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Press Release

Australia's Foreign Secretary engages high level talks with Pakistan

The Secretary of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Mr Peter Varghese AO will visit Pakistan 14-16 May for a meeting of the Australia-Pakistan Bilateral Political Talks (BPC). The previous Bilateral Political Talks were held in Canberra in 2012.

Mr Varghese will be joined in the Australian delegation by Australian High Commissioner HE Mr Peter Heyward and Ms Tiffany McDonald, the Director of the Pakistan and Central Asia Section of the Department and Foreign Affairs and Trade from Canberra.

The Pakistan delegation will be led by Foreign Secretary Aziz Ahmad Chaudhary and senior officials of the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The talks are also the first high level meeting between Australia and Pakistan since the change of Governments in both countries. (Pakistan held elections on 11 May last year resulting in the election of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, while Australians elected the Government of Prime Minister Tony Abbott on 7 September 2013.)

Mr Varghese said his visit to Pakistan reflected the importance the Australian Government placed on its bilateral relationship with Pakistan which spans not just foreign policy but defence, counter terrorism, trade and investment, development, agriculture and other areas.

"Both our new Governments have placed the economy at the heart of their domestic and foreign policy priorities which lays a very good foundation for greater cooperation in a wide range of areas including trade and investment," Mr Varghese said.

"Our relations are also underpinned by strong people-to-people linkages with a 30,000 Pakistani community in Australia and over 12,000 students in Australia," he said. "Australia is currently the second most popular destination for Pakistani students."

"While our relations have grown steadily in recent years, I am keen to explore new areas of potential cooperation between Australia and Pakistan, I do not think we're fully achieving the potential of the relationship," he said.

Australia's development assistance to Pakistan is \$76 million this year, which supports efforts to maintain stability and democratic governance, and achieve economic development and poverty reduction.

[Bio for Mr Varghese attached]

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