

PRESS RELEASE
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**A great leap forward needed in Indo-Pak bilateral relations, say participants
of Delhi Dialogue**

DELHI: A great leap forward was needed to break the current impasse in the Indo-Pak bilateral engagement, said participants of the Delhi Dialogue, a bilateral Track-II conference organized by Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation and Jinnah Institute in New Delhi from 18-19th January. Participants from India and Pakistan expressed dissatisfaction with the “glacial” progress on all aspects of the bilateral relationship and felt that although normalization of ties was as yet not possible, there was need for meaningful “grand gestures” from both sides to make this happen. It was also said that incremental steps towards regional peace were welcome, but the bilateral relationship was still seen to be vulnerable to episodic events that could derail the ongoing dialogue between the two countries.

Participants from India and Pakistan observed that the “uninterrupted and unintermittible” dialogue could be realized fully if terrorism did not pose as big a threat. The two day conference was attended by senior Indian and Pakistani diplomats, legislators, journalists, policy experts and academics who discussed bilateral trade and economic integration, the situation in Afghanistan, Kashmir, terrorism and extremism, and the role of media in mitigating conflict, with a view to devising policy solutions to these challenges in both countries. On trade and economic integration, it was seen that both countries had much to gain from the recently concluded economic CBMs. However, participants debated whether the benefits will be skewed in India’s favour or would Pakistan have more to benefit from a liberalized trade regime. It was felt that expanding trade with India will be more advantageous to Pakistan, whereas India will have to play a bigger role in this dynamic for regional trade to achieve the potential it has. It was pointed out that a certain degree of trade determinism was noticeable in discussions involving Indo-Pak economic engagement, whereby it was overlooked that trade could also become a source of contention in days to come. While the benefits of expanding trade may be obvious, it should also be seen that political roadblocks had so far hindered the growth of trade in the region and may continue to do so.

Participants pointed out the need for a bilateral cooperative security framework on Afghanistan. It was seen that Afghanistan was turning out to be a new faultline in Indo-Pak relations and that the degree to which both countries could find strategic accommodation in Afghanistan depended on progress in the official dialogue. It was agreed that both countries must take into account each other’s concerns in Afghanistan and ensure that their policies do not lead to strategic

anxiety or conflict escalation. It was suggested that India and Pakistan jointly assist in the training of the Afghan National Security Forces and other development projects in ways that create opportunity for cooperation.

In a session on Kashmir, it was observed that any solution to Afghanistan was linked to the resolution of the Kashmir issue. There was a feeling that despite the CBMs on cross-LoC trade earlier this year, Kashmir had been left on the back burner by both India and Pakistan. This was certainly the feeling among Kashmiri youth who had been hopeful that the Gilani-Singh talks would bring about results, but so far neither the back channel nor the promised peace process had been resumed. Participants discussed the non-violent freedom movement going on in Kashmir, demographic, social and political changes in the valley and human rights concerns.

The role of media in conflict mitigation was also discussed. Participants spoke about how media was the “drawing board” where public discourse was constructed and that the media in both India and Pakistan had a responsibility to relay news with accuracy and responsibility. Participants felt that media was often criticized as a driver of conflict in the Indo-Pak context, whereas much of the blame could be laid on bilateral mistrust which the media portrayed. It was also stated that there needs to be far greater interaction between media persons from India and Pakistan to allow impressions to change. Participants noted that terrorism and extremism do not take place in a vacuum and are products of other political and social causes. In the Indo-Pak context, terrorism and extremism in particular were seen to pose the greatest threat to the social fabric. Participants shared statistics on terrorism and extremism and observed that broad social engagement within society was one way to combat these challenges so that the “constituencies of peace” could be identified and expanded against the onslaught of extremism.

The Pakistani delegates of the Islamabad Dialogue included Executive Director Jinnah Institute Ejaz Haider, former Foreign Secretary Humayun Khan, former ambassador Aziz A. Khan, former Foreign Secretary Najmuddin Shaikh, Director Current Affairs Dunya TV Nasim Zehra, Chair Dept. Defence and Strategic Studies at QAU Dr. Rifaat Hussain, Senator Dr. Attiya Inayatullah, former State Minister for Foreign Affairs Malik Amad Khan, political economist Dr. Akbar Zaidi, Joint Director PILDAT Aasiya Riaz and Security Analyst Jinnah Institute Salman Zaidi.

The Indian included Rajmohan Gandhi, Chairman Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation, Sushobha Barve, Executive Director Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation, former Foreign Secretary Salman Haider, former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, senior fellow at Centre for Policy Research C. Raja Mohan, freelance journalist and advisor to FICCI Jyoti Malhotra, independent Kashmiri journalist Pervaiz Bukhari, author and veteran journalist Prem Shankar Jha, Secretary General FICCI Dr. Rajiv Kumar, Lt. Gen. (retired) Ravi Sawhney, editor Nayi

Duniya Shahid Siddiqui, Deputy Foreign Editor and primetime anchor CNN-IBN Suhasini Haidar, Kashmir Director for Mercy Corps Usmaan Ahmad, and Chairman Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front Yasin Malik.