

PAKISTAN OFFERS 'CONTINUED DIALOGUE'

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Pakistan

Stating that Pakistan wants to resolve all issues with India through talks, Mr. Qureshi said, "We need a continued, uninterrupted dialogue. It is the only wise course for us."

Mr. Qureshi, who is also vice-president of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, said External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj had sent a letter on Sunday to congratulate Prime Minister Imran Khan and mentioned talks to resolve issues.

"I welcome her letter," he said.

Responding to External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's letter, he said, "I want to say to Indian Foreign Minister that we are not only neighbours but also nuclear powers. We have old issues and we both know what these issues are. We need to address these issues," Mr. Qureshi said.

The Foreign Minister said the two countries could not afford any adventurism due to close proximity. "We cannot afford any adventurism as response time is so short. The only option is to engage with each other. We cannot live in enmity and we have to accept that there are outstanding issues," he said.

He said Kashmir is an issue and both countries know about it. "Whether we wish or not, Kashmir is an issue and both countries have recognised it. In my opinion there is no option other than talks to resolve it," he said. He said former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Lahore and Islamabad and recognised the reality of Pakistan and the issue of Kashmir.

Growing divide

Mr. Qureshi has had an earlier stint as foreign minister from 2008 to 2011 under the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government during the Mumbai terror attacks. He was in New Delhi when 10 Pakistan-based LeT terrorists attacked India's financial capital.

The India-Pakistan ties have nose-dived in recent years with no bilateral talks taking place. The ties further deteriorated after the terror attacks by Pakistan-based groups in 2016 and India's surgical strikes inside Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The sentencing of alleged Indian spy Kulbhushan Jadhav to death by a military court in April last year added to the strain.

Message for Kabul

On Afghanistan, Mr. Qureshi said he will make a phone call to the foreign minister of Afghanistan and also visit Kabul with a "solid message" that both countries have the same destiny. "There will be no peace in Pakistan without peace in Afghanistan," he said.

"I want to tell people of Afghanistan to understand each other's problems and bilaterally try to resolve all issues," he said.

Talking about relations with the U.S., the foreign minister said there is a trust deficit between the two countries but Pakistan wants to have good ties based on its interests.

Economic diplomacy

Mr. Qureshi said the foreign policy of the new government will be based on the interests of Pakistan and it can be fine-tuned according to the needs of the nation. He said the foreign policy priority will be to change the lives of common people through economic diplomacy. "We will try to change lives of people through socio-economic development," he said.

He said, "There are enormous local and regional challenges but we want to make progress on these issues. Some forces have been trying to isolate the country but it will not happen now," he said.

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