

Government seeks Durand Line pact review

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By Shaukat Piracha

ISLAMABAD: In major shift in Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan, the Government of Pakistan is thinking of re-negotiating the Durand Line Agreement with Afghanistan to secure its western borders from the movement of terrorists/remnants of the Taliban.

Highly-placed official sources told Daily Times that the law-enforcement agencies have pointed out that the Durand Line agreement of 1893 provided for free movement of border area peoples across the Durand Line and this has created immense problems in hunting down terrorists or remnants of the Taliban in the border areas. "This has earned a bad name for Pakistan and it has also undermined the efforts of the law-enforcement agencies in hunting down the terrorists", sources said.

The revision of the Durand Line is being sought following the recommendations of an Inter-Provincial Conference on Law and Order held last month which was chaired by the Interior Minister and attended by the four provincial Chief Secretaries, IGs Police and other high officials and heads of law-enforcement agencies, said sources.

"The Durand Line agreement, inter alia, includes free movement of the people in the bordering area within a specified limit. This aspect needs to be reviewed and adoption of a new policy to secure the Western Border in the changed geo-political situation should be devised early", sources quoted the decision on the subject taken by the inter-provincial conference on law and order.

On this very issue of Taliban leadership, the international community, particularly the United States, has supported Afghan government's claims that Taliban leaders are mixed up with Afghan refugees.

It has also been learnt that the issue of the Durand Line has become one of two major irritants between the two countries. The other major irritants are the increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan and the repatriated Afghan refugees who are still returning to Pakistan. However, the 1893 agreement for demarcation of the Pak-Afghan border called the Durand Line did not provide for any renewal and settled the issue once for all, whereas the boundary of the border has remained

un-demarcated except at one or two places and the tribal people do not respect the Line.

The Interior Ministry has also warned the bordering provinces that the increasing Indian influences in Afghanistan, especially the opening of their Consulates in Kandhar and Jalalabad, are a direct threat to Pakistan's interests because the Indians don't have community or commercial interests in the two cities. Also, it may be noted that the Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan is an expert on this region and has served as Director General of Pak-Iran-Afghan Desk in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs.

On the other hand, Pakistan's Ambassador to Afghanistan is a non-career diplomat with experience only as a former Chief Commissioner for Afghan Refugees. An official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr Hameed Afridi, has now been appointed as Pakistan's Deputy Head of Mission in Kabul. He is replacing Mr Ziaad Khan who has been designated as Consul General of Pakistan at Mazar--Sharif.

The issue of the release of Pakistanis detained in Afghanistan has also been not resolved by the Afghan Government despite the announcement from the prime minister, Zafarullah Khan Jamali, that all Afghan prisoners detained for violating the Foreigners Act will be released by the government of Pakistan as a goodwill gesture.

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