

Relations 1971–1999: From East Pakistan to Kargil

The **East Pakistan crisis** stemmed from deep political, cultural, and economic inequalities between East and West Pakistan. The **Awami League**, led by **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**, won a majority in the 1970 general elections but was denied power. The central government's refusal led to massive protests. Pakistan's military launched **Operation Searchlight**, causing immense civilian casualties. India, hosting millions of refugees, intervened militarily in December 1971. After 13 days of war, **Pakistan surrendered**, resulting in the **creation of Bangladesh**. This was one of the most significant turning points in Pakistan's history.

Aftermath of the 1971 War

The 1971 defeat was a **national trauma** for Pakistan. It lost half of its territory and population. The war discredited the military and brought **Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto** to power, who sought to rebuild morale and national unity. Bhutto's policies included **Islamic socialism**, **nationalization**, and drafting the **1973 Constitution**. The **Simla Agreement (1972)** with India was signed to normalize relations and promote peaceful coexistence. Pakistan began focusing on **self-reliance and nuclear development** to prevent future vulnerabilities. The 1971 loss redefined Pakistan's strategic, political, and psychological outlook.

Improved Relations with India

The **Simla Agreement** was a landmark peace accord between **Indira Gandhi** and **Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto**. It emphasized **bilateral resolution** of disputes and reaffirmed the **Line of Control (LoC)** in Kashmir. In the following years, both sides made cautious efforts toward peace through **trade, cultural exchanges**, and **regional cooperation** under **SAARC**. However, **deep mistrust** persisted, particularly over Kashmir and cross-border militancy. Although relations improved at intervals, mutual suspicion and domestic politics prevented long-lasting reconciliation.

The Siachen Glacier Dispute

The **Siachen Glacier**, located in the **Karakoram Range**, became a new flashpoint in 1984 when **India occupied key positions** on the glacier. Pakistan viewed this as a breach of earlier agreements, especially the **Simla Agreement**. Both nations deployed thousands of troops at altitudes exceeding 20,000 feet, enduring **harsh weather and high casualties**. Most deaths occurred due to frostbite and avalanches rather than direct combat. Despite repeated diplomatic talks, no **demilitarization** has been achieved. The Siachen conflict remains a **symbol of military endurance and geopolitical rivalry**.

The Kargil Conflict (1999)

The **Kargil War** was fought from **May to July 1999**, when Pakistani soldiers and Kashmiri militants infiltrated Indian positions across the **LoC**. India responded with a full military assault to reclaim occupied heights. The conflict occurred just a year after the **Lahore Declaration**, which had raised hopes for peace. Under intense **international pressure**, particularly from **U.S.**

President Bill Clinton, Pakistan was forced to withdraw. The episode damaged Pakistan's credibility and weakened **Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's** government, while exposing tensions between civilian and military leadership.

Conclusion

Between **1971 and 1999**, Pakistan's relations with India fluctuated between **war and peace efforts**. The **loss of East Pakistan, Simla Agreement, Siachen dispute**, and **Kargil conflict** define this complex era. Despite moments of cooperation, **deep mistrust, territorial disputes, and military dominance** prevented stable peace. These decades taught that **true regional harmony** can only be achieved through sustained dialogue, political maturity, and mutual respect for sovereignty and people's aspirations.