

**Press Briefing by Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin,
Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations**

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Good Afternoon, friends,

I am a newcomer with you, so please cut me some slack because this is the first time I am interacting with you. I am a much more conventional diplomat. I do my job rather than add to the fire and fury of heightening tensions. So, I just came here because, for the first time, after the end of the Security Council closed consultations, we noted that two States, who made national statements, tried to pass them off as the will of the international community. But, you are all well versed in the nuances of how and in what way the Security Council acts. I therefore do not need to tell you that the Security Council is a very deliberative institution. It works in a very considered manner. Its outcomes are provided to all of us through the President. So, if national statements try to masquerade as the will of the international community, I thought I will come across to you too and explain our national position. And what is that?

Our national position was and remains that matters related to Article 370 of the Indian Constitution are entirely an internal matter of India. These have no external ramifications. The recent decisions taken by the Government of India and our Legislative bodies are intended to ensure that good governance is promoted, socio-economic development is enhanced for our people in Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

You are aware, this morning, that the Chief Secretary of the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir announced a whole set of measures that the Government is undertaking to move towards normalcy. We are gratified that the Security Council, in its closed consultations, appreciated these efforts, acknowledged them and indicated that this is the direction in which the international community would like the issue to move in.

We are committed to gradually removing all restrictions. You are aware of the timetable for that. Let me also tell you since the changes internal to India have not made any difference to our external orientation, India remains committed to ensuring that the situation there remains calm and peaceful. We are committed to all the agreements that we have signed on this issue. We note that there were some who tried to project an alarmist approach to the situation, which is far from the ground realities. Of particular concern is that one State is using terminology of jihad against and promoting violence in India, including by their leaders.

Friends, violence is no solution to the problems that all of us face. Consistent with our previous positions, we are committed that all issues between India and Pakistan, as well as India and any other country, will be resolved bilaterally, peacefully and in a manner, that beholds normal inter-State relations between countries. We are saddened that terrorism is being fueled, language and incendiary talk of jihad is being mentioned by people who should know better. All of you are understanding of the situation here. I do not need to tell you what was the outcome of the closed consultations. You will yourself know about it. We stand ready to continue our efforts towards peaceful resolution of all issues in an atmosphere free of terror and violence.

I am ready if any of you have any questions. I understand there are many of you.

Q&A Session

PR: I will answer five questions, which is five times more than both my predecessors who came here.

Q.1: there have been resolutions on the disputed territory of Kashmir and Article 370 - that could be an internal matter.

PR: thank you for accepting that.

Q.1 (continues) - Article 370 was enshrined in the Indian constitution. Still the reality remains how do you deal with the UNSC resolutions passed in 1947, 1950 and then Simla Agreement that failed in bilateralism?

PR: I understand your point as to how do we address this issue. The history is well-known. I do not need to go back. Let us look at the last agreement that India and Pakistan signed and that goes back to 1972. We are committed to that and we hope Pakistan too would try to address these issues in the manner that they have signed on to, in a legally binding agreement. We stand ready to address them in that context. We can go back in history. But every new agreement overtakes the past. So, you are very well versed, my friend. Please appreciate that I started by saying we are committed to that agreement and we hope Pakistan too is. Because if that is so, its actions do not seem to be working out in tune with what is in that agreement.

Q2: The fact remains while you have said all these things and you are willing to talk, but what has happened - the fact remains India has steadfastly refused to have any meeting with Pakistan, for one reason or the other. It has been almost time immemorial. When are you going to sit down with Pakistan and have a meeting because that is the reality?

PR: Your question is whether India and Pakistan have talked. Let me tell you I have been a member of many delegations to Islamabad and you are aware of that. I myself served as an Indian diplomat in Islamabad. So, please understand there are normal diplomatic ways of dealing with countries. That is the way to do it. But using terror to try and push your goals is not the way that normal States behave. No democracy will acknowledge or accept talks, when terror thrives. Stop terror to start talks.

Q.3: When will you begin a dialogue with Pakistan?

