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Record of the Press Briefing by Spokesperson on 12 April 2018

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Opening Remarks

I begin this Press Briefing by welcoming you all. It is for the first time in the history of Pakistan's Foreign Office that the spokesperson is doing his weekly media briefing from outside Pakistan. This is being streamed live to the reporters sitting in the MOFA auditorium. It is an added pleasure to hold this session from Beijing, the heart of Pakistan's most important strategic partner, China. I am here for an event of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) of which Pakistan recently assumed full membership.

We will be increasingly making use of latest technologies to reach out to our audience, both in Pakistan and abroad, in an effective and timely manner.

Let me begin by giving a brief roundup of activities on the foreign policy front:

Prime Minister, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi led Pakistani delegation to Boao Forum in Sanya, China from 08-10 April 2018. He held a series of successful bilateral meetings on the sidelines with world leaders and Heads of important corporate organizations.

Prime Minister held a bilateral meeting with President Xi Jinping of China. He congratulated President Xi on his re-election as the President of the People's Republic of China. Both sides exchanged comprehensive in-depth views on enhancing the bilateral cooperation. Prime Minister briefed President Xi on Pakistan's efforts for the successful implementation of CPEC. He also apprised President Xi on the rapidly deteriorating situation in Indian occupied Kashmir. President Xi termed Pakistan as the pillar for regional peace and stability. He appreciated Pakistan's contribution in addressing the challenge of terrorism and also commended Pakistan's relentless efforts for working towards a peaceful neighbourhood.

On the sidelines, Prime Minister met with UN Secretary General and expressed grave concern at the grave situation in Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IoK) and the mindless killing spree of innocent Kashmiris by Indian occupation forces. The Prime Minister called upon the UN to play its part in stopping Indian atrocities being inflicted upon innocent Kashmiris in the Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. The UN Secretary General acknowledged Pakistan's efforts towards counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance to the Afghan refugees and the UN peacekeeping operations. He maintained that he had been advocating the need for a serious dialogue on the Jammu and Kashmir dispute.

The Prime Minister also met with the Federal Chancellor of Austria, Mr. Sebastian Kurz, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Ms. Carrie Lam, the Administrator of National Energy Administration (NEA) of China, Mr. Nuer Baikeli and the Executive Chairman of Alibaba Group Mr. Jack Ma.

Indian Deputy High Commissioner Mr. J.P. Singh was summoned to the Foreign Office on 07 April 2018 over unprovoked ceasefire violations by the Indian occupation forces along the Line of Control, resulting in the shahadat of an innocent civilian lady (30 years old Rudeba Kauser) while injuring her three sisters. The Indian forces are continuously targeting civilian populated areas with heavy weapons along the Line of Control and the Working boundary. In 2018, the Indian forces have carried out more than 900 ceasefire violations, resulting in the shahadat of 21 innocent civilians, while injuring 90 others.

The Kashmir Solidarity Day was observed all across Pakistan on 06 April 2018 to express solidarity with our Kashmiri brothers and sisters. The Government and the people of Pakistan reaffirm their continued and resolute moral, diplomatic and political support to the oppressed people of Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir in their valiant struggle for realizing the fundamental right to self-determination.

Indian brutalities in IoK continued after the massacre of over 20 Kashmiris last week. The Indian occupation forces martyred another four Kashmiris this week, including 16-year old Bilal Ahmad Tantray, 25-year-old Sharjeel Ahmad Sheikh, Faisal Ilahi and 21-year old B.Tech final year student, Musavir Hassan Wani in Kulgam and Pulwama areas of Indian occupied Jammu & Kashmir. The "Shopian Chalo" March announced by the Joint Resistance Leadership was forcibly attacked by Indian occupation forces. The Hurriyat leaders have been physically stopped from moving out of their residences and placed into custody.

In a chain of inhuman Indian atrocities, Hurriyat leadership has been barred from visiting the bereaved families. Indian forces use the draconian AFSPA to first kill and wound innocent Kashmiris on trumped up charges and then clamp curfew and internet restrictions to prevent the voices of the bereaved from reaching the international community. The Indian media has sought to create the false impression that life is 'limping back' to normal, denying the stark reality of the continuing Indian crackdown and the protest by innocent Kashmiris bearing the brunt of brutal Indian state terrorism.

The silence of the Indian Government and failure to acknowledge, let alone accept, the failure of the heinous Indian atrocities to suppress the valiant Kashmiris indicates its dissociation from reality. This ostrich tactic will only aggravate the situation instead of resolving it. Pakistan calls upon the international community to be cognizant of its responsibilities in the matter and urge India to facilitate the visit of independent Fact Finding teams of OHCHR and IPHRC to look into the gross human rights violations in IoK being perpetrated by Indian occupation forces and to fulfill its obligations under UN Security Council resolutions on Kashmir.

