

# No longer in the Line of Fire

League stuck to their stand, the INC kept compromising, the British had to leave – it happened the same way and India was left divided. But, the aim was fulfilled – the

Pakistanis felt the frustrations of the INC and the Indians, the stubbornness of the Muslim League.

## Bandeya ho

Paigaam's meet had many such activities, each teaching great lessons: whether it is Jones and Miller teaching the importance of communication, or honest documentaries such as *The Final Solution* illuminating a bitter truth, readings of history textbooks from the two sides that leave us wonder-

dering which side of the tales are true, or the cricket matches and the amazing race making us wonder just why we must know.

## Operation Vijay

Paigaam comes as a revelation in these times of continued misunderstanding. They believe in a voice

they must keep echoing till entire populations hear the sincerity in it. No wonder it won the Cambridge Award for the best peace initiative this year. Paigaam occurs every year, with students, activities and ways of keeping the flame alive.

Says Revanth Baddam, a student, "You ask me if the Indo-Pak relations affects me. Of course they do. But the effect they have on me is different: I care for the lives getting lost, not if the lives Indian or Pakistani."

Even if comprising only a handful of students or being an idea that's only in germination, it tells you, just like we've learnt not to judge a book by its cover, perhaps it's time for us to stop judging a person by the passport he holds.

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Students from Pakistan and Bangladesh and India, including some from the city, came together to form one view, one mission and one Paigaam of peace



BEYOND BARRIERS: Students across borders get to know each other in an informal setting

IPSITA AGARWAL  
Times News Network

## Am I Indian or Pakistani?

If I were born 60 years ago, it wouldn't have made a difference: there wasn't a line across the thin strip of land back then. The British left, but left a permanent scar dividing a country and its countrymen. Somehow along the way, with every terror attack, every war and every misunderstanding, the gap widened, giving way to chaos and hatred.

It is precisely the understanding of this situation that gave rise to a quiet yet confident voice a year ago, called Paigaam. This voice took the form of a student-organised peace conference, a reunion of teenagers from across the border. And be-

tween 12-18 July this year, these 60 students lived together as friends in Mumbai.

## 'The enemy'

"Look at the Mecca Masjid blast, look at the Gokul Chaat or Lumbini park blasts. Look at Hyderabad or at Kashmir. Do you think we can be friends with countries that kill our people? Do you still believe a conference that lasts a few days is going to erase from our minds their deeds over the last sixty years?" retorts a fellow Hyderabad.

Well, it is a valid question: how can a group of 16-year olds possibly solve a conflict that governments have failed to? The answer is: they won't; it's not in their hands, as yet. They just aim to erase pre-conceived notions that have been plant-

ed in their minds ever since they ran to their *dada* to hear of 'the enemy.' They aim to build a long lasting relationship with those from across that border and this is how they do so:

## Pride and prejudice

In one of the many interesting group activities over these few days, a group of seven strangers were seated on a round-table with a label stuck on each of their foreheads, literally. They didn't know what their own label read, but could clearly see the characteristics, such as 'bossy' or 'pessimistic,' on everyone else. Now, they had a virtual decision to make: how would they get off a deserted island? The decision never came; they got into a fight, treated each other by their labels and finally ended up laughing together.

This game played at Paigaam was an exercise to understand

how labelling and stereotyping occurs! Not one person could look beyond the stereotype. Point being, not much moves when countries indulge in the same stereotyping.

## Repeating history

In another exercise, Indians played the part of the Muslim League; Pakistanis made up the Indian National Congress, while some others stepped in as British representatives. They were back in time, in 1946, trying to decide the fate of the then India. A mighty task for mighty hearts, but now undertaken by teenagers. The Muslim

If I hadn't been curious to see others like me, better than me, I would never have experienced friendship that can surpass all borders

—Aditi Ratho,  
Indian participant

Why I waved goodbye to Mumbai with tears in my eyes, I can never explain. What had been the land of the 'enemy' for nearly 18 years suddenly seemed like home

—Syed Taha,  
Pakistani participant

