Indian and global cricket. The league has transformed the cricketing economy, created a powerful platform for young domestic talent, strengthened India's sporting brand and given players exposure to pressure, scale and international competition at a very early stage. It has also expanded cricket's cultural vocabulary by taking the game beyond stadiums into homes, digital platforms, fan communities and everyday conversations. The IPL's strength lies in this very ability to reinvent attention around cricket. The task ahead, therefore, is not to dilute the IPL, but to refine it, to ensure that spectacle does not overpower skill, entertainment does not erase emotion, and commercial success continues to serve the deeper purpose of nurturing cricket.