At the invitation of President Ashraf Ghani, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi visited Kabul on 06 April 2018. Both leaders discussed the entire gamut of Pak-Afghan relations including peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan, counter-terrorism, return of Afghan refugees, bilateral trade and regional connectivity. They agreed on following key principles to operationalize the working groups under Afghanistan - Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS):

o Pakistan to support the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation:

o The two countries to undertake effective actions against fugitives and the irreconcilable elements posing security threats to either of the two countries;

o Both countries to commit to deny use of their respective territory by any country, network, group or individuals for anti-state activities against either country;

o To put in place a joint supervision, coordination and confirmation mechanism through Liaison Officers (LOs) for realization of the agreed actions;

o The two countries commit to avoid territorial and aerial violations of each other's territory;

o The two countries to avoid public blame game and instead use APAPPS cooperation mechanisms to respond to mutual issues of contention and concerns; and

o Establish Working Groups and necessary cooperation mechanism as per APAPPS for full implementation of the APAPPS and the above mutually reinforcing principles.

Prime Minister of Pakistan announced a gift of 40 thousand tons wheat for the Afghan people. He also announced waiver of additional regulatory duty on Afghan exports to Pakistan to help lift the Afghan economy. The two sides also concurred to initiate discussions on consular matters and exchange of civilian prisoners.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister, Dr Mussadiq Malik, led Pakistani delegation to the Ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Azerbaijan on 06 April. He drew attention to the seven decades of non-implementation of UN Security Council resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir.

Separately, Pakistan rejected callous and heartless attempts of certain sections of the Afghan media to exploit the tragic bombing at the Kunduz seminary to cast baseless aspersions and insinuations against Pakistan. This attempt was made by segments that do not want good relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Pakistan also rejects the baseless Afghan allegations of violation of its airspace and air raids inside Afghan territory by Pakistan Air Force. Pakistan urges Afghanistan to focus on taking effective counter-terrorism actions including plugging of large gaps existing along the Afghan side of Pakistan-Afghanistan border to prevent the targeting of Pakistani civilians and security forces by terrorists from Afghan soil. As agreed during PM Abbasi's visit it is important to refrain from blame game.

Now the Floor is open for Questions

Question

Despite ceaseless efforts by the Government of Pakistan in general and the Foreign Office in particular, the world seems to turn a deaf ear to the plight of innocent Kashmiris at the hands of Indian barbarity, which the Indians are continuing with impunity due to international community's lack of concern. What other options does Pakistan have to convince the world to come to rescue of our Kashmiri brothers and sisters? (Syed Mohsin Raza - ASAS Group of Publications)

Answer

Pakistan has, and will tirelessly continue to highlight the plight of innocent Kashmiris at the hands of Indian occupation forces at all relevant forums, until Indian human rights atrocities come to a complete halt, and the Jammu & Kashmir dispute is resolved in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions and the aspirations of the Kashmiri people

After the recent surge in barbaric and callous killing spree by India in Indian occupied Jammu & Kashmir during the last few days, Pakistan has actively reached out to regional & global partners. Our Foreign Minister spoke to the Foreign Ministers of Iran and Turkey and Secretary General OIC, all of whom issued statements in the matter. Also, the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) and UN Secretary General issued statements, condemning the killing of innocent Kashmiris. We will continue to carry out efforts to keep the Jammu & Kashmir dispute alive in the world's conscience until its amicable resolution in accordance with UNSC Resolutions and wishes of the Kashmiri people.

Question

Recently, our Defence Minister visited Russia. Please share the details of his visit to Russia. Have any agreements been signed between the two sides? What is the current trajectory of Pak-Russia bilateral relations?

Second, we have heard reports that from 01 May 2018, US is making a law because of which Pakistani diplomats stationed in the US will be required to take NoC from the State Department if they want to travel outside the radius of 45 KM from Washington. How do you comment on these reports (Salman Hashmi - Forensic Eye)

Supplementary Questions

The State Department is reported to have firmed up this law against Pakistani diplomats due to alleged restrictions on the movement of US diplomats in Islamabad, to FATA, Karachi and other areas, and that the US is only doing this in reciprocity. Your comments please! (Shabbir Waghra - PTV World)

What is the update on the investigations involving the US diplomat, who killed a Pakistani national last week? It is ironic that our Prime Minister is screened thoroughly without protocols at an airport in the US, while a Pakistani national has been killed for more than a week and no action has been taken so far? (Fakhar Rahman - SAMAA TV)

Answer

Regarding your first question, the Minister for Defence, Mr. Khurram Dastagir Khan visited Russia to attend the 7th Moscow Security Conference from 4-6 April, 2018. The visit of the Defence Minister was part of Pakistan - Russia regular interaction on security matters. The Defence Minister has been attending the Moscow Security Conference since the last four years. He met senior officials of relevant departments and Ministries and discussed issues of mutual interest and bilateral defence cooperation. The Defence Minister also held meetings with his counterparts of friendly countries, on the sidelines.

