

# Can India And Pakistan Ever Live In Peace And Prosperity?

—By Wing Commander Dinesh Mathur, VSM (Retd.)

Broadly speaking, Group Discussion refers to examining a subject or topic thoroughly to reach a conclusion or find a solution, by making a group of people participate in this process. This process means the exchange of ideas by participants on a specific subject or topic. The whole concept is to bring together a unit of people on a common platform to share their ideas. At the same time, Group Discussion is also a method widely used by organisations and educational institutions to assess whether the candidates who wish to join them have certain personality traits or skills which are a must for their employees or students. These skills include Awareness, Effective Communication, Self-confidence, Assertiveness, Active Listening, Leadership, Team Spirit, etc. Organisations often conduct Group Discussions after a written test as part of the screening process to select candidates. Group Discussions are normally categorised into two basic categories : Topic-based Group Discussions and Case-based Group Discussions. While conducting a Topic-based Group Discussion, a specific topic is given to a group of candidates to discuss. The topics provided could be of three kinds : factual topics, controversial topics, and abstract topics. The second category of Group Discussions is Case-based Group Discussion. Here, instead of topics, a case is given to the candidates, which leads to several questions and the candidates are required to discuss these questions. In this process, the problem-solving capabilities of the candidates come to the fore rather easily.

The above topic, which comes in the category of factual topics, was given to a group of candidates during the selection process of the candidates to undergo the MBA course at a prestigious management institute in India. All candidates arrived formally dressed and, after verifying their identity, were



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allotted Identification Numbers and made to sit in a semi-circular sitting arrangement. A detailed briefing was then conducted by three assessors on the Do's and Don'ts to be observed during the process of this Group Discussion. Candidates were given five minutes to recapitulate and jot down some points which they could refer to while discussing the topic. Candidates were asked to conclude the discussion within 25-30 minutes.

Subsequently, the discussion commenced in the following manner :

**Candidate No. 10 :** Good morning, friends. I know, you are all set to discuss this extremely significant topic for our country. It gravely impacts the lives of the people of India and Pakistan. The present tense relations between India and Pakistan are adversely impacting the entire South Asian region. After the British-India partition in August 1947, both these countries had a complex and hostile relationship owing to several historical and political events. The partitioning of British India had resulted in the displacement of up to 15 million

people, with the death toll estimated to have reached between several hundred thousand and one million people as Hindus and Muslims migrated in opposite directions across the border to reach India and Pakistan, respectively. While India emerged as a secular republic, Pakistan became an Islamic republic. However, their relationship was soon overshadowed by the ill effects of partition and territorial disputes, the major disagreement being that of Jammu and Kashmir. Various attempts were made to improve this relationship. However, relations remained frigid mainly due to acts of terrorism by Pakistan. We need to analyse multiple aspects of this fragile relationship in detail and highlight how significant this relationship is for the people of both these countries. You may now express your ideas on this topic.

**Candidate No. 7 :** Friends, Number 10 has adequately introduced this topic. I think that to appreciate the present state of India-Pakistan relations, we need to deal with this topic from a historical perspective. We may only cover developments of the past few years and need not dwell on the long history of India-Pakistan relations. Do you all agree?

**Candidate No. 1 :** Yes, you are right. I agree with you.

**Candidate No. 8 :** I recall that the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had travelled to Islamabad in January 2004 to attend the summit of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) hosted by Pakistan, which marked a powerful breakthrough in the recurrent India-Pakistan logjam. While regional cooperation was certainly the backdrop, the bilateral significance of the visit pushed everything else to the margins. Similarly, much of this sense was invoked in December 1988, too, when the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi



visited Pakistan again for a SAARC Summit. SAARC meetings had sometimes facilitated or, at the least, been the platform for an India-Pakistan dialogue.

**Candidate No. 2 :** Yes, I agree with you. In fact, whenever the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan meet for any conference, people always speculate that they will discuss bilateral relations to improve the present state of tense relations between the two neighbours, who have now become "Distant Neighbours". We are aware that certain past historical and political developments are responsible for the present impasse.

**Candidate No. 5 :** You are right, but in the past, quite a few sincere efforts have been made to improve things, but obviously without much long-term success. These important agreements include the Indus Water Treaty, which was signed in 1960 for the sharing of the Indus River's water. The Tashkent Declaration was signed in 1966 after the 1965 war. The Simla Agreement was signed in 1972 after the 1971 war. Significantly, this agreement established the Line of Control (LoC) as the de facto border between the two countries. The Lahore Declaration was signed in 1999 to continue the progress made in the Simla Agreement. No War Pact was signed in 1981 to ensure enduring peace. I think we need to examine the factors that are responsible for the continued tense relations between the two countries.

**Candidate No. 10 :** I want to say that while in the present atmosphere of distrust between the two nations, chances of bilateral engagement seem rather remote, the importance of peace between the two neighbouring countries cannot be understated. It is felt that both India and Pakistan should actively seek to resolve their mutual suspicions because they share an over 3,000 km-long border, and the present state of affairs adversely impacts the large population of India and Pakistan. Experts note that everything, including Kashmir, can be resolved if there is a will to do so in both countries.

**Candidate No. 8 :** Yes, I agree with you. I can point out why the two nations should actively work towards a working relationship. Firstly, both are nuclear-equipped countries. If India and

Pakistan stumble into a large-scale war, neither side would win. An escalation brings with it the risk of a full-on nuclear exchange, which would be disastrous and amount to mutually assured destruction. Secondly, Pakistan right now needs food security, given the devastating floods which decimated crops. A thaw in ties would result in the resumption of trade between the two countries and bridge the demand-supply shortfall. Pakistan could import food and other items from India at a much lower price to meet its urgent needs.

**Candidate No. 5 :** I would like to add, that South Asia is the world's most populous region and the least integrated and has the largest number of poor people. It is suggested that it could become a region of prosperity for all by jointly implementing ambitious connectivity projects if mutual mistrust is removed. Both countries should look for opportunities that will lead to the connectivity of the entire South Asia, benefiting all. Secondly, both countries should play more cricket and make religious and cultural tourism easier. People who have families and friends on the other side of the border should be able to travel to each others' countries. All said and done, both sides owe it to their people to forge a peaceful path based on coexistence and friendship.

**Candidate No. 3 :** Candidates Nos. 8 and 5 have nicely highlighted why India and Pakistan must live in peace.

**Candidate No. 10 :** Friends, while I understand that both countries should improve their relations, we must also talk about the present ground realities. I want to add that despite the 2021 ceasefire lasting over three years, India and Pakistan are yet to resume the diplomatic ties that were broken after Jammu and Kashmir's special status was changed by the Indian Government in 2019. Any substantial change in the bilateral relations seems quite unlikely at this point due to India's decision to abrogate Article 370 and divide the State into two Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

**Candidate No. 2 :** Yes, these Constitutional changes were in accordance with the traditional ideological position of the BJP. The abrogation of Article 370 has now received the Supreme Court's endorsement, although the Government

has given an assurance that it will restore Statehood to Jammu and Kashmir at an appropriate time. Pakistan has taken a stand that the Constitutional changes vis-a-vis Jammu and Kashmir marked a material change to what it considers an "international dispute". Later, Pakistan's efforts to take the issue to the UN Security Council proved futile, and it was conveyed to it that this matter should be resolved bilaterally.

**Candidate No. 8 :** In addition to what has been said about the ground realities concerning India-Pakistan relations, let me add that the Indus Water Treaty, which has been an important landmark in the India-Pakistan relationship, now faces a storm. It appears the stage is all set for a fresh round of bitterness and confrontation since India has formally invoked an Article of the Indus Water Treaty (IWT), seeking its modification. We know that IWT divided the Indus system with the western rivers of Indus, Jhelum and Chenab assigned to Pakistan and the eastern rivers of Ravi, Sutlej and Beas to India.

**Candidate No. 5 :** Yes, you are right. In this regard, Pakistan has filed a complaint with the Court of Arbitration in The Hague that India's Kishanganga Hydroelectric Project violates the Indus Water Treaty. India's move is not surprising considering Pakistan's obstructionism on projects which India considers valid under IWT. Following its initial response, Pakistan seems to have sidestepped India's demand by stating that all issues can be addressed by the two countries' respective IWT Commissioners. India is unlikely to be satisfied with this response. So, this issue is likely to create more bitterness between India and Pakistan soon.

**Candidate No. 10 :** Historically speaking, there was a hope of a positive change in India and Pakistan relations when the Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi took the initiative of meeting the then Pakistan Prime Minister Mr. Nawaz Sharif in 2015, but Pakistan army sabotaged the effort. Subsequently, there was a promise of better relations when, in 2018, Imran Khan's party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, won the election and he became Pakistan's Prime Minister. At that time, it appeared that Pakistan would focus on the path of economic stability and growth. However, the Pakistan army continued to indulge in terrorism as a



policy against India. This sadly resulted in the Pulwama terrorist attack in February 2019. It was followed by a dangerous confrontation that occurred with India's Balakot air strike. The matter was fortunately defused by international pressure.

