

Pakistan Approves India's 'Humanitarian' Prisoner Swap Proposals

Pakistan and India have agreed to the exchange of civilian prisoners older than 70 years, as well as females and inmates suffering from mental illness.

The rare, mutual understanding comes amid heightened tensions between the two nuclear-armed rival nations, stemming from military skirmishes in the disputed Kashmir region.

Pakistan's foreign ministry revealed for the first time Wednesday that Islamabad had received a set of "humanitarian proposals" from New Delhi regarding the civilian prisoners "incarcerated" in both countries. Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif approved India's proposals "after consulting with all the stakeholders," a ministry statement said.

The agreement calls for both countries to permit medical experts to examine the "mentally challenged prisoners for their repatriation."

The statement noted that while accepting the Indian proposals, Asif has also proposed an exchange of prisoners older than 60 years, and child prisoners younger than 18.

The minister expressed hope, the statement said, that India would "positively reciprocate" Pakistan's proposals.

Through such initiatives, Pakistan and India "would embark on the road to a comprehensive" bilateral dialogue and make a "conscious effort" to de-escalate military tensions in Kashmir and "the extremely vitiated current environment" plaguing relations between the two countries.

Both Pakistan's and India's militaries are involved in nearly

daily clashes on the Line of Control, the de facto border that separates India and Pakistan in the disputed Himalayan region.

Both sides accused each other of firing the first shot in violation of a mutual cease-fire in Kashmir that went into effect in 2003 but has since been nonexistent on the ground. The clashes have killed and wounded dozens of people on both sides in recent months.

Official bilateral political talks to normalize ties and find a resolution to outstanding disputes remain suspended due to India's allegations that Pakistan is not doing enough to stop cross-border militant attacks, charges that Islamabad denies.

Courtesy: Voice of America