

Pakistan, Turkey agree to take FTA talks to conclusion

Page No.01 Col NO.06

ALI HUSSAIN

SEP 15TH, 2018

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan and Turkey Friday agreed for taking talks on Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to logical conclusion at the earliest, besides agreeing on boosting trade, economic, investment and defense relations. The understanding was reached during delegation level talks in which Pakistan's delegation was led by Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi while his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu led his country's delegation.

The Turkish foreign minister arrived along with a high-level delegation on early morning of Friday on a daylong visit to hold talks with newly elected government. He called on Prime Minister Imran Khan at the PM House and also met with Chief of the Army Staff Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa at General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi. Both foreign ministers also held a one-on-one meeting followed by delegation level talks.

Speaking at a joint news conference along with his Turkish counterpart, Foreign Minister Qureshi said they held discussions on all issues of common interests including on the need to further enhance bilateral trade. He said the two sides felt that the existing two-way trade is not enough and there is a need to give a special attention to further boost the trade relations.

To this end, he said the two sides discussed the progress on FTA so far and both the sides also agreed to revive the process of talks on FTA and take it to logical conclusion at the earliest. He pointed out that regular exchange of high-level visits, and presence of a number of institutional frameworks under the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC), are indicative of the close bilateral ties maintained at various levels.

He said the HLSCC provides mechanism to ensure implementation on the already signed projects, adding the 6th round of joint working group under the HLSCC would soon be held in Islamabad. He said Pakistan and Turkey have been brothers, friends and partners, adding that the inseparable bonds of common faith, history and culture have been reinforced by mutual trust and a sense of inter-dependence on critical issues.

"The strength of Pakistan-Turkey relationship is not relative to time, situations or individual choices. It is a relationship anchored in affection and solidarity among the people of the two nations," he said, adding that the two countries support each other on all issues of core concern to both sides. He said the Turkish foreign minister also conveyed the best wishes of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the people of the Republic of Turkey and congratulated him on his appointment as foreign minister of Pakistan.

While reiterating the "heart to heart" and "two countries, one nation" relations between the two countries, Qureshi said Foreign Minister Cavusoglu underlined that Pakistan will always have a special significance in Turkish foreign policy. Qureshi told that the Turkish foreign minister appreciated Pakistan's successful and strong action to subdue and defeat the menace of extremism and terrorism.

He said both sides reiterated that Pakistan and Turkey are important members of the Muslim world. "Our people take pride in their faith and are determined to make collective efforts in confronting Islamophobia and other attempts to malign or distort the great message of peace and respect for humanity imbibed in the Holy Quran and repeatedly demonstrated in the life of our Holy Prophet (PBUH)," he added.

Foreign Minister Qureshi reaffirmed that government's priorities were focused on socio-economic uplifting

of the people of Pakistan and furthering regional peace and stability in the region, and that Turkey is one of the frontline partners in this pursuit. He said Pakistan-Turkey relationship has been very strong and there is a mutual interest. "We understand each other's sensitivities," he said, adding that Turkey has played a role in improving regional consensus and stability.

Qureshi further told that situation of Afghanistan was also discussed during the talks, adding that he also appraised the Turkish foreign minister about his visit to Afghanistan today (Saturday) to hold talks with Afghan leadership on further expanding bilateral ties and discussing the peace initiatives. He said Pakistan and Turkey have a common position on the Afghan conflict and the two sides are also part of a trilateral mechanism together with Afghanistan which, he said, would also be reactivated.

He further told that he also discussed with the Turkish foreign minister about his talks with Iranian foreign minister who recently visited Islamabad. "I also got the chance today to thank the Turkish foreign minister for supporting Pakistan's membership in Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) as well as in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)," he said, adding he also thanked Turkish government for its support on the Netherlands caricature issue.

Qureshi said Turkey has agreed to support Pakistan's bid for a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir issue at the UN, adding that he invited the Turkish foreign minister to the meeting of the OIC Contact Group on Kashmir to be held on the sidelines of UN General Assembly in New York this month and Turkish FM accepted the invitation.

