Backchannel talks

Why in news?

Recently silent backchannel talks are held between India-Pakistan to address various issues which seems to be approved by the PM's of both countries.

What are the various indications of this?

- The statements issued by the Director Generals of Military Operations had significant terms -resolution of core issues by coordination at diplomatic level followed by a high-level political approval.
- Events like scheduling the Indus Water Treaty talks, granting of sports visas and the salutary messages between PM's of both the Nations strengthened these rumours.
- There is lack of any references to Pakistan in electoral speeches of assembly elections by top political leaders.
- The Ministry of External Affairs decision not to criticise the U-turn by Pakistan PM on trade are seen as more such clues.
- Both the country's foreign ministers have not denied the news reports which mention that these talks are overseen by National Security Adviser and Pakistan Army Chief facilitated by foreign governments- UAE.

Was these backchannels talks existed earlier?

- These mechanisms have been in operations in the worst of times- including wars, terror strikes and military action and their existence brought to light only years later.
- For example, former RAW chief mentioned about the channel for peace talks that began in 1988 which was initiated by Pakistan General and Indian PM Rajiv Gandhi through Jordan Crown Prince.
- Later, during the Kargil War, PM Vajpayee chose an unorthodox back-channel interlocutor who met with Pakistan PM's envoy for the contours of ceasefire.
- Over the years there were talks held for preparing a proper map of the India-Pakistan Line of Control in order to work for the resolution.
- These backchannel diplomats were travelling across the border without visas or any official record.
- In early 2014, Pakistan NSA and other senior officials were indicated that an

invitation will be sent to Pakistan PM for the swearing ceremony of India PM.

- In December 2015, Indian PM visited Lahore in surprise which clearly mentions about the non-official talks held behind.
- After the Pathankot attack in 2016, the backchannel talks worked to ease tensions and they facilitated the visit of Pakistani investigative team to the scene of the terrorist attack.
- After Kulbhushan Jadhav's arrest, these channels worked until MEA confirmed that the officials had met in Bangkok on December 26, the day after Mr. Jadhav's family was allowed to meet him in Islamabad.
- In 2016, six former Pakistani High Commissioners also travelled to Delhi for a Track-II consultation with nine former Indian High Commissioners.

Why backchannel talks now?

- The domestic constraints and challenges on other fronts often put the need for a workable peace on the India-Pakistan front.
- Pakistan's is in dire economic condition and the mounting pressure from the FATF to shut down all terrorist safe havens or face severe sanctions.
- This is the clear imperative forPakistan's willingness to engage via the backchannel even after India's decision on Jammu and Kashmir.
- For India, the stand-off with the People's Liberation Army at the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh has made the possibility of a two-front war more real and fuels the push to reduce tensions with Pakistan.
- The existence of a backchannel at this time is not possible without the support top level officials and leaders.
- It is clear that though the friendship and trust between inimical neighbours with a bitter history may seem impossible but their engagement is inevitable.

Source: The Hindu

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering