Subsiding Indo-Pak Tensions

What is the issue?

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- After weeks of an intense diplomatic stand-off, tensions seem to be easing between India and Pakistan, which was visible symbolic gestures.
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- While the symbolism is positive, the countries need to address the important underlying issues to prevent a future crisis.
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What are the recent symbolic gestures?

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- Pakistan had recalled its High Commissioner to India due to mounting tensions, but he been returned in time to host the ‘Pakistan National Day’ reception in New Delhi.
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- Responding positively, Indian government has stated that Minister of state for Agriculture Mr. Gajendra Singh Shekhawat would attend the reception.
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- Also, Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan was in attendance at the military parade in Islamabad to mark the same occasion.
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- Also, a sustained calmness has returned to the LoC which saw intense exchange of fire over the recent months.
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- More significantly, despite the usual hard-line towed by military, the Pakistan’s army chief, General Bajwa had indicated a desire to normalise ties with India.
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- While these are signs from both sides that normalcy is returning, discussions for eliminating factors that precipitated the crisis is needed.
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- Additionally, Pakistan should also work to curtail anti-India elements within

its borders to further its outreach towards India.
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What caused the diplomatic crisis?

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- **Utilities -** The Pakistani authorities are said to have disrupted contractor who were working on the Indian diplomatic residential complex in Islamabad.
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- India argues that its construction plans were duly authorised and that Pakistan was simply seeking trouble by intervening on trivial pretexts.
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- Contrarily, Pakistan argues that while the Indian complex in Islamabad is in an advanced state of construction, Pakistani diplomatic complex in Delhi hasn't even been approved by authorities for long.
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- **Club membership -** Pakistan has refused to admit Indian diplomats to the recreational clubs like the "Islamabad Club".
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- This is said to be in retaliation to corresponding Indian clubs charging Pakistani diplomats exorbitant amounts for membership.
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- Interesting, India's contention that the government cannot interfere with how private clubs manage their membership procedures hasn't cut any ice.
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- Rather, Pakistan had called for a "Memorandum of Understanding" for reciprocal club memberships for each other's diplomats.
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- **The backdrop –** In addition to the above, ceasefire violations along the LoC and the resultant political rhetoric intensified the diplomatic standoff.
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- Consequently, a series of actions and counter-actions that amounted to harassment of each other's diplomatic personnels unfolded.
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- These were violations of 'Vienna Convention of diplomatic protection – 1961' and it is also concerning that routine disagreements were allowed to escalate.
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How did the previous standoff span out?

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- During the initial years of the insurgency in Kashmir in 1990’s there were heightened fears of an India-Pakistan military escalation.
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- The situation was far more tense that the current and had become particularly difficult for diplomats to work in each other’s countries.
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- But despite this, both countires managed to reach an agreement to protect each other’s diplomatic personnels from harrasment.
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- Notably, lower ranked officials of the host country usually aggravate tensions as they aren’t properly informed on how to deal with enemy diplomats.
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- While efforts to percolate the ‘code of conduct’ in dealing with diplomats have paid off, habitual mistreatment in certain cases continues nevertheless.
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How should India and Pakistan treat spies?

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- **The Trend -** India and Pakistan have claimed that they do not carry out espionage, despite operatives being caught on both sides.
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- If an act of spying is established (or strongly suspected) in custody, then spies are subjected to the most inhumane forms of torture by the captors.
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- Hence, captured spies routinely pretend ignorance, even though when released from custody, they return home and openly brag about their espionage.
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- All counties involve in spying and to claim otherwise would be laughable, which hence mandates commissioning standard policy for dealing with spies.
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- **Way forward -** While disrupting under-cover operatives is essential, torturing spies doesn’t spell well for a humanitarian political setup.
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- Hence an agreement on punitive action espionage or exchange of spies like the ones during the cold war could be co-opted.
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- Hypernationalism and grandstanding can make professional handling of

these issues difficult and hence a rationalistic approach is needed.
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Are the communication networks functional?

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- The state of communication between India and Pakistan is at its lowest ebb in more than a decade and these needs to be revived.
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- Both countries have ‘Director-General of Military Operations’, who coordinate for easing border tensions, but they didn’t meet recently despite constant ceasefire violations.
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- Contacts between the respective High Commissions and the host governments have largely been through “summons, and stern warnings”.
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- Additionally, even planned high-level political engagements have been called off and even the discrete diplomatic initiatives have been a damper.
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- Reviving engagements across domains is a high priority for sustaining peace.
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Source: The Hindu

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