

PM offers Imran 'constructive engagement' but no early talks

Reminds Pak Of Need To Tackle Terror & Violence

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi/Islamabad: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has written to newly sworn-in Pakistan PM Imran Khan expressing India's commitment to a "meaningful and constructive engagement" and recalling their recent conversation about a shared vision of peace to rid the Indian subcontinent of terrorism.

Modi wrote to Khan immediately after the Pakistani leader's swearing-in on August 18 about the need to build good neighbourly relations



and engagement for the benefit of the people of the region, official sources said in Delhi. Indian officials, however, clarified that this should not be read as an invitation to restart the comprehensive bila-

teral dialogue launched in December 2015.

The clarification from Indian officials came after Pakistan foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said in Islamabad that Modi's letter

"indicated the beginning of talks between the two countries". This was denied by Indian officials who said no suggestion had been made for resumption of the formal dialogue process.

Later, in an official statement, Pakistan also denied saying that Modi had made an offer of dialogue. The two leaders underlined the significance of moving ahead through constructive engagement, said the statement.

Qureshi said Pakistan was keen to rebuild ties with Afghanistan and India. "We need a continuous, uninterrupted dialogue. It is the only wise course for us," he said, adding Kashmir was an issue that needed to be resolved.

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Dangling N-threat, Pak minister talks of dialogue



Pakistan PM Imran Khan

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While expressing a desire for dialogue, Pakistani foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said he would like to tell India that both nations were nuclear powers. "We cannot afford any adventurism as response time is short. We cannot live in enmity and we have to accept that there are outstanding issues," he said.

In his letter to Pakistan PM Imran Khan, Modi recalled his phone conversation in which, government sources here said, they spoke of "their shared vision to bring peace, security and prosperity to the Indian subcontinent in order to make it free of terror and violence, and to focus on development".

As India assesses the new government in Islamabad, it is unlikely to dilute the centrality of terrorism to any improved ties.

Modi had taken up the need for a terror-free environment in the region in his conversation on July 30 with Khan in which he had reiterated "his vision of peace and development in the entire neighbourhood".

"[The] PM wrote to the new PM of Pakistan, Imran Khan, on August 18 congratulating him on his assumption of charge. He expressed the belief that the smooth transition of government in Pakistan would strengthen and cement people's belief in democracy," an official source said in Delhi, hours after Qureshi said PM Modi had written to Khan.

Islamabad is keen to host the Saarc summit this year and while Pakistani sources didn't rule out the possibility of Khan officially inviting Modi, Indian officials said it was too early to think along those lines. India blocked the summit after the Uri attack in 2016 in which 19 Indian soldiers were killed by terrorists from across the border. Indian sources recalled the MEA statement welcoming polls in Pakistan in which it hoped Pakistan would work constructively to build a safe, stable, secure and developed South Asia free of terror and violence.

Reacting to the controversy over Qureshi's statement, for which it blamed the Indian media, Pakistan said Qureshi had not stated that "the Indian Prime Minister had made an offer of a dialogue", but had said that the Indian PM in his letter also mentioned "something similar to what the foreign minister elucidated earlier i.e. that the way forward was only through constructive engagement".