

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, and has its foundations in the historical contacts and exchanges between the people. In recent past, Indo-Afghan relations have been further strengthened by the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed between the two countries in 2011. As Afghanistan was preparing itself for three simultaneous political, security and economic transitions in 2014, India had allayed its fears about its future by making a long-term commitment to the security and development of Afghanistan. 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. As the lead country for Trade, Commerce and Investment CBM of Heart of Asia Process, India hosted Senior Officials Meeting of the Heart of Asia countries in New Delhi in January 2014. MoS Gen V K Singh led the Indian delegation to participate in Heart of Asia Ministerial Meeting in October 2014 in Beijing and the London Conference in December 2014.

There also exists a high-level political engagement with Afghanistan, which is reflected in the large number of bilateral high-level visits. There have been frequent high level visits from both sides, including among others, Prime Minister in May 2011; Vice President in March 2014 (to Participate in the funeral of FVP Marshal Fahim) and September 2014 (Inaugural Ceremony of National Unity Government), External Affairs Minister (EAM) in January 2011, February 2014 (inauguration of ANAASTU) and September 2014 (unveiling of the monumental flag and New Chancery premises inauguration) ; National Security Adviser (NSA) in March 2011, February 2013 and October 2014; Special Envoy to PM to Kabul in June 2011 for a meeting of the International Contact Group; Foreign Secretary in September 2011, August 2013 and May 2014; Minister of Law & Justice in September 2011 and June 2014, Minister for Steel in April 2013, and by Shri S. Ramadorai, Adviser to the Prime Minister of India in the National Council on Skill Development and Shri M.S. Swaminathan, Chairman of National Farmers Commission.

Hon'ble EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj visited Afghanistan and called on the President Karzai and jointly inaugurated a monumental Afghan Flag on 10 September 2014. This flag, a symbol of Afghan unity and nationhood was organized with assistance from various sponsors including the Flag Foundation of India. India announced US \$ 1 million for creation of a national public park around the flag. Indian initiative was widely appreciated by Afghans and the international community. EAM also inaugurated the new chancery complex in Kabul from which the Embassy has started operating since July 2014. She pointed out that this was the clearest statement of 'no exit' policy by India.

From the Afghan side, high level visits to India included Former President Hamid Karzai's visit in May, 2013, following closely after his state visit in November, 2012, when he delivered the prestigious MaulanaAbulKalam Azad Memorial lecture, had intensive discussions with political and business leaders and oversaw the signing of four MoUs with India. India also hosted the Upper House of the Afghan Parliament, Meshrano Jirga, for a study visit from 11-18 February, 2013.

The former President Hamid Karzai visited India to attend the swearing in ceremony of the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in May 2014. Mr Karzai visited India in November 2014 to participate in HT Leadership Summit and also attended the 125th Birth Anniversary of the First PM Pt Nehru, organized by the Indian National Congress. PM Modi met the new President Dr Ghani on the sidelines of the SAARC Summit in Kathmandu in November 2014. Gen. Karimi's visited IMA Dehradun as the Chief Guest at passing out parade in December 2014 and also met with COAS Gen Suhag.

The Presidential elections were held in 2014 in Afghanistan. After a protracted electoral process for two rounds of elections and UN mediated audit process, a Political Agreement was signed between two leading contenders – Dr Ashraf Ghani and Dr Abdullah Abdullah which led to the formation of national unity government, inaugurated on 29 September 2014. The ceremony was attended by our Vice President Dr Hamid Ansari. Our consistent signalling on the political inclusivity and peaceful transfer of power was addressed and appreciated by all sections of the Afghans. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in his congratulatory message wholeheartedly welcomed the agreement between the two Afghan leaders and mentioned that wisdom they have shown respects the strong democratic aspirations of the people of Afghanistan, which was also manifested by the poll turnout. PM also conveyed that India will stand steadfastly with the new government of Afghanistan as it continues the task of building a strong, developed and peaceful nation.

President of Afghanistan, Dr Ashraf Ghani, paid a state visit to India from 27-29 April, 2015. During the visit, the countries reaffirmed their commitment to patiently and systematically work towards strengthening of the India Afghanistan Strategic Partnership, with a clear focus on the long term relationship between the two countries.

While underlining the strength of their bilateral relations, the leaders of both the countries acknowledged that peace, prosperity and security in the region was indivisible, and their mutually respectful relations are not at expense of other nations or group of nations.

Development Cooperation:

Bilaterally, India has played a significant role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan. India's extensive developmental assistance programme, which now stands at around US 2 billion, is a strong signal of its abiding commitment to peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan during this critical period of security and governance transition. This makes India one of the leading donor nations to Afghanistan, and by far the largest from among the regional countries.

India believes that sustainable development of Afghanistan requires long-term investment in Afghanistan that can help it exploit its natural resource wealth. India is, thus, at the forefront of the promotion of investment in Afghanistan and a consortium of public and private Indian companies has been selected to make one of the biggest investments in the country's mining sector, in the Hajigak iron ore reserves.

Major Indian projects in Afghanistan nearing completion include Salma Dam, new Afghan Parliament building, Doshi (already charged) & Charikar (expected to be completed by end August 2015) substations, Restoration of Store Place (expected to be completed in by December 2015). Under Gol's wheat assistance programme to

Afghanistan, out of a total committed quantity of 1.1 million MT of wheat, 711,882 tonnes of wheat (or wheat equivalent in cash) has already been supplied to Afghanistan at an expenditure of Rs. 989.45 crore. India has also committed to contribute substantially in improving transportation system in Kabul and has decided to donate 1000 buses to Afghanistan. A team from Delhi Integrated Multi-modal Transit System (DIMTS) Ltd., consultants for implementing the project, will be visiting Kabul in end July 2015 to prepare Detailed Project Report.

