

Warmer ties in the interests of India, Pakistan: US

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Washington: As uncertainty prevailed over Foreign Secretary-level talks between India and Pakistan in the wake of Pathankot terror strike, the US today said "warmer" ties would be in the interest of the two nations, but it is for their leaders to decide their national interest.

"The United States certainly believes that warmer relations and more cooperation between the government of India and the government of Pakistan would be in the interests of both countries. But ultimately, the leaders of those countries will have to decide for themselves," the White House Press Secretary, Josh Earnest, told reporters at his daily news conference.

Earnest was responding to questions on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Lahore and the terror strike at the Pathankot air base, which appeared to have originated from Pakistan.

An element of uncertainty today prevailed over next week's Foreign Secretary-level talks with Pakistan amid indications that these may be deferred in the wake of the terror attack.

"Obviously the leaders of both countries are gonna have to decide for themselves what they believe is in the interests of their citizens," Earnest said.

Jaishankar is scheduled to hold discussions with his Pakistani counterpart Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry to chalk out a roadmap to carry forward the engagement under the newly-announced "Bilateral Comprehensive Dialogue".

However, official sources said the government was "mulling options" with regard to the Islamabad meeting.

Responding to another question, Earnest said that it is in the interest of Pakistan to take actions against terrorist groups.

"The government of Pakistan has their own interest in trying to fight extremism and fight terrorist organisations that are operating inside their own country," he said, adding that the US has offered its support to the Pakistani government.

"We obviously want to help them particularly in light of that terrible terrorist incident where we saw an extremist organisation carry out an attack against an elementary school inside Pakistan. That was a little over a year ago, I believe," he said, referring to horrific Taliban attack on a Peshawar school.

"That was I think was a rather vivid illustration for people who don't closely follow this issue that citizens in Pakistan and the Pakistani government has their own vested interest in trying to deal with terrorist organizations that are attempting to operate inside the country, and the United States obviously strongly supports the Pakistan government as they do that," he said.

Earnest said he is not aware of any upcoming meeting between the US President and the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan.

"I'm not aware of any upcoming meetings between the president and the leaders of India and Pakistan, but if anything like that materializes, we'll certainly let you know," he said in response to another question.

- PTI