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## Pak prods Taliban to join Afghan talks

2/25/2012

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Friday urged leaders of the Afghan Taliban movement to enter direct peace negotiations with Kabul, a possible sign that Islamabad is stepping up support for reconciliation in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Afghan and US officials have long accused Pakistan of using militant groups as proxies in Afghanistan to counter the influence of rival India, allegations that Islamabad denies.

Pakistan is critical to efforts to bring the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table because of its historical ties to the group. PM Yusuf Raza Gilani said that Pakistan was "prepared to do whatever it takes" to help the Afghan reconciliation process succeed. He called on Hizb-i-Islami - one of Afghanistan's most notorious insurgent factions - and other militant groups to negotiate peace.

The Afghan government has established some contacts with the Taliban, but there are no signs of fullfledged peace talks anytime soon.

US diplomats have been seeking to broaden exploratory talks that began clandestinely in Germany in late 2010 after the Taliban offered to open a representative office in Qatar, prompting demands for inclusion from Kabul.

Afghan president Hamid Karzai has frequently urged Pakistan to advance the peace process. Afghan officials are holding talks with the Afghan Taliban in Pakistan, Ata Mohammad Ahmadi, the head of a provincial peace council in Kandahar, said on Tuesday.