

Taliban reject peace talks with Afghan government

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Kabul: The Taliban on Saturday refused to resume long-stalled peace talks with the Afghan government, reiterating their preconditions for holding dialogue, a statement said.

"We want to repeat our stance once again that until the occupation of foreign troops ends, until Taliban names are removed from international blacklists and until our detainees are released, talks will yield no results," it said.

The statement comes as direct face-to-face talks between the militant group and the Kabul government were expected to start in Islamabad this week.

"We unequivocally state that the esteemed leader of Islamic Emirate (Taliban) has not authorised anyone to participate in this meeting and neither has the Leadership Council of Islamic Emirate decided to partake in it," the statement added.

The announcement is a blow to efforts by Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the United States to restart negotiations aimed at ending the Taliban's long and bloody insurgency in Afghanistan.

Delegates from the four countries met in Kabul late February for a fourth round of talks aimed at reviving the nascent peace process, which stalled last summer.

The quartet had called for a direct dialogue between the Taliban and Kabul by this week, a deadline that analysts called "completely unrealistic".

Kabul has repeatedly called for all Taliban groups to sit at the negotiating table though President Ashraf Ghani has said his government will not make peace with those who kill civilians.

A first round of direct talks was held last summer in Pakistan, but the process quickly derailed after the announcement of the death of Taliban founder Mullah Omar.

- PTI