

Sushma ignores Pak counterpart

Foreign Minister Slams Pak At Saarc Meet, Walks Out Before Qureshi Speech

TNN & Agencies

New York/ Delhi: Foreign minister Sushma Swaraj and her Pakistan counterpart Shah M Qureshi came face to face on Thursday — for the first time since the new government in Islamabad took over — at a Saarc meeting on the sidelines of the UN general assembly.

Speaking at the meeting, Swaraj called for efforts to eliminate the scourge of terrorism in all its forms, without any discrimination, and end the “ecosystem of its support”. Swaraj said in the presence of Qureshi that progress in the region wasn’t possible without an environment of peace.

“An environment of peace and security is essential for regional cooperation to progress and achieve economic development and prosperity. The number of threats and incidents that endanger south



Sushma Swaraj presents an award to Columbia University professor Alison Bush for promotion of Hindi, during a meeting on the sidelines of 73rd UN General Assembly in New York on Thursday

Asia is on the rise. Terrorism remains the single-largest threat to peace and stability in our region, and indeed in the world,” she said.

Immediately after her speech, Swaraj left the meeting for, as Indian officials said, her other scheduled meetings. While she didn’t wait to hear Qureshi, foreign

secretary Vijay Gokhale stayed back. Qureshi later told reporters, “No I didn’t have any talk with her (Swaraj). On the positive gesture, I can say she left the meeting mid-way, maybe she was not feeling well.”

Indian diplomatic sources said that it was quite normal in a multilateral meeting

to leave early after one had delivered the country’s statement. The sources said that Swaraj was not the first minister to leave the meeting as her counterparts from Afghanistan and Bangladesh had also left before her.

Qureshi added that the “attitude of one nation is making the spirit of Saarc and the spirit of the founding fathers of Saarc unfulfilled and unsuccessful”. He said he judged from the Saarc meeting that most of the members present understood the significance and value of the grouping. “They want to move on. I can’t speak for them, but I can deduce from their body language the disappointment because if you do not move and if you do not sit and convene meetings, how do you move on? You are talking of SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Area), you are talking of regional trade, how do you have regional

trade when you are unwilling to sit and talk? When you fail to agree on a date for a summit where is regional trade going?” he said.

India had earlier this month agreed to a proposal by Pakistan PM Imran Khan for a meeting between the foreign ministers in New York but called it off 24 hours later blaming Pakistan for terror-related incidents in Kashmir.

Earlier, Swaraj voiced India’s commitment to regional cooperation, saying it attaches highest priority to the development and prosperity of the region, under the government’s ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy. “Development of seamless physical connectivity is key for achieving regional growth, employment and prosperity,” she said.

Swaraj attended the ‘Informal Meeting of the Saarc Council of Ministers’ held here on the margins of the 73rd UNGA.