**Candidate No. 6 :** Quite right. A very grave situation was defused.

**Candidate No. 8 :** Friends, the fact remains that the Pakistan military has directly ruled the country for over half the time since its creation, with generals like Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan, Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq and Pervez Musharraf ruling for about 43 years. Even when the military was not in power, it exercised its control over the political parties and the government. Pakistan's military continues to be the most powerful and feared organisation in Pakistan.

**Candidate No. 7 :** Yes, you are right. Pakistan's military exerts its impact behind the scenes without accountability, while the government running the administration is still answerable to its people.

**Candidate No. 2 :** I feel strange to realise that the Pakistan army, which was so comprehensively defeated and humiliated by India in the 1971 war, has now become so powerful in Pakistan.

**Candidate No. 5 :** The Pakistan military has become so powerful since it has received substantial support from the US and China over some time. Moreover, General Zia began to Islamise the country and the army. It got a boost when Pakistan became a nuclear power, and the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. America supplied arms, ammunition and F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan to increase its military capability. The US also paid \$2 billion a year to the Pakistan army to support its operations in Afghanistan for quite some time. As a result, the Pakistan Army deals not only with security but also with foreign affairs, industry, and the economy. Moreover, of late, China, which has now huge strategic and economic interests particularly in view of \$62 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, is another crucial impediment in New Delhi-Islamabad ties.

**Candidate No. 7 :** Some experts feel that India-Pakistan relations cannot improve till such time the Pakistan Army is in control of things in that country. They feel that it is in the Pakistan Army's

interest to continue having some tension with India to justify its significance for Pakistan.

**Candidate No. 4 :** Yes, given this, things can only improve if the Pakistan Army decides to make things better since the present state of India-Pakistan relations is adversely impacting the people of the whole region and even beyond.

**Candidate No. 10 :** Friends, I want to discuss yet another important issue that is also a casualty of the current strained India-Pakistan relations. After the SAARC meeting in 2014 in Kathmandu, there has been a freeze on SAARC summitry and high-level meetings. The organisation, though, continues more or less unchanged as a bureaucratic entity, and functional-level meetings and some routine activities take place. But in the absence of summit-level endorsement, it appears rudderless, devoid of ambition, and almost like an appendage whose best days are over. India blames Pakistan for its obstructionist approach towards India for this impasse.

**Candidate No. 9 :** Yes, I agree with you. Existing India-Pakistan relations are squarely responsible for rendering SAARC redundant. This is certainly not a happy situation.

**Candidate No. 8 :** Let me add, against this backdrop, India joined BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), whose ambit covers Nepal and Bhutan alongside Bangladesh and Sri Lanka from SAARC nations to pursue regional connectivity and economic cooperation. However, BIMSTEC prospects are also eroding mainly due to Myanmar's internal problems since 2021, which has meant that its role as a bridge between South and South-East Asia stands compromised.

**Candidate No. 7 :** I want to clarify that India's shift of attention away from SAARC and towards BIMSTEC was a deliberate policy decision, mainly due to disgust from Pakistan's attitude. The present situation indicates that South Asia does not seem equipped to deal with matters concerning regional cooperation, which is a sad commentary on this state of affairs for our region.

**Candidate No. 1 :** Yes, I agree with you.

**Candidate No. 2 :** Friends, I think we have discussed some significant

aspects of this topic. I suggest we should also talk about some measures which could be used to improve the present impasse on India-Pakistan relations.

**Candidate No. 4 :** It's a good suggestion.

**Candidate No. 5 :** Looking at previous efforts in this regard, I feel the relations between India and Pakistan cannot be improved suddenly in one go. We have seen in the past that organising big events at the highest level with much hype and propaganda has not worked. Therefore, there is a need to deal with all contentious issues one by one with a positive mindset in both countries to resolve issues. To achieve this aim, the two countries must review some previous agreements on trade, investment, and territorial disputes. A beginning could be made by reviewing trade agreements and increasing trade between the two countries. This will certainly be welcomed by the people of both nations.