PR: let me begin by coming across to you. Let me tell you, we have already extended a hand of friendship by saying we are committed to Simla Agreement. Let us wait for a response on that from the Pakistani side.

Q.4: How do you respond to Pakistan's assertion that the very fact that we are meeting here at the Security Council means this is no longer a bilateral issue and that this has been internationalised?

PR: You have been covering the Security Council. You are aware that in closed consultations, any one, especially parties to the dispute, can try and throw in anything for the consideration of the members of the Security Council. That is the nature of the beast. However, you have seen what is the outcome of that consultation. I do not want to add further. I have repeatedly said we are ready to address these issues in a manner that States, who have normal approaches to international ties, should address them. In our case, we are committed to the Simla Agreement. It is now for Pakistan to make that commitment to stop terror to start talks.

Q.5: Just before the meeting, Russia said that it favours a bilateral track between India and Pakistan on Kashmir. That is again a viewpoint of many other countries here at the UN. So, again, in a way that Pakistan said that it is internationalising the issue, but with other countries not in favour of that, how do you see given the fact that other countries are saying it is a bilateral issue?

PR: I do not, like my predecessors, take on the responsibility of speaking for the Council. The Council has spoken. It's pretty clear. All of you are aware of what outcomes are there. I will not comment on it. Let me tell you, India's commitment to address these issues on the bilateral track has broad acceptance globally.

Q.6: Mr. Ambassador, you spoke about normalisation and removing the restrictions in Kashmir. So, are you here admitting that there is something wrong that happened? How India is going to address that – the will of the Kashmiri people?

PR: Let me tell you, there is something called prevention is better than cure. The measures that we took were preventive in nature. They were designed to stop terrorists from bleeding our people. You noticed that in the 10 days that have passed, there are no casualties, there are no fatalities. That is because every effort was made to work to ensure that our people in Jammu & Kashmir are not adversely affected in terms of their lives. Yes, there is always a difficulty that sometimes these will lead to restrictions. We acknowledge that. We are an open

society. But it is a balance of choice that the administrators on the ground should make, not journalists here or diplomats here. Please allow them the space and time to address these issues. They have controlled the situation. You have seen this. Not one fatality! In similar situations, in large parts of world including previously in Jammu & Kashmir, there have been large fatalities if such an issue arises. So, please give us some time. We are addressing it in a democratic manner, in a manner that we are committed to, to address difficulties that our people in Jammu & Kashmir are facing.

Q.7: You talked about Pakistan promoting extremist elements in the region. What do you have to say about the International Organisation accusing Indian troops and soldiers committing human rights violation in Indian-administered Kashmir?

PR: I don't know which International Organisation you are talking about. The UN did not say anything. There is no Body, no Body, which is intergovernmental in nature, which has accused India of anything that you are saying. Anything. No intergovernmental organisation in the world has ever said anything about Indian democracy, India's commitment to human rights. We are the country who started issues of apartheid at the UN. None of you who are talking about this were even worried about that. Don't forget, India is the country which changed the human rights declaration, changed the word "all men are born equal" to "all humans are born equal" signifying men and women are equal. Our constitution is an open book, our legislature is an open book. Put on the TV, you will see we have different shades of opinion in India. There will be issues discussed and if there are issues, these will be addressed by our Courts. We do not need international busybodies to try and tell us how to run our lives. We are a billion plus people. We know how to do things and have a commitment to democracy, unlike those who are now trying to speak to us about human rights, whose experience is extremely limited. We have vast experience. We will fulfill our goals. We are committed to addressing the difficulties some of our people have and please give us the time and space to address these.

Q.8 – will it not undermine India's image of being an open democracy?

PR – Public order is integral to ensuring that democracy prospers. Without public order, no democracy can function. So, there are reasonable restrictions. We acknowledge that these are restrictions. We are easing them. Again, let us not here decide what and to what extent and how fast this is done. There is a pace. There is a trajectory. The trajectory is clear. You may not be happy with the pace. Some others may be unhappy with the pace. But, it is the people on the ground, the administrators who are committed, who work under democratically elected leaders who will decide this. Let me assure you India is a vibrant, thriving democracy and we live by it every day.