

Imran Khan ' s Party Seeks New Relationship between Pakistan and India

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- The key contentious issues of Kashmir, Siachen, Sir Creek and water resources can be resolved but require strong political leadership.
- Both countries need to build trust through people-to-people contacts, including tourism and sport, not only at the level of defence and security.
- Free trade between India, Pakistan and Afghanistan is in the national interest of all countries in the region.
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National Capital Region, Gurgaon, India, 7 November 2012 – Shafqat Mahmood, Central Information Secretary, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Pakistan, the party led by Imran Khan, has called for “ an entirely new relationship with India ” based on mutual trust, free trade and people-to-people contacts. Mahmood said both sides have a basis for moving forward on the key contentious issues: “ Kashmir can be resolved, Siachen can be resolved, Sir Creek can be resolved, even water can be resolved – but there has to be strong political leadership. ” He suggested that while Prime Minister Manmohan Singh shows a desire to move fast on normalizing relations, other elements within the Indian state, particularly the military, are counselling caution.

Speaking at a special session on regional cooperation at the World Economic Forum on India, featuring speakers from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Kurdistan, Mahmood said India and Pakistan had been very close to reaching a settlement on Kashmir several times, most recently in 2007, but that both sides had missed the opportunities presented. He argued that interaction “ on levels other than defence and security ” could build trust, for example through trade and tourism. Apart from looking forward to the arrival of the Pakistan cricket team in India in December, he said “ we are willing to take unilateral steps to increase the arrival of Indian people in Pakistan ” .

Referring to regional trade, Mahmood said, “ We feel it is in our national interest to have a strong trading relationship with India. ” He criticized the previous US administration for its focus on aid rather than opening up its markets for trade, saying, “ We are determined to stand on our feet and are very clear that US aid is counterproductive. ” The panellists were united in welcoming the prospect of a free trade zone in the South Asian region, which has yet to become a reality despite the ratification of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) in 2006. Abid Butt, Chief Executive Officer, e2e Supply Chain Management, Pakistan, called on India to take a leadership role in promoting cross-border trade. Meanwhile, Sham Bathija, Minister Senior Adviser for Economic Affairs to the President, Office of the President of Afghanistan, invited Indian businesses to share their experience and expertise in manufacturing, a sector in which Afghanistan needs considerable support.

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