He said the meeting happens every year but it is different this time because a new UN report has come out which sheds light on the Indian forces brutalities in the Indian occupied Kashmir. He said that international community is concerned over human rights abuses that are taking place in the IoK.

Foreign Minister Cavusoglu in his remarks said, "Our two nations are destined to achieve great heights through a collective journey on the road to ensuring peace, stability, socio-economic development leading to prosperity of not only our two nations but all other countries and regions in our neighbourhood."

"By the grace of Allah Turkey and Pakistan are endowed with unmatched natural, geographic and human resources to achieve these objectives," he said, adding leadership on both sides is determined to make best use of the close linkages and the existing potentials to further strength Pak-Turkey strategic partnership.

He also assured his country's support to Pakistan's position on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir and peaceful solution to the Kashmir dispute, adding that Turkey desires that Kashmir issue involving India and Pakistan gets resolved peacefully. "In the group that has been formed over Kashmir, we will stand with Pakistan and try to make it successful," he added.

"I discussed a plenty of issues with Foreign Minister Qureshi. The most important aspect of our discussion was on the high-level strategic council, the sixth round of which will take place in Islamabad," he said. He said the two sides have strengthened their commercial relations and decided to facilitate Turkish companies that want to work in Pakistan.

"We have a unique relation, therefore, we should work together to further enhance our relations. The security issue for both the countries is important and so is the economic and military cooperation," he asserted, adding: "The governments and people come and go, but real friendships cannot end which is between the people of the two countries," he said.

Foreign Minister Cavusoglu said Pakistan and Turkey have suffered the most due to terrorism and emphasized the need for close cooperation to root out the menace of terrorism from both the countries.

He also underscored the need for further deepening the military and defense cooperation between the two countries. He stated that Turkey is ready to provide defense equipment to Pakistan, adding that Pakistan's Air Chief is currently in Turkey to negotiate helicopters' purchase and other equipment from

Turkey.

He also thanked Pakistan for its support following failed attempt of a military coup on July 15, 2016 in Turkey, adding: "Turkey will never forget the support of Pakistan and its people to thwart the failed 2016 Turkish coup attempt."

"The Gulen Movement not only damaged Turkey but it caused destruction wherever it went," he said, adding that Pakistan helped Turkey in ending the movement. However, he asserted that Turkey will again urge the government of Pakistan to take action against remnants of the Gulen Movement.

To a question, Foreign Minister Cavusoglu said Turkey wants a peaceful solution of the Syrian conflict under the UN mandate, adding "terrorists in the country [Syria] are playing havoc with the innocent lives of women and children." He said Turkey is also confronting these terrorists, adding that Turkey together with Iran and Russia has agreed that the conflict is resolved peacefully through dialogue with all the elements.

However, private media was kept away from the joint presser of the two foreign ministers and only state media of the two countries were allowed to cover it.

Meanwhile, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu called on Prime Minister Imran Khan. Cavusoglu is on an official visit to Pakistan to convey to the new Government greetings of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the people of the Republic of Turkey. He also congratulated Prime Minister on his historic victory in recent elections in Pakistan.

Prime Minister Imran Khan stated that Pakistan and Turkey are bonded by common faith, mutual interest, and a shared future for the people of the two countries. Both countries have always stood beside each other and would continue to do so. Pakistan and Turkey have the required potential to forge an even stronger partnership in future.

Foreign Minister Cavusoglu reiterated Turkey's full support to Pakistan Government's future plans to take the country on a rapid course of economic progress, developments and creating greater opportunities for the people of Pakistan, especially its vibrant youth. Ideas covering promotion of bilateral trade and Turkish investment in various sectors including energy sector of Pakistan were also discussed. Both sides reiterated their commitment to continue working closely in various multilateral and international foras including UN and OIC.

Copyright Business Recorder, 2018