

## India-Afghanistan Relations

India and Afghanistan have a strong relationship based on historical and cultural links. The relationship is not limited to the governments in New Delhi and Kabul, but has its foundations in the historical contacts and exchanges between the people. In recent past, India-Afghanistan relations have been further strengthened by the Strategic Partnership Agreement, which was signed between the two countries in October 2011.

The Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) between the two sides, inter alia, provides for assistance to help rebuild Afghanistan's infrastructure and institutions, education and technical assistance to re-build indigenous Afghan capacity in different areas, encouraging investment in Afghanistan's natural resources, providing duty free access to the Indian market for Afghanistan's exports support for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, broad-based and inclusive process of peace and reconciliation, and advocating the need for a sustained and long-term commitment to Afghanistan by the international community.

India-Afghanistan relationship is characterized by regular high-level exchanges. Our leaders have met each other during bilateral visits as well as on the sidelines of international events. On 25<sup>th</sup> December 2016, Prime Minister along with a high level delegation paid a visit to Afghanistan. During his visit he called on President Ashraf Ghani; he met Chief Executive, Dr Abdullah and Former President Hamid Karzai. During his visit he inaugurated the newly built Afghan Parliament; announced 500 scholarships for the children of the martyrs of Afghan Security Forces and gifted four Mi-25 Attack helicopters to the Afghan Air Force. During the visit, it was also decided to conduct the second Strategic Partnership Council meeting headed by the Foreign Ministers of the both countries in the first quarter of 2016 along with four joint working group meetings.

His Excellency Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Chief Executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (CEO) visited India from 31 January- 4 February 2016. During this visit, he met Prime Minister on 1st February 2016 and held discussions on bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest including the security situation and peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. EAM and NSA called on CEO, on February 1 & 4, respectively. In continuation of India's development assistance to Afghanistan, Government of India approved the 3rd phase of Small Development Projects comprising of 92 projects. An Agreement on Exemption from Visa Requirement for Holders of Diplomatic Passports was signed. On 3rd February, CEO addressed a joint interaction with the three leading chambers of commerce and industry in India, namely ASSOCHAM, CII and FICCI. CEO delivered the Keynote Address at the Counter Terrorism Conference organised by India Foundation in Jaipur on February 2, where the inaugural address was by Rashtrapati.

On 4 June 2016, Prime Minister visited Herat in western Afghanistan and he along with President Ghani jointly inaugurated the Afghan-India Friendship Dam, earlier known as Salma Dam. The completion of the dam project represents culmination of years of hard work by about 1,500 Indian and Afghan engineers and other professionals in very difficult conditions. It also highlights India's continued commitment to Afghanistan's reconstruction and development.

Later on 22 August 2016, Prime Minister jointly inaugurated through video conferencing the restored Stor Palace in Kabul with President Ghani. During his speech Prime Minister said the 1.25 billion Indian people will “always” stand with Afghanistan in ensuring peace and prosperity.

President Ghani paid a working visit to India from 14-15 September 2016. The visit provided an opportunity to continue the close and frequent consultations between the two friendly neighbours. During the visit, Extradition Treaty, the Agreement on cooperation in civil and commercial matters and the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Peaceful Uses of Outer Space were signed. It was also stressed that expeditious implementation of the trilateral agreement involving Iran, signed in May 2016, which would use Chahbahar port to augment connectivity in the region. India also announced additional USD 1 billion assistance for capability building in spheres such as education, health, agriculture, skill development, women’s empowerment, energy, infrastructure and strengthening of democratic institutions of Afghanistan.

The second Strategic Partnership Council meeting was held in New Delhi on September 11, 2017. Foreign Minister H.E Salahuddin Rabbani led the Afghan delegation comprising of senior members of the Afghan Government. Making use of the fresh US\$ 1Billion announced by Prime Minister, India and Afghanistan launched a New Development Partnership. Government of India worked with the Government of Afghanistan to identify priorities and projects where Afghanistan needed the Indian assistance to be directed. India agreed to implement some important new projects such as the Shahtoot Dam and drinking water project for Kabul that would also facilitate irrigation, water supply for Charikar City, road connectivity to Band-e-Amir in Bamyán Province that would promote tourism, low cost housing for returning Afghan refugees in Nangarhar Province to promote their resettlement, a gypsum board manufacturing plant in Kabul to promote value added local industry and for import substitution, and a polyclinic in Mazar-e-Sharif.

In addition, India will also take up 116 High Impact Community Development Projects in 31 provinces of Afghanistan. These important investments will be in the areas of education, health, agriculture, irrigation, drinking water, renewable energy, flood control, micro-hydro power, sports and administrative infrastructure.

