
INDIA MAY SEND DOCTORS TO PAKISTAN FOR PRISONER REPATRIATION

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In an attempt to de-escalate tensions, India and Pakistan are currently discussing a proposal by the former to allow a team of over 20 doctors to visit Pakistan to examine mentally unsound, women, children and elderly prisoners. These Indian prisoners have been awaiting repatriation since the two countries arrived at an understanding earlier this month for their release.

Both countries are in touch over the issue of visas for the doctors but diplomatic sources here said Pakistan may not give visa to such a large number of doctors and medical experts.

India though has clearly laid out four conditions as imperative for imparting even a hint of normalcy to ties after the hostility over allegation by both India and Pakistan that their diplomats were being bullied in Islamabad and Delhi respectively. These include an immediate end to harassment of Indian diplomats, unhindered movement of Indian High Commissioner Ajay Bisaria even outside Islamabad, construction of the Indian residential complex in Islamabad in a peaceful manner and reversal of the decision to not allow Indian diplomats membership of Islamabad Club. India has also accused Pakistan of blocking Indian government websites and has strongly taken up the matter with Pakistans foreign ministry. It is important for the Indian government to get the mentally unsound prisoners examined by doctors to facilitate their repatriation to India. The agreement arrived at over the humanitarian issue of prisoners was a product of a meeting between foreign minister Sushma Swaraj and Pakistan High Commissioner Sohail Mahmood in October 2017. Swaraj had proposed in the meeting that the 2 sides look to resolve humanitarian issues related to elderly, women, children and mentally unsound prisoners. India noted in a statement on March 7, days before the diplomat harassment issue made it to the front page of leading dailies in both countries, that Pakistan had responded ``positively to Swarajs suggestion. The initiative on prisoners was seen as the first real sign of thaw until it became clear a few days later that India and Pakistan were locked in a bitter exchange over alleged intimidation of diplomats. While India put the blame for the crisis on a raid by ISI officials on the Indian residential complex on February 15, which saw supply of water and electricity to the complex disconnected, Pakistan alleged that its diplomats and other staff faced harassment on 18 occasions between March 7 and March 9.

Both countries have issued a slew of note verbale in the past couple of weeks claiming harassment of their diplomats. While Pakistan wants India to sign a protocol to facilitate smooth construction work in both Islamabad and Delhi, diplomatic sources said there was no way Islamabad was going to ``compromise on the issue of club membership. Pakistan diplomats here want the same facilities, and at the same price too, in Delhi Golf Club and Gymkhana as those provided by Islamabad Club to Indian diplomats. Apart from not approving Bisarias membership, Pakistan is

also threatening to not renew the membership of other Indian diplomats.

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