Regarding the restrictions on Pakistani diplomats, we do not comment on media reports.

On the last question, on 7th April, at around 1500 hours, a US Embassy vehicle driven by Colonel Joseph Emanuel Hall, Defense and Air Attache of the US Embassy in Islamabad, was involved in a car accident on the 7th Avenue-Margalla Road junction that killed the motorcyclist (Mr. Ateeq Baig) on the spot and injured the co-rider (Mr. Raheel). FIR has been lodged and matter is under investigation at this stage. The Foreign Secretary has conveyed to the US Ambassador that justice will take its course in accordance with the letter of the land and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961. The US Ambassador has assured the Foreign Secretary of full cooperation in this issue. We await results of investigations before discussing the issue any further.

Question

What is Pakistan's position on the current Syrian crisis, as President Trump has recently threatened of punitive measures, and there are rumors of an impending war? (Naveed Akbar - Daily Dunya)

Answer

We do not comment on interstate relations. Pakistan's position on the situation in Syria is based on the principles of international law, the UN Charter and the rules of interstate conduct with special focus on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria.

Question

When is Pakistan going to hold the next SAARC Summit? Reportedly, India has hinted at pulling out of the next SAARC Summit, scheduled to be held in Pakistan. How do you see the Indian intransigence to scuttle the forum that is aimed at the welfare of the people of the region? (Khawaja Nayyar Iqbal - Daily Kashmir Post)

Answer

As you are aware, the SAARC Summit was regrettably scuttled by India. Pakistan condemns the attempt to bring the bilateral issues into multilateral forums. Indian belligerence has brought this multilateral forum to a halt, holding hostage the development and economic progress of the whole region. We expect to hold the, already delayed Summit in Islamabad, at the earliest.

Question

How do you analyze the recent visit of Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi to Kabul? It has been reported that despite cordiality between the two sides, trust deficit persists. From the Foreign Office's point of view, how fruitful was the meetings? (Essa Naqvi - Dunya News)

Answer

At the invitation of the President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi undertook a daylong visit to Kabul. The Prime Minister held in-depth consultations on a whole range of bilateral relations and regional situation with President Ghani and the Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah.

The Prime Minister reiterated Pakistan's support for President Ghani's vision for peace and offer of peace talks to the Taliban. The two sides reaffirmed their commitment for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process, improvement of bilateral trade, avoidance of blame game, facilitating people to people contacts, cultural exchanges, security and counter-terrorism cooperation. They also agreed to finalize MoUs on connectivity projects between the two countries, operationalize the working group of APAPPS, initiate discussions on exchange of civilian prisoners and working together for eradication of polio.

The Afghan leadership appreciated Prime Minister's announcement to waive additional regulatory duty on Afghan exports to Pakistan and the gift of 40 thousand tons of wheat for our Afghan brethren. Overall, it was a substantive and successful visit.

Question

Reportedly, Afghan local officials in Kunar claim that more than four hundred rockets have been fired by Pakistan, yesterday. One person has reportedly been killed. Your comments, please. (Shabbir Wagara - PTV World)

Answer

I have addressed this question before as well. As you know, we eliminated TTP, JuA, LI and other terrorist organizations from our soil through operation Zarb-e-Azb. They have relocated themselves in Afghanistan. Daesh too has made sanctuaries on Afghan side of the Pak-Afghan border. These terrorist groups regularly undertake cross-border raids on our posts. On 7th April one of our soldiers was martyred in a sniper fire from Afghan territory. Again on 8th April one soldier was martyred and five others, including an officer, were injured in a cross-border raid by terrorists based in Afghan territory.

Our troops only respond when they are under attack by these terrorist groups. Our response - as mentioned many times before - is always directed to the point of origin. We respect Afghanistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We neither step into Afghan soil, nor fire inside its territory.

I would also like to add that this issue has been addressed in some locations where Afghan forces have taken action against terrorist sanctuaries along the border and deployed troops. We urge Afghanistan to take similar actions on other terrorist infested areas to fully address this issue. We have shared actionable intelligence with the Afghan side about the hideouts of terrorists along the Pak-Afg border.

Question

You mentioned that you have no comments to offer on the recent reports concerning restrictions on the movement of Pakistani diplomats in the US, does that mean that no such move is taking place? (Ali Hussain - Business Recorder)

Answer

I have already responded to this question.

Question

Regarding the appointment of Mr. Ali Jahangir Siddique as Ambassador-designate to the US, has the US informed us of its decision? Moreover, since his appointment is subjudice Islamabad High Court, and the Foreign Secretary was also called to the court to submit its response, is it that the Foreign Office will once again hide behind the pretext that his was a political appointment? (Auon Sherazi - Such TV)

Answer

We have already stated our position in the matter.

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