

# Ready for talks any time: Imran

**OUTREACH** Says willing to wait for 2019 polls but push for peace can't be one-sided

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**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan acknowledged on Thursday it was not in the country's interest to allow its soil to be used for terrorism and said he was prepared to talk to his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi at "any time".

A day after India said it was regrettable that Khan referred to Kashmir at the groundbreaking of the Kartarpur corridor, the premier again raised the issue and said India shouldn't treat it only as a "territorial issue".

Khan also said he was prepared to wait till after India's general election in 2019 for any sort of forward movement in bilateral relations but stressed that the push for peace can't be "one-sided".

This was the latest in a series of strong statements made by the Pakistani administration expressing an inclination for greater engagement, most of which came in the wake of the two nations deciding to build a corridor for Sikh pilgrims from India to visit the Kartarpur shrine in Pakistan.

On Wednesday, India's external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj said the Kartarpur project cannot be the basis for resuming dialogue.

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IMRAN KHAN, Pakistan PM

"Terror and talks cannot go hand-in-glove. The moment Pakistan stops terror activity against India, talks can begin," she said.

She also ruled out PM Modi attending a Saarc meeting in Pakistan unless there was more progress on talks.

During an interaction with a visiting group of Indian journalists on Thursday, Khan was repeatedly questioned about Pakistan's handling of terror, which India has linked to any possible resumption of talks.

"I can say in all earnestness that it is not in Pakistan's interest for anyone to use our soil for terrorism," he said. All political parties have endorsed the National Action Plan on terror-



Imran Khan said he has had a "good conversation" with PM Narendra Modi and "would be happy to talk to him any time". PTI

ism and no armed group would be allowed to operate in the country, he added.

Asked about the possibility of acting against Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) founder Hafiz Saeed, Khan said there were "severe" UN sanctions against his group.

"There is a clampdown on him. The case against the accused in the Mumbai attacks is in court and it is sub judice," he said, adding that his government had "inherited" the issue.

Khan said he had a "good conversation" with Modi and "would be happy to talk to him any time". He recalled his pledge in his first speech after his party's election victory to take two steps for every step taken by India and said there had been a "bad response" from New Delhi, which had called off a meeting of foreign ministers on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in September.

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## Kashmir

Khan, whose government completed 100 days on Thursday, said Pakistan could make a “grand gesture” on terror-related matters but there should be a “response from the other side”. Referring to Kashmir, Khan said India should look at the issue “differently” and not just as a “territorial issue” as there could not be a “military solution”. He added, “If nothing

else, we want the government of India to do something for the people of Kashmir. There are images on social media of bodies, and women crying.”

The decision for opening the Kartarpur corridor was the outcome of a consensus among different stakeholders and should not be confused for “desperation for peace”, he said.

Khan said Pakistan was prepared to wait till after the completion of India’s general elec-

tion next year for any sort of movement in bilateral relations. “We expect that after the elections, India will have to respond,” he said. “We will keep trying to improve relationships with India and Afghanistan.”

Former Indian diplomat Ashok Sajjanhar said presenting the Kashmir dispute as the core issue has always been Pakistan’s stand. “There are other issues to be sorted out. I think Pakistan-sponsored terrorism

is the correct core issue. India has never said no to discussing any issue but meaningful dialogue cannot be held when Pakistan keeps aiding and sponsoring terrorism. Pakistan must understand this,” he said.

Indian army chief General Bipin Rawat on Wednesday said, “the whole world is aware that terror camps in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir are being run by governmental agencies that also plan disruptions in India.”