India also announced that on-going programmes for education, capacity building, skills and human resource development of Afghanistan, one of the largest such programmes in the world, will continue for a further period of five years from 2017 to 2022.

During the meeting, three major documents were exchanged;

(a) Motor Vehicles Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger, Personal and Cargo Vehicular Traffic;

(b) Memorandum of Understanding between the National Medicine and Healthcare Products Regulatory Authority of Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO), Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for mutual cooperation in the field of pharmaceutical products regulation;

### (c) The Orbit Frequency Coordination Agreement between India and Afghanistan on South Asia Satellite (SAS)

Dr. Abdullah during his recent visit (28-29 September) inaugurated the India-Afghanistan Trade and Investment Show, an impressive event jointly organized by India, Afghanistan and the United States of America. Dr. Abdullah also held meetings with Prime Minister and EAM during his visit and discussed various issues of bilateral concern. Dr. Abdullah also called on the President of India during his visit. India and Afghanistan signed an agreement in the area of Police Training during the successful visit to further expand the areas of cooperation.

### **Commercial Relations**

The bilateral trade at for the year 2016-17 was USD 800 million approx and has immense potential to be expanded further. However, the trade relations will realize its true potential once the Wagah-Attari route is opened for bilateral trade. So far, the Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) has been restrictive in this aspect. India is the largest market in the region for Afghan products and the blocking of transit has affected the free movement of commodities. One of the objectives of building Zaranj-Delaram road by India was to boost bilateral economic relations besides offering Afghanistan another outlet to a seaport. The successful operation of the Chabahar port in Iran would capitalize on this road to offer a new transit route of Afghan products to India while opening a new route for India, and the rest of the world, for trade with Central Asia.

The inauguration of the Dedicated Air Cargo Corridor in June 2017 between Kabul-Delhi and Kandahar-Delhi has provided a fresh impetus to bilateral trade. The Air Corridor has ensured free movement of freight despite the barriers put in place due to the denial of transit by Pakistan. During the Strategic Partnership Council meeting it was decided to further strengthen the corridor and expand it to other cities in India. Over 1000 Tonnes of cargo has already been transported in the Air Corridor since its inauguration.

On 28 September 2017, Dr. Abdullah inaugurated the India-Afghanistan Trade and Investment Show. It provided a valuable platform to showcase trade and investment opportunities in Afghanistan. The show generated business worth US\$ 250 million and enhanced the B2B linkages between India and Afghanistan. The show brought forward the immense potential in the bilateral trade and further strengthened the commercial relations between India and Afghanistan.

The prominent Indian companies doing businesses in Afghanistan are:

- (1) KEC – Electrical Transmission Lines
- (2) Phoenix – Consultancy in Electrical Transmission
- (3) AIPL – Establishment of Hydro Power Project in Hilmand Province
- (4) APTECH – Computer & Management Education
- (5) GAMMON INDIA – Power Transmission Line & Power Sub-stations
- (6) KPTL – Power Transmission Line

(10) ANAAR GROUP (AIR INDIA GSA)

(11) Spice Jet

### **Afghan Culture Relations**

Afghanistan has been an important trading and craft centre for over 2000 years connecting the civilizations of Persia, Central Asia with India. However, over 3 decades of war have undermined Afghanistan's unique traditions of art and architecture. Today, the biggest challenge for Afghanistan is to rediscover and sustain its ancient art and architectural knowledge. India and Afghanistan share centuries old cultural heritage with deep-rooted linkages in the field of music, arts, architecture, language and cuisine.

In the field of music, in particular, most Afghan musicians were trained in the Patiala Gharana. Today, Indian films, songs and TV serials are popular with the masses, contributing significantly to the popularization of Hindi and familiarization of the populace with Indian socio-cultural value system. As part of India's restructuring programme for Afghanistan, India has regularly aimed to take up projects that will render Afghanistan's cultural heritage sustainable. The Indian cultural centre has also been working towards building a shared cultural heritage.

### **Indian Diaspora in Afghanistan**

The Mission maintains a database on Indians staying in Afghanistan, though many Indians don't register with the Mission. Presently, there are estimated to be about 2500 Indians in the country, though only about 850 are registered with the Mission. Most of the Indian Diaspora are engaged as professionals in Banks, IT firms, Construction companies, Hospitals, NGOs, Telecom companies, Security companies, Universities, Govt. of India sponsored projects, Govt. of Afghanistan and UN Missions. The Mission interacts closely with the Indian citizens, helping them to resolve their problems, and routinely invite them to attend National & Embassy functions.

### **Useful Resources:**

Embassy of India, Kabul's website:

<http://eoi.gov.in/kabul/>

Embassy of India, Kabul's Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/indianembkabul>

Embassy of India, Kabul's Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInAfghanistan>

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