

## 'AFGHAN SOIL MUST NOT BE USED FOR TERROR'

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Solid ties: Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with their Australian counterparts Peter Dutton and Marise Payne. PTI-

The international community wants to ensure that Afghanistan can never again become a “safe haven” of terrorism, said Marise Payne, Foreign Minister of Australia.

Addressing the media after the inaugural “2+2” Minister-level meeting here on Saturday, India and Australia displayed a common approach to the Afghan crisis, with External Affairs Minister Jaishankar saying the policy is summed up by the Security Council Resolution 2593.

“We do share very strong interests in ensuring that Afghanistan never again becomes a safe haven for breeding or training of terrorists and that is an abiding concern of the international community,” Ms. Payne said, laying out the convergence of Indian and Australian policies towards the “interim government” that the Taliban have set up in Kabul.

“Our approach is very similar. In a way, it is summed up by UN Security Council Resolution 2593, which emphasises most of all, Afghanistan must not allow its soil to be used in any manner by any body for terrorism,” said Mr. Jaishankar, who avoided describing the Taliban regime as a government, instead referring to it as a “dispensation”.

The statements by the Ministers indicated the lingering concern about the Taliban’s links with global terrorism that was further amplified as the dialogue was held on the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, which Ms. Payne described as an attack not just on the U.S. but also on the “modern, pluralist, democratic world”.

Days after the UNSC resolution, Taliban spokesperson Suhail Shaheen said his organisation can raise issues concerning “Kashmir, India or any other country”. The remark indicated a trans-border agenda of the Taliban reminiscent of its previous government that was toppled after the 9/11 attacks.

Ms. Payne said the immediate concern of Australia was to ensure that those with visas of other countries wishing to leave Afghanistan should be allowed to do so “safely”. She said Afghanistan faced a humanitarian emergency because of a drought-like situation and displacement of domestic population.

“We are very conscious of the impact of violence and breaches of human rights of the Afghanistan community, and again call for the fundamentals of human rights to be observed,” she said, urging the UN Food Programme and other relief organisations to ensure help for the war-affected citizens.

Accompanied by Defence Minister Peter Dutton along with his counterpart, Rajnath Singh, Ms. Payne focused on the erosion of women’s rights since the fall of Kabul. “I would also strongly reinforce Australia’s views in relation to the position of women and girls,” she said, calling for safeguarding their rights that were promoted in the past two decades.

Mr. Singh and Mr. Dutton highlighted the maritime domain and urged for an “open and inclusive” Indo-Pacific region. “The important partnership between India and Australia is based on the shared vision of the Indo-Pacific region as a free, open, inclusive and prosperous domain,” said

Mr. Singh, adding that both sides have agreed to collaborate on logistical support.

Mr. Dutton formally announced that Australia will invite India to the “Exercise Talisman Sabre” in 2023 and said Canberra will increase its defence diplomatic representation in New Delhi.

Mr. Jaishankar raised the difficulties faced by Indian students who secured admission in Australian universities but are unable to attend on-campus lectures because of COVID-19 related travel restrictions. Ms. Payne responded saying the restrictions would be lifted in phases and she would herself be present at the airport to welcome when the Indian students return to Australia.

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