A significant addition to India's development portfolio in Afghanistan is the Small Development Projects (SDP) scheme, in the fields of agriculture, rural development, education, health, vocational training, etc. The Small Development Projects were implemented in two Phases- the first in July 2006 comprising projects worth US\$ 11,216,179/- and the second in June 2008 comprising projects worth US\$ 8,579,537/-. MoU for implementation of the Third Phase of the SDP scheme was signed during President Karzai's visit in November 2012 with an additional provision of US\$ 100 million. 125 projects have been sanctioned under Phase III at a total cost of US\$ 32.347 million.

In the area of skill development, GoI offers training to Afghan officials/nationals in diverse fields through 500 ITEC slots allocated annually to Afghanistan, Special ITEC courses for Afghan Government Officials, 614 ICAR scholarships under India-Afghanistan Fellowship Programme during 2012-13 to 2016-17, training via tele-education at ANASTU, Kandahar and Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health, Kabul. GoI also grants ICCR scholarships to 1000 Afghans every year to pursue under graduate courses in various Indian universities in major cities across India.

Economic and commercial relation:

India fully recognizes the pre-eminence of Afghanistan as a junction of trade routes between central, south and west Asia. Considering the immense possibilities of trade between India and Afghanistan, the bilateral trade figure of US\$ 683 million (US\$ 474 million exports and US\$ 209 million imports by India) for the year 2013-14 is a rather modest figure. Major Indian exports to Afghanistan are man-made filaments, apparels and clothing accessories, pharma products, cereals, dairy and poultry products. Afghan exports to India primarily comprises of dry and fresh fruits.

India has undertaken a series of measures to achieve the full potential of trade development between the two countries. A Preferential Trade Agreement was signed with Afghanistan in March 2003, under which India allowed substantial duty concessions [ranging from 50% to 100%] to 38 dry fruit products. In November 2011, India removed basic customs duties for all Afghan products [except alcohol and tobacco products], giving those duty free access to the Indian market.

With the operation of Chabahar port in Iran, Afghan exports would receive a major boost, as a new transit route would be available for the country to trade with India and the rest of the world.

A Public-Private consortium of Indian iron ore mining and steel companies (AFISCO), led by Steel Authority of India, secured a tender for the Hajigak iron ore reserves, with plans to construct a 1.2 MTPA steel plant, including a 90 MW capacity power plant. Since beginning of 2013, Indian business delegations are regularly visiting Afghanistan.

MoU signed for developing Afghan Textiles industry:

Afghanistan is endowed with rich quality of cotton, silk and cashmere and has significant potential for development of the textiles industry, which in turn may generate considerable employment opportunities. With this objective, a MoU was signed between India and Afghanistan on 7 January 2015, as per which India would provide the required assistance to develop Afghan textiles industry and assist in skill development, research and technical collaboration in product development and manufacturing, testing and certification and organize joint trade missions for mutual collaboration.

Pharmaexcil International Exhibition:

A delegation of 45 Afghan businessmen attended the Pharmaexcil Exhibition held at Ahmedabad in Gujarat on 9-10 January 2015. Pharmaexcil India is one of the most prestigious Pharma exhibitions in the world. After the Exhibition, the Afghan delegation also participated in 'Vibrant Gujarat 2015'.

3rd India-Afghanistan Innovation Fair:

The event was organized with the support of USAID/FAIDA and Herat Chamber of Commerce and Industries. 20 Indian NGOs/business groups and 40 Afghan groups showcased their innovative models during the Exhibition, which was followed by B2B match making events. More than 1,000 visitors visited the Exhibition daily.

Indian Diaspora in Afghanistan

Presently, there are estimated to be about 3500 Indians in Afghanistan, though only about 800 are registered with the Mission. Most of them are engaged as professionals in UN organizations, IT firms, banks, professors in universities. The Mission periodically issues security advisories to all Indians apprising them of the security situation and security precautions to be taken while staying in the country. The Mission interacts closely with the Indian citizens, helping them resolve problems, and routinely invites them to attend Embassy functions.

Many Indians also come to Afghanistan in search of high paying jobs after paying exorbitant amounts to unscrupulous agents in India and Afghanistan on tourist/entry visa of 30 days. Often they are stranded after not getting the desired job and their visa having expired. The Mission arranged the return to India of 99 distressed Indians in 2014 and 19 in 2015 till date, who were stranded in Afghanistan either due to expiry of their visa, loss of passport or lack of funds.

In 2014, four Indians were killed in various terrorist attacks in Kabul, two on July 22 at Camp Gibson where they were working for Dyncorps and two at Bagram Airbase on December 8, while on May 13, 2015 four Indians were killed in terrorist attack on Hotel Park Palace, Kabul. The Mission liaised and facilitated expeditious despatch of their mortal remains and informed their families. An Indian, Alexis Prem Kumar, working for a NGO, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), in Herat was kidnapped by armed militants on June 2 from Saahadattownship in Zindajan district. He was released on July 22 and was sent back to India.

Afghan Hindu-Sikh Community

The Mission maintains close liaison with the Afghan Hindu-Sikh community, which numbers about 3000 after their exodus through the years and reside mostly in Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Ghazni and Helmand. Numbering over 50,000 in the early 90s, their numbers have dwindled over the years on account of sufferings from the war conditions. Most of those who have stayed back also have their families staying in India or other countries, while a few male members run petty business in Afghanistan to earn their livelihood. They do not have PIO status as their Indian origins are shrouded in remote past, but they identify with the Indian cultural heritage.

Useful Resources:

Embassy of India, Kabul website:

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

Embassy of India, Kabul Facebook Page:

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

Embassy of India, Kabul Twitter account:

<https://twitter.com/IndianEmbKabul>

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