

Pakistan hasn't committed to become part of any conflict in exchange for Saudi package: Qureshi

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi told the Senate on Wednesday that Pakistan has not agreed to become part of any conflict in the Middle East in exchange for the financial assistance package from Saudi Arabia.

"Pakistan has received an unconditional package [from Saudi Arabia]. No conditions have been imposed," the minister said while responding to concerns expressed by opposition senators.

The confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia has reached "unprecedented levels" as the two countries fight for regional dominance in Yemen and Syria, the minister observed, adding that the strain could affect the entire region, including Pakistan.

Considering the importance of the issue, Prime Minister Imran Khan had offered to play a mediatory role to resolve the Yemen conflict, Qureshi told the upper house.

He recalled that former premier Nawaz Sharif too had tried to arbitrate in the Yemen dispute, but had remained unsuccessful.

Minister For Foreign Affairs @SMQureshiPTI Addressing Senate of Pakistan, Islamabad (07.11.18) #PTI #Senate #Islamabad
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– PTI (@PTIofficial) [November 7, 2018](#)

He informed the house that the Iranian foreign minister had

said his country would welcome and “respond positively” Pakistan’s role in the Yemen dispute. He said he was also seeing a “slight shift” in Saudi Arabia’s position with regard to the war and progress could be made by continuous engagement.

The minister’s remarks came as Prime Minister Khan in a meeting with Ambassador of Yemen Mohammed Motahar Alashabi today assured the envoy of Pakistan’s “unwavering support in the early resolution of the conflict” in Yemen.

Qureshi said Pakistan’s relations with Saudi Arabia had been frosty for a few years and the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government has been successful in rectifying the same.

“We have re-engaged [the Saudis]... and the vacuum has been broken,” he said, adding that the PTI government has been able to reach the understanding that the previous two governments could not.

He said the \$6 billion package pledged by the Kingdom for Pakistan, including balance-of-payments support and deferred oil payments, has curbed economic uncertainty in the country.

Visit to China ‘highly beneficial’

The foreign minister said Prime Minister Khan’s recent visit to China had been “highly beneficial” for the country, adding that this was the first time the top four Chinese leaders had separately met the Pakistani leadership.

“We have agreed to upgrade strategic dialogue between China and Pakistan to the foreign ministers’ level,” Qureshi said while highlighting the successes of the visit.

He said China has suggested it wants to help Pakistan because it recognises the country’s significance, and that it is ready to rectify the trade imbalance between the two countries by giving Pakistan market access.

China has also agreed to play its role in a “trilateral engagement” to advance the Afghan peace process, he announced. A meeting in this regard will be held in Kabul in December, to be attended by China, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

He assured the Senate that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects that have already been started will reach completion; however, the PTI government has “tried to give [the project] a new direction”.

The government’s focus in the second phase of the mega project has shifted from infrastructure to livelihoods, human development and a “people-centric approach”, the minister revealed. The sectors targeted under this approach would include education, health, skill development, poverty alleviation, agriculture, industrialisation and a fast-track development of Gwadar.

PPP not satisfied with minister’s clarification

The opposition remained unconvinced with the foreign minister’s assurances regarding Pakistan’s role as a mediator in the Saudi-Yemen conflict.

PPP leader Sherry Rehman criticised Qureshi’s statement and said that the opposition’s apprehensions regarding the matter were not addressed by the government.

“The foreign minister made a long speech in Senate and while it revolved around the prime minister’s offer of acting as a mediator between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, he did not answer any of the questions put forth by the opposition,” Rehman said.

She added: “Pakistan publicly made this offer and Yemen refused it. How can Pakistan act as a mediator in the conflict when it is taking loans from Saudi Arabia?”

“Saudi Arabia could raise questions on Pakistan’s offer of acting a mediator,” she said, adding that the details of the loans taken from the Kingdom have also not been shared with the Parliament.