

OIC OUTREACH HINTS AT RESET OF TIES

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Sushma Swaraj

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj will address the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Foreign Ministers meet on March 1, the first time the body has invited an Indian dignitary to attend, the government announced on Saturday.

Coming on the heels of statements of solidarity from the UN Security Council and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) over the Pulwama attack, the speech at the OIC inaugural plenary is also expected to take forward India's case for action against the Jaish-e-Mohammad and strictures on Pakistan.

Thanking the host United Arab Emirates, the Ministry of External Affairs said it saw the invite "as a milestone in [India's] comprehensive strategic partnership with the UAE ... and as a welcome recognition of India's contribution to the Islamic world".

Officials told *The Hindu* that the UAE had sounded out India about the event in January 2019, and that it was a "major diplomatic success".

The invitation, that came from UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, marks a major turnaround between India and the group of Islamic countries, that have often clashed over Kashmir.

Kashmir group

The OIC has a specially designated "Kashmir contact group" that coordinates positions at the United Nations, often led by Pakistan, to protest alleged human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir and invoke UN resolutions. In 2018 alone, the OIC had issued no less than five statements specifically dealing with the situation in J&K, and calling for the international community to intervene.

Criticising the government for accepting the invitation from the OIC, given its previous stand member of Parliament and leader of AIMIM Asaduddin Owaisi said it was "a shame and regretful that India is sending Sushma Swaraj to an organisation which calls Jammu and Kashmir as Indian occupied Kashmir".

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