

## **We must delink religion from terror: Sushma Swaraj tells Arab League**

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**Manama:** Strongly pitching for delinking terrorism from religion, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj today said India and the Arab world must join hands to eliminate the menace as she warned that those who silently sponsor terror groups could end up being used by them.

"Those who believe that silent sponsorship of such terrorist groups can bring rewards must realise that they have their own agenda; they are adept at using the benefactor more effectively than the sponsor has used them," Swaraj told the Foreign Ministers of Arab League states.

Speaking at the first First Ministerial Meeting of the Arab-India Cooperation Forum which she described as a "turning point" in India's ties with the Arab world, she made a strong pitch for delinking religion from terrorism, saying the only distinction is between those who believe in humanity and those who do not.

"Terrorists use religion, but inflict harm on people of all faiths," said Swaraj, who arrived here yesterday on a two-day visit.

She cited "India's model of unity in diversity" as an example for the world to counter indoctrination and radicalisation.

Swaraj's citing of India's religious and cultural diversity at the world stage assumes significance as it comes in the backdrop of the intolerance debate that had raged recently in the country with many writers, artists and civil society members expressing alarm over the issue.

"We in India have citizens who belong to every existing faith. Our Constitution is committed to the fundamental principle of faith-equality: the equality of all faiths not just before the law but also in daily behaviour. In every corner of my country, the music of the azaan welcomes the dawn, followed by the chime of a Hanuman temple's bells, followed by the melody of the Guru Granth Sahib being recited by priests in a gurdwara, followed by the peal of church bells every Sunday," she said.

"This philosophy is not just a construct of our Constitution, adopted in 1950; it is the essence of our ancient belief that the world is family," she asserted.

Swaraj, in her speech, also quoted from the Quran, saying that faith harmony is the message of the Holy Quran as well.

"I will quote only two verses: La ikra fi al deen (Let there be no compulsion in religion) and La qum deen o qum wa il ya deen (Your faith for you, and my faith for me)," she said in her address to the key Arab nations.

She stressed that dangers of radicalisation and indoctrination cannot be ignored.

"We have seen repeatedly that terrorism does not respect national borders. It seeks to subvert societies through its pernicious doctrine of a clash of civilisations," Swaraj said.

"The only antidote to this violent philosophy is the path of peace, tolerance and harmony, a path that was illustrated centuries ago by Buddha and Mahavira and which was taken into the modern age by the Father of our nation Mahatma Gandhi. As he famously said, 'an eye for an eye ends up making the whole world blind'," she said.

Swaraj's strong push for anti-terror cooperation comes at a time when there have been a spate of terror attacks across the globe from the Paris carnage and the Pathankot airbase assault to the blasts in Indonesia as terrorism has risen as one of the most significant challenges of the world.

"As the spectre of terrorism and religious hatred raises its ugly head across the world, particularly in those cherished cities of history, it is time once again to reach back in time and redeem the essence of our civilisational spirit. We must pledge to halt the physical violence that has spread like a plague," Swaraj said.

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