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Suo Motu Statement by External Affairs Minister in Lok Sabha on Her Visit to Islamabad and Recent Developments Relating to Ties between India and Pakistan (December 14, 2015)

December 14, 2015

Hon'ble Speaker,

1. I rise to brief this august House and Hon'ble Members on my recent visit to Islamabad, Pakistan to lead the Indian delegation to the 'Heart of Asia' Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan and recent developments relating to ties between India and Pakistan.
2. The Fifth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia Istanbul Process on December 8-9, 2015 in Islamabad was devoted to the themes of security and connectivity. The Conference provided to us an important opportunity on a vital regional platform for political consultations and regional cooperation to reiterate India's commitment to Afghanistan's stability and development and our faith in its future. India has actively participated in the Heart of Asia Process since its beginning. The process brings together friends of Afghanistan from its immediate and extended neighbourhood as well as supporting countries and international organizations to promote political consultations and regional cooperation for a united, democratic, independent, strong and prosperous Afghanistan. My visit to Islamabad underlined India's strong commitment to that cause. In my statement at the Conference, I urged full and direct transit for Afghanistan through Pakistan to India. In the context of relations between India and Pakistan, I advocated working together for peace and development in South Asia, with self-confidence and maturity.
3. I also take this opportunity to inform the House that during my visit to Islamabad, I called on Prime Minister Mr. Nawaz Sharif and held discussions with my Pakistani counterpart Mr. Sartaj Aziz. Following my meetings the decision of this Government to begin a Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue with Pakistan was announced in a Joint Statement in Islamabad on December 9, 2015. This decision of the Government follows the recent developments and engagements between the two countries, especially the constructive discussions between their National Security Advisors in Bangkok on December 6, 2015. The meeting of the NSAs resulted from discussion between our Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Mr. Nawaz Sharif in Paris on November 30, 2015.

4. As the House is aware, the Prime Minister of Pakistan was invited in May 2014, among other SAARC leaders, by Prime Minister to attend the swearing-in ceremony of the new Government. This was a demonstration of our commitment to good neighbourly ties with Pakistan, in line with our vision for peace and development in the region through deeper regional integration in South Asia. In the first meeting between the two Prime Ministers during that visit of Mr. Nawaz Sharif to New Delhi, our views on India-Pakistan ties and our concerns on terrorism and violence were conveyed to the Pakistani authorities. The meetings as decided between the two sides in May 2014, however, did not take place.
5. As the House is also aware, the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan met in Ufa in July 2015 and agreed that the two countries had collective responsibility to ensure peace and promote development. They condemned terrorism in all its forms and agreed to cooperate with each other to eliminate this menace from South Asia. To that end, they decided on a meeting of the National Security Advisors to discuss all issues connected to terrorism. They also stated that the two countries were prepared to discuss all outstanding issues. During the Ufa meeting, PM was extended an invitation by Prime Minister Mr. Nawaz Sharif to visit Islamabad for attending the SAARC Summit in 2016.
6. For the reasons that we all know, the expected meetings of NSAs and Directors General of Military Operations of the two countries envisaged at Ufa, did not materialize though Directors General of BSF and Pakistan Rangers met and a number of humanitarian measures, agreed at Ufa, were implemented.
7. In this background, when our Prime Minister met his Pakistan counterpart during the COP-21 Summit meeting in Paris on 30 November 2015, there was a discussion on how the two countries could build an atmosphere conducive for again re-engaging with each other. The underlying sentiment, on which I am confident that this House concurs fully, was that the continued estrangement of two neighbours was a hurdle to the realization of our shared vision of a peaceful and prosperous region. At the same time, there was also a sharp awareness that the principal obstacles to the growth of ties, especially terrorism, would have to be clearly and directly addressed.
8. Following PM's conversation with PM Mr. Nawaz Sharif in Paris, the two leaders decided that both sides should hold the NSA-level meeting. The National Security Advisors of the two countries accordingly met on December 6, 2015. The meeting was held in Bangkok. Discussions between the two NSAs in that meeting were held in a candid, cordial and constructive atmosphere. They focused on peace and security, terrorism, tranquility along the Line of Control, and Jammu & Kashmir – the State which has been most directly impacted by terrorism and violation of LOC.
9. My visit to Islamabad for the Heart of Asia Conference came two days after the constructive talks between NSAs on issues related to security, terrorism, etc. My meetings with PM Mr. Nawaz Sharif and Mr. Sartaj Aziz in Islamabad were held in the backdrop of this positive development. Both sides condemned terrorism and resolved to cooperate to eliminate this menace. There we dwelt on the need for Pakistan to expedite the Mumbai terrorist attacks trial. The Indian side was assured of the steps being taken to expedite its early conclusion.

10. Accordingly, it was decided to begin a dialogue with Pakistan under the new title "Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue". The Foreign Secretaries have been tasked to work out modalities and schedule of the meetings under the new Dialogue.
11. I would like to assure the House that this Government accords the highest priority to the country's security. In order to meet any threats in this regard, the Government will take all steps, including through diplomatic channels. At the same time, the Government is also committed to building an environment of peaceful and cooperative relations with all our neighbours, including Pakistan, so that the efforts for peace and development in South Asia, initiated by the Government on the day of assuming office itself, are taken further forward. The new Dialogue with Pakistan has twin aims of removing hurdles in the path of a constructive engagement by addressing issues of concern, and at the same time, of exploring and establishing cooperative ties. Initiatives on trade and connectivity, people-to-people exchanges and humanitarian issues will contribute to welfare of the entire region, and promote better understanding and mutual trust. The new Dialogue, we sincerely hope, marks a new beginning also for peace and development in the whole region. I am confident that we have the support of the entire House in this expectation.

Thank you.

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