**Candidate No. 10 :** India is firm on its stand that unless Pakistan stops terror activities, there can be no bilateral talks to resolve problems, and Pakistan insists on discussing the Kashmir issue first. Experts opine that unless both countries discuss these subjects with an open mind, how can a way out emerge? Nothing can be achieved by not discussing these ego issues and for how long this impasse should be allowed to continue while the people of both countries continue to suffer.

**Candidate No. 3 :** Yes, you have made a very valid point.

**Candidate No. 8 :** There is a need for leaders of both India and Pakistan to put aside all the misunderstandings, anger, distrust and sectarian and religious divides. They have a golden opportunity to become great statesmen to be remembered by generations to come. They must seek peace and the welfare of their people. What will future generations think about us when they inherit these long pending issues? Friends, there are a thousand reasons why we need peace. For example, the fast-increasing climate crisis does not recognise borders, race, religion, caste, or sect. It does not separate common people from the elites. Neighbouring countries must join hands to deal with such life-threatening global problems.



**Candidate No. 5 :** I want to add that in 2019, India's military spending was \$71.1 billion, while in Pakistan, the declared military expenditure was \$10.3 billion. This huge amount of money could improve the socio-economic conditions in India and Pakistan.

**Candidate No. 9 :** Friends, the time given to us to discuss this topic is over now and we must conclude. Can some friend come forward to conclude?

**Candidate No. 5 :** If you all agree, I can conclude.

**Candidate No. 6 :** Number 5, please go ahead.

**Candidate No. 5 :** Friends, we all had an interesting and thought-provoking discussion on this significant international topic. After a brief introduction, it was decided to deal with this topic in its historical context covering the past few years of developments. Then we highlighted the dire need for both countries to cooperate. This followed a discussion on the present ground realities in both countries. It included the developments regarding the Indus Water Treaty, which could become a point of conflict due to some recent developments. After that, we talked about the political ups and downs in Pakistan and the role of its Army, which has adversely impacted India-Pakistan relations. Subsequently, we also discussed how SAARC has become ineffective due to continued tensions between India and Pakistan. Finally, we also suggested some measures which may be taken to improve the present stressful situation.

Thanks, friends. Have a nice day.

### Critical Analysis of Candidates' Performance :

#### Good : 5, 8 and 10

A Group Discussion round is a selection tool to screen or select candidates. In the given short time, candidates have to display their awareness and other skills, including leadership, etc. Therefore, unless a candidate can show that he/she possesses these qualities better than other group members, he cannot ensure a winning result. During this GD, these three candidates displayed they had good knowledge of this topic. They brought out quite a few new issues on this topic and other candidates did not disagree with them. They spoke with confidence and made a focused contribution to this GD. They also permitted others to contribute. Given these factors, their performance has been assessed as "Good".

#### Average : 2 and 7

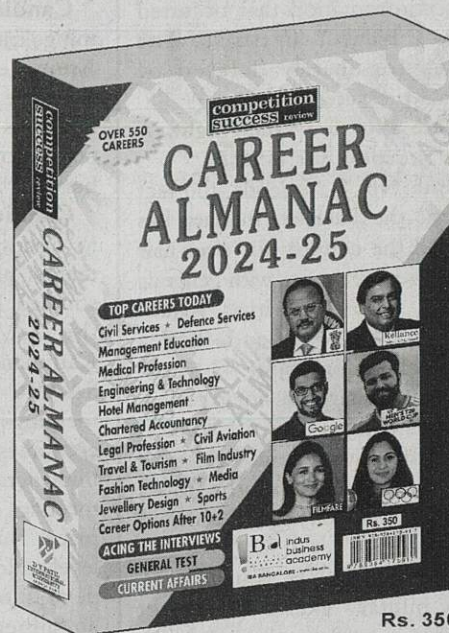
Looking at the performances of these two candidates, it became obvious that they had some knowledge of this topic but did not collect sufficient information to put up a winning performance. They lacked self-confidence but guided the discussion to proceed in the desired direction. They spoke a few times but their contribution remained limited only. It was felt that, but for their lack of preparation, they were capable of putting up a much better performance. Because of all this, their performance has been assessed as "Average".

#### Below Average : 1, 3, 4, 6 and 9

It became apparent that these candidates had decided to come for the Group Discussion, without making much effort to prepare this well-discussed topic. Due to their inadequate preparation, they also did not possess the self-confidence to speak. Their contribution to this GD was barely visible. They were seen to be only agreeing or appreciating other candidates, who were actively participating in this discussion. Owing to all these reasons, their performance remained "Below Average".

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