

ANOTHER PUSH AT UNSC TO BAN AZHAR

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Pakistan

Three permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the U.S., U.K and France, have made a 'listing request' to the UNSC on Wednesday, asking for a travel ban, arms embargo and asset freeze on Pakistan-based Jaish-e Mohammad (JeM) leader Masood Azhar. The JeM had claimed responsibility for the February 14 suicide attack on an Indian security convoy in Pulwama in Kashmir that killed more than 40 Indian troops.

Government sources in Delhi said India had shared the dossier given to Pakistan, on Azhar and Jaish-e Mohammad — including specific details of the group's terror camps and links to the Pulwama attack and previous attacks carried out by them — with all 15 members of the UN Security Council as well.

Wednesday's listing request, which is not publicly available but *The Hindu* has reviewed, will be considered as accepted by the UNSC 1267 Committee unless objections are raised by 3 p.m. on March 13, i.e., after a period of 10 business days.

Fourth attempt

China had used its veto power as a permanent member of the UNSC to block previous attempts at sanctioning Azhar (most recently in 2017). This week's attempt is the fourth since 2009 to list the JeM chief.

The request has been in the works since shortly after the Pulwama attack, but was expected to take longer. Given the escalating situation between India and Pakistan this week, some UNSC members were keen on getting the request finalised quickly, to help keep the peace, a western diplomat familiar with the process told *The Hindu*.

"Yes, we have been able to do this quite quickly, and we are grateful we were able to submit it at the right time, that has also helped in de-escalation tensions. We have all been worried by the situation on the ground between two powerful states, and we also want to make it clear to India that we support them on the issue of terror," the diplomat said.

The JeM had already been listed by the UNSC as being associated with al Qaeda in October 2001. The listing request, in the "Statement of Case" section, links Azhar to the JeM, saying he founded it "upon his release from prison in India in 1999" and that, "Azhar has also financially supported JEM since its founding." Mr. Azhar is also cited as having a role in recruiting fighters in Afghanistan. The Statement of Case further links JeM to the February 14 Pulwama attack.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has had contacts at "various levels , with all sides" and was following the situation "with deep concern", his spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said. The UN's message publicly and privately to both sides has been to "urgently take steps to lower tensions through meaningful, mutual engagement," Mr Dujarric said.

With inputs from Suhasini Haidar in New Delhi

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