

# India-Pakistan relations: My fact, your fact

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*Amit Baruah argues that facts are dispensable when it comes to India-Pakistan bilateral relations.*

Some Indians and some Pakistanis are [ready to believe](#) the worst of each other. Most of them are right-wing zealots on either side, only too willing to accept the worst conspiracy theory about the other. So, when the *Times of India* ran a [story](#), quoting R.V.S. Mani, a junior Indian interior ministry official, allegedly “quoting” Satish Verma, a police official, that the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in November 2008 were orchestrated by Delhi, some Pakistanis were [more than willing](#) to buy the story.



And, why shouldn't they? In the [propaganda game](#) of pointing fingers between Indians and Pakistanis, facts are dispensable. That's something I learnt a while ago.

One of the first times I encountered India-Pakistan 'facts' was in May 1997 in Islamabad when the two countries agreed to discuss a slew of issues as part of a [composite dialogue menu](#). One subject on that menu was the “Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project”. The Pakistanis believed that India was constructing a barrage on the Wullar Lake, while the Indians claimed it was a navigation project. Since no agreement on the facts could be reached, both sides simply bungled in the dual barrage/navigation project and got on with the dialogue!

The recent *Times of India* report – which has led many Pakistanis to 'conclude' that the Indian state was 'responsible' for the Mumbai terror strikes – should be seen in the context of a campaign to prevent a proper investigation into deaths resulting from the [Ishrat Jahan](#) 'encounter' in Gujarat in June 2004. India's Intelligence Bureau (IB) has been thwarting attempts by the Central Bureau of Investigation to investigate the role of senior policemen, including a top IB official, in the killing of Jahan, a 19-year-old girl from Mumbai, along with three others. In the bargain, some IB elements have been engaged in a slur campaign, with many of India's leading newspapers and television channels only too happy to oblige.

Verma is a Gujarat police officer who was asked by the Gujarat High Court to assist in the Jahan case. He is therefore at odds with the government of Gujarat, headed by Chief Minister Narendra Modi, whose administration is uninterested in justice for Jahan—as well as the Muslim victims of the 2002 carnage. Given this context, Mani's alleged remarks regarding the Mumbai attacks, that he attributed to Verma, can be interpreted as an attempt to undermine Verma's credibility. But even if, for the sake of argument, one accepted Verma's alleged view on the Indian government's involvement in the 2008 attacks, it remains no more than one individual's opinion.

A [transcript posted](#) on the website of Pakistan's foreign ministry says its High Commission approached the Indian external affairs ministry regarding this matter, only to be told that the "said Indian former official" (i.e., Mani) denied having ever made such comments.

Hawkish Pakistanis now have two choices—either to believe Mani or those Indian officials who have denied his remarks. The sad fact is, Indians and Pakistanis will believe what they want to believe—facts don't get in the way of their assuming the worst.

As I write, a trial is underway in a Rawalpindi court to convict those Pakistani nationals who conspired with [Ajmal Kasab](#) and his accomplices to kill 166 people and injure more than 300 in Mumbai between November 26 and 29, 2008. When such irresponsible stories as the one published in a leading Indian newspaper gain currency, the chances of the Pakistani accused, including Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi – a top commander of Lashkar-e-Taiba, the group accused of masterminding the Mumbai attacks – being convicted reduce further.

Rather than pursue justice for the Mumbai terror attacks – as well as for the hundreds of terror attacks against innocent Pakistanis – some Pakistanis are blaming the Indian state for these strikes. This highlights once again that the religious right in Pakistan and India will only be too happy if the two countries remain at loggerheads with each other.

As it stands, the latest 'facts' on Mumbai may well strengthen the case of LT leader Hafiz Saeed and others who oppose Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's desire to improve bilateral relations with India. India-Pakistan relations are a story of lost and subverted opportunities. What's one more?

We happily exist in denial.

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