

PAK. URGED TO CREATE MILIEU FOR TALKS

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India on Monday urged Pakistan to create a 'conducive' environment for restarting dialogue.

The Indian response came from the Minister of State for External Affairs V. K. Singh, days after Pakistan's new Foreign Minister spoke about holding talks with India.

"Our policy is very clear that dialogue will happen provided the environment is made conducive," Mr. Singh said while speaking to the media here on the sidelines of an event.

Meeting at UNGA

Mr. Singh's statement comes days before Indian and Pakistani Foreign Ministers are expected to interact during the UN General Assembly (UNGA) session which will begin this week. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had made clear India's expectations from Islamabad, when he had urged in a letter to Prime Minister Imran Khan that he should help foster a terrorism-free South Asia.

Earlier last week, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mehmood Qureshi during a visit to Kabul said the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan desired dialogue with India.

Mr. Singh, however indicated that Indian decision-makers are yet to be convinced of the new Pakistani government's ability to decide on India-related issues without the support of the powerful military establishment. "He (Mr. Khan) was propped up by the Army. Let's wait and watch. The question remains whether he will remain under Army control or not," Mr. Singh told media persons. Pakistan's new government has maintained from the beginning that it wishes to hold talks with India.

The pro-dialogue opinion was also reflected by Pakistan's Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry, who told a news channel, "Pakistan's Army, government and people want peace with India...In his first speech after victory, PM Imran Khan had said that we will take two steps if India takes one."

Relations with Pakistan were reflected in domestic politics in India when Congress leader Navjot Sidhu attended Mr. Khan's swearing-in ceremony in Islamabad, and was seen greeting the Pakistan Army Chief General Qamar Bajwa.

Entry to gurdwara

Mr. Sidhu had sought Pakistan's help in ensuring the visit of Sikh pilgrims to the famed Kartarpur Sahib gurdwara, located a short distance from the India-Pakistan border. Sources said on Monday that Mr. Sidhu met External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj regarding visits to Kartarpur Sahib.

Though subsequent reports had suggested that Pakistan was set to open the gurdwara for Indian pilgrims, Mr. Singh said on Monday that such a proposal had not come from Pakistan.

"No proposal has come from Pakistan yet. This issue has been going on for a very long time. There is nothing that has come about yet," he added.

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