

Pakistan warns world of grave consequences of Kashmir crisis

* US senators say danger of a 'miscalculation' is always there if tensions between Pakistan and India escalate

* Call upon India to afford similar transparency as Pakistan offered them in Azad Jammu and Kashmir



Prime Minister Imran Khan on Monday said the international community must take cognizance of grave consequences of Indian actions in the occupied valley of Kashmir for regional peace and stability and should act without any delay.

Talking to US senators Christopher Van Hollen and Margaret C Hassan, who called on him, the prime minister appreciated the continued active interest of the US Congress, including the two senators, in the volatile situation in Indian-held Kashmir.

The senators are visiting Pakistan to have firsthand information and an in-depth assessment of the evolving situation following India's illegal and unilateral actions in the valley in violation of the United Nations resolutions and international law. The visit also provided an opportunity for the senators to exchange views on strengthening Pakistan-US ties and the Afghan peace and reconciliation process.

The prime minister said the ongoing lockdown in the occupied valley for over two months, refusal of Indian authorities to lift the curfew, and acute shortage of basic necessities including medicine and food in the largest prison on earth are grave violations of the fundamental human rights and the international humanitarian law. It is critical for the international community to raise its voice for respect of the rights and freedom of the people in the Held Kashmir, he said. The prime minister said the relationship between Pakistan and the United States is based on mutual trust and partnership for peace. The senators affirmed that they will work for a broad-based and long-term relationship with enhanced trade ties between the two countries. Discussing the regional situation, the prime minister noted that both Pakistan and the US have a shared interest in advancing peace and stability in Afghanistan. Reiterating Pakistan's continued commitment to the facilitation of a political solution in the war-torn country, he underlined the importance of earliest resumption of the US-Taliban peace talks.

Senator Christopher Van Hollen, who visited Miranshah on October 5, appreciated the development work in the area. He also acknowledged the sacrifices of Pakistani soldiers and civilians as part of its successful drive against the menace of terrorism.

The two senators, who visited the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) on October 6 and held meetings with the AJK president and prime minister, said they shared concerns on the current humanitarian situation caused by Indian actions. They expressed their resolve to continue to remain engaged on the issue.

The US senators also called on Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa at the GHQ on Monday. According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the matters pertaining to regional security and the Afghan peace process were discussed during the meeting. The Kashmir issue and the current situation in the held valley also came under discussion.

On the occasion, the US senators hailed efforts of Pakistan for peace and stability in the region. COAS Bajwa thanked the senators for support on resolving the Kashmir cause and appreciating efforts of Pakistan for peaceful Afghanistan. Both sides stressed the importance of a strong bilateral relationship between the United States and Pakistan in and beyond security cooperation.

Later at a media interaction at the US embassy, the visiting senators, while

stressing greater transparency on Jammu and Kashmir, called upon India to afford similar transparency as Pakistan offered them in its side of the valley.

Senator Hollen, who is visiting Pakistan after India where he was denied permission to visit Srinagar, expressed deep concerns over the human rights situation in the occupied valley.

Senator Hollen said the immediate concern is restoration of full communication and ending curfew. He said he made a request to the Indian government to gather facts about the detention of hundreds or thousands of people for over 60 days and highlight greater transparency in the need to address the very real concerns of rule of law and human rights. "In Kashmir, transparency is important so that people know what's happening to their loved ones. That's why the issue is important to ask questions about and to address the human rights concerns," he said.

Hollen said they held very good discussions with the AJK president and prime minister and mentioned that the UN Military Observer Group at the Pakistani side of Kashmir had the freedom to investigate the incidents as compared to its counterpart, which was reportedly confined to Srinagar.

Asked what role the US could play in persuading India to ease restrictions, he said it was important to speak out for the human rights issue. He said the US did not have any advance notice about the decision India was going to make on August 5. If the tension between Pakistan and India escalates, he said, there is always a danger of miscalculation.

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