

Won't give up consultations with Kashmiri separatists: Pakistan

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United Nations: Pakistan has declared that it won't give up consulting Kashmiri separatists in order to hold talks with India -- a condition that India promptly rejected at the General Assembly here on Wednesday.

Asserting that consultations with separatists is essential for peacefully solving the Kashmir dispute, Pakistan's Permanent Representative Maleeha Lodhi said, "Calling for the termination of these consultations, as a precondition for dialogue is unacceptable as well as counterproductive."

Voicing New Delhi's rejection of the Pakistani condition, Indian diplomat Abhishek Singh called it an interference in India's internal affairs.

Lodhi also reiterated Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's four-point peace initiative he announced here last month and said Islamabad "stands ready to engage in a dialogue on all outstanding issues", even though there was no positive response from India.

Responding to it on the floor of the General Assembly, Singh, a first secretary in India's UN Mission, dismissed the offer, quoting External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's blunt response, "We do not need four points, we need just one -- give up terrorism and let us sit down and talk."

Singh recalled that Swaraj had said, "India remains open to dialogue. But talks and terror cannot go together." She had said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Nawaz had agreed to this at their July meeting during Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit in Ufa, Russia.

"Let us hold talks at the level of NSAs (National Security Advisers) on all issues connected to terrorism and an early meeting of our directors general of military operations to address the situation on the border," she had said. "If the response is serious and credible, India is prepared to address all outstanding issues through a bilateral dialogue."

The talks scheduled in August between the National Security Advisers Ajit Doval of India and Sartaj Aziz of Pakistan were called off after Aziz wanted to meet Kashmiri separatists.

Sharif's four-point plan called for renouncing the use or threat of use of force, demilitarising Kashmir, withdrawal from Siachen Glacier and formalising ceasefire along the Line of Control.

Lodhi prefaced the renewed talks offer with scathing attack on India over Kashmir asserting that instead a plebiscite "the people of Kashmir have suffered brutal oppression".

"Escalating tensions on the Line of Control in Kashmir and the Working Boundary also require Pakistan and India to take all possible measures to avert further escalation," she added.

Speaking shortly after Lodhi at the session on the secretary general's report on the work of the UN, India's Permanent Representative Asoke Kumar Mukerji, said, "It is most unfortunate that the distinguished delegate of Pakistan has chosen to refer to issues that are extraneous to the debate that we are having today."

He added, "We have diplomatic relations with Pakistan and such issues should be addressed in the framework of these relations, instead of being aired elsewhere."

Singh, in his right of reply to Lodhi, said, "It is all the more ironical that these comments come from a country which is persisting with its illegal occupation of part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. These references are totally out of context and constitute a clear interference in the internal affairs of India. Therefore, we reject them in entirety."

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