

INDIA UPS ANTE OVER SAARC MEET SPAT

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Taking its protest over the presence of a minister from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) at a South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) meeting to the next level, India has now demanded that the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) be “derecognised” by the South Asian grouping.

In a letter addressed to the SAARC secretariat, which is based in Kathmandu, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) accused the SCCI of having “violated” the SAARC charter and principles by inviting the Minister from PoK Chaudhury Muhammad Saeed to its event in Islamabad on December 8. An Indian diplomat attending the event had walked out in protest against Mr. Saeed's presence.

Regret letter

According to government sources, the SCCI has written to the High Commission of India in Islamabad, “expressing regret”.

In its letter dated December 10, two days after the event, the MEA referred to Mr. Saeed as a “renegade entity” from Jammu and Kashmir “which is under illegal and forcible occupation of Pakistan”, and said his presence at the event constituted a contravention of SAARC principles to respect sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states. It also said the SCCI had taken a “political” position, which breached guidelines for SAARC Apex bodies.

“The government of India requests the SAARC secretariat to consider initiating steps for derecognition of the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry as the Apex body of the SAARC”.

Founded in 1992, the SCCI is formed from local chambers of commerce from all nine members of SAARC including the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). The group led by SCCI president Ruwan Edrisinghe meets regularly and is one of the SAARC's most active bodies.

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