



PRESS RELEASE

India and Pakistan must continue to engage

The Ananta Aspen Centre convened a first of its kind interaction between **Former High Commissioners of Pakistan to India and India to Pakistan** in New Delhi. The Delegation consisted of Mr. K. Shankar Bajpai, Mr. Salman Bashir, Mr. Satish Chandra, Mr. Aziz Ahmad Khan, Dr. Humayun Khan, Mr. Riaz H. Khokhar, Mr. S K Lambah, Mr. Shahid Malik, Mr. Shivshankar Menon, Mr. Satyabrata Pal, Mr. G. Parthasarathy, Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Mr. T .C. A Raghavan, Mr. Sharat Sabharwal, and K. Natwar Singh.

It was a special discussion that brought together diplomats from both sides of the border who have served in each other's country since independence. The general consensus was that such meetings should not be one-off events but continue in the future also.

New Delhi, 29th April 2016: On the sidelines of this meeting, Ananta Aspen Centre organized a discussion between select participants on "India-Pakistan Relations" moderated by Mr. Karan Thapar. The question remained- Is the relationship moving forward, standstill or inching backwards?

On the future of India- Pakistan relationship Mr. **Ashraf Jehangir Qazi** said, "we are living in interesting times. The relationship between India and Pakistan has never been incident free. We are at a cross-road where we don't know whether the relations will progress forward or regress, as has happened in the past. In such a situation it is important to restore trust."

In the context of Pathankot attack and recent visit of Pakistan's Joint Investigation Team which led to a lot of uproar in India, Mr. **Shivshankar Menon** said, "we are getting mixed signals from Pakistan since Pathankot. It is very early to say what Islamabad's stance is on the incident. On a positive note, there exists the potential to move things forward on it, provided the political will exists. But there is the broader question of terrorism that looms large. Scope for both sides to progress will only be possible if only there is political will."

The discussion raised questions on the sudden arrest of alleged Indian spy Kulbhushan Jadhav, Mr. **Salman Bashir** said, "contact between the NSAs helps contain explosion of incidents like Pathankot. In the case of Kulbhushan Jadhav both sides should cooperate in the investigation. More communication on such incidents is in the interest of both the countries. It is imperative for both India and Pakistan to be satisfied with the ongoing investigation."

Mr. **G. Parthasarathy** agreed with his Pakistani counterparts that "espionage should never become a cover for terrorism." He believes that "the public opinion at present is not in favour of Pakistan. People have had enough of terrorism. PM Modi has no political space to move. Hence, it is in our interest to keep talks away from the glare of media. Let the intelligence chiefs and DGMOs meet.

Mr. **S K Lambah** was of the view that "despite the popular disappointment over the perceived failure of the recent FS talks, the fact that they met is important as there was no contact since the Pathankot incident." On the way forward, he said that "dialogue with Pakistan cannot make progress unless we have peace on the border, no terrorism, an early resolution of 26/11 trials and punishing the guilty, be they state or non-state actors."

Mr. **Aziz Ahmad Khan** differed with his colleagues on the question of civil-military relations in Pakistan. He was of the opinion that “army plays an important role in Pakistani politics. They have been successful in security its people and hence have a say in national security policymaking.”

The general consensus was in the interest of both the countries to continue talks at all levels. In this regard the meeting between the NSAs away from the media glare was a step in the right direction. As neighbours we have no option but to be sensitive towards each other which will not be possible unless we take cognizance of the core issues. We should never talk out of fear but we should never fear talk.

About Ananta Aspen Centre

An independent organization, Ananta Aspen Centre is registered under the Indian Trust Act. It focuses on leadership development and encourages frank and open dialogue on the most important issues facing Indian society, to help foster its transformation. The Centre also engages civil society, business, governments and other key stakeholders on issues of importance to India’s development, foreign policy, strategic affairs and national security.

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