

Pakistan invites India for key Afghan conference

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Islamabad: Pakistan has invited External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj for a crucial regional conference here on Afghanistan, a move that could provide an opportunity for the two neighbours to mend their frosty ties.

The "Heart of Asia" conference will be held on December 7 and 8, where representatives from Azerbaijan, China, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and the UAE are expected to attend. Pakistan has also sent an invitation to Ms. Swaraj, the Express Tribune reported.

A formal invitation has been sent to India and 25 other countries for the Heart of Asia ministerial meeting on Afghanistan to be hosted by Pakistan, a senior Foreign Office official was quoted as saying by the paper.

An Indian diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed New Delhi has received the invitation but said the decision on whether the External Affairs Minister will attend the conference has yet to be taken, the paper said.

He said India is likely to send a high-level delegation headed by the minister given the conference's importance. The meet provides a moment to unfold the process for a dialogue between the two countries after recent hiccups in their ties.

Indo-Pak ties are going through a chill particularly after cancellation of NSA-level talks following differences over the agenda proposed by Islamabad, and a planned meeting between Kashmiri separatists and Pakistan's National Security Adviser Sartaj Aziz. India has also accused Pakistan of repeated ceasefire violations and of having a hand in recent terror incidents in Jammu and Kashmir.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi, who were staying in the same hotel during their stay in New York in September for the UN General Assembly, did not meet on the sidelines of the summit.

Mr. Modi and Sharif had last met in Ufa, Russia, in July on the sidelines of the BRICS and SCO summits.

It is believed that Prime Minister Modi may be ready for talks with Pakistan after Bihar elections, where his party could not repeat the success it had in Kashmir last year, the paper said, citing analysts.

The Afghan conference will discuss the current situation in Afghanistan with particular focus on helping the war-torn country's economy.

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