

Towards an India-Pakistan Alliance?

President Zardari Proposes India-Pakistan Economic Union

By [Iftikhar Gilani](#)

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NEW DELHI: Pakistan is in a position to turn South Asia into a nuclear weapon-free zone, President Asif Ali Zardari said on Saturday.

Addressing the Hindustan Times Summit 2008 through video-conferencing from Islamabad, Zardari asked, "I can get around my parliament to this view, but can you get around the Indian parliament to this view."

Asserting he was against the use of nuclear weapons and that Pakistan would not use them first, the president said, "We do not hope to get into any position where nuclear weapons have any use."

To a question about who the disputed region of Kashmir belonged to, the president said it belonged to the people of Kashmir. Zardari asserted Pakistan had nothing to do with the ongoing assembly elections in Indian-held Kashmir (IHK). Asked if his government would ensure that the elections pass off peacefully, the president replied that the Pakistan government and his Pakistan People's Party had a 'hands off' policy on India.

Zardari urged opening the Kashmir issue to public debate in India and Pakistan and letting the people decide the future of IHK.

Zardari said he did not feel threatened by India and India should not feel threatened by Pakistan. He talked about taking bilateral relations to a new level. He also envisaged forging an economic union.

Zardari started the video conference by stating that "every Indian in his heart is a little Pakistani and every Pakistani is in his heart a little Indian" and as such he was speaking not only as Pakistan's president but also as a little Indian.

Visa: Asked about the visa problem faced by Indians and Pakistanis in travelling to each other's country, Zardari said he was hopeful of finding a 'methodological solution' where no passport would be required to cross the border.

"Someone having an e-card or something else can show it at the border and walk in," he said.

The president said any economic help from India would be appreciated. "I will say yes. That would be welcome," he responded when asked whether he would accept Indian help as offered by Singh to help Pakistan out of the economic morass. "Let us open borders for trade and mutually beneficial activities. If you can trade with China, why not with

Pakistan?" he asked the Indian audience.

Zardari said he believed in the philosophy of trade and not aid.

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