

India – Afghanistan Relations

Political

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 undergoing three simultaneous political, security and economic transitions in 2015, 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 and with the help of FICCI, India is organising a 6th Regional Technical Group (RTG) in New Delhi on November 2015.

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. Secretary of M&ER Division, Shri. Sujata Mehta led the delegation to participate in the RECCA VI conference held in Kabul in September 2015.

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. During Heart of Asia 2015, Hon'ble EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj led a high level delegation to Islamabad. In the conference EAM stressed on increased connectivity, regional trade and openness with Afghanistan, and also "extended India's hand towards Pakistan" in this regard.

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 Maulana Abul Kalam 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 signaling 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.

In 14 March 2015, Abdullah Abdullah, Chief Executive of arrived in India for a three days visit. During his visit he met with Mohammad Hamid Ansari, the Vice President of India and some other high ranking government officials. He also participated in India Conclave Conference organised by India Today magazine. The President Dr Ashraf Ghani, after seven months in April 2015 paid an official visit to India in April 2015. During the visit, President Ghani met President of India, Shri

Pranab Mukherjee; Prime Minister of India Shri. Narendra Modi; and External Affairs Minister Shri Sushma Swaraj. Both side discussed about the cooperation and assistance in various sectors including the health, education, agriculture, disaster management, power sector and electoral management. As a result of President Ghani's visit, India has gifted Afghanistan three Cheetal helicopters; assistance for the annual maintenance of M/s Habibiya School, Kabul and Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health; USD 5 million fund to ARCS to treat Afghan child with Congenital Heart Disease (CHD) in India for 5 years; extension of ICCR scholarship till 2020 and indicated readiness to sign a bilateral motor vehicle pact to allow vehicles from both sides to traverse each other's countries.

The National Security Adviser of Afghanistan, Mohammad Haneef Atmar visited India on November 8-9, 2015. During his two-day visit, the Afghan NSA engaged in bilateral talks with the relevant Indian government authorities. The meetings focused on cooperation in the political, security and economic areas including the current situation in Afghanistan and the region. The National Security Adviser of Afghanistan and the Indian authorities discussed and exchanged views on mutual efforts in fighting against terrorism in line with the provisions of the Strategic Partnership Agreement. On bilateral economic cooperation, H.E. Atmar discussed with the Indian authorities expedition of investments by Indian companies in Afghanistan.

The Deputy Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Hekmat Khalil Karzai paid an official visit to New Delhi from November 16 – 20, 2015. Deputy Foreign Minister Karzai during his four day visit conducted meetings with Indian authorities to discuss a host of issues and the state of progress in the bilateral ties between Afghanistan and India and interacted at India based think-tanks. Accompanied by a number of relevant delegates, the Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister paid his first official visit to India. The Afghan authority met with the Indian Hon'ble Vice- President H.E. Hamid Ansari, Minister of External Affairs H.E. Sushma Swaraj, Minister of Skills Development and Employment opportunities H.E. Rajiv Pratap Rudy, Foreign Secretary H.E. S. Jaishankar, Special Secretary (ER) Smt. Sujata Mehta, Home Secretary, H.E. Rajiv Mehrishi, BCCI Secretary General Mr. Anurag Thakur, and And the Director General of Indian Council of Cultural Relations Mr. C.V Rajasekhar. The Deputy Foreign Minister discussed with the authorities of the host country key issues related to the bilateral arrangement between Afghanistan as well as those of mutual interest and concern for the two countries. The head of Afghan delegation also interacted with members of Vivakananda International Foundation (VIF) under Chatham House Rule and spoke at the Observer Research Foundation on "Indo-afghan Relations: the Way Forward". During the visit the Afghan authority also met with the National Congress Party's Vice President Mr. Rahul Gandhi, and BJP's National Secretary General Mr. Ram Madhav.

In 25th 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; he announced 500 scholarships for the children of the martyrs of Afghan Security Forces in school and colleges both in

Afghanistan and in India; and Prime Minister gifted four Mi25 Attack helicopter to Afghan Air forces. During the visit, it has been decided to conduct the first Strategic Partnership Council meeting headed by the Foreign Minister of the both country 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 visited India from 31 January- 4 February 2016. During this visit, he met Prime Minister on February 1 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 H.E. Dr. Abdullah, on February 1 & 4, respectively. India reiterated its abiding commitment to stand by Afghanistan in all possible ways during the latter's on-going political, security and economic transitions. The two sides strongly condemned the recent terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and Pathankot in India, and stressed the need to fully eliminate all forms and manifestations of terrorism as well as support to it, for peace and stability in the region.

In the context of continued bilateral development cooperation, the decision of the Government of India to approve the 3rd phase of Small Development Projects comprising of 92 projects in Afghanistan was conveyed. Both sides agreed to develop connectivity through Chahbahar port in Iran on priority. An Agreement on Exemption from Visa Requirement for Holders of Diplomatic Passports was signed. On 3rd February, H.E. Dr. Abdullah addressed a joint interaction with the three leading chambers of commerce and industry in India, namely ASSOCHAM, CII and FICCI.

H.E. Dr. Abdullah 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.

Commercial Relations

Indo-Afghan Trade and Investment

India recognizes the preeminence of Afghanistan as a junction of trade routes between central, south and west Asia for 3000 years. The bilateral trade at USD 683.02 million for 2013-14 (US\$ 474.25 million export and US \$ 208.77 million import by India) and \$684 million for 2014-15 (\$422 million export and \$ 262 million import by India) is a modest figure going by the actual potential. However, the trade relations can realize its true potential if the Wagah-Attari route is opened for bilateral trade with Afghanistan. So far, the Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) has been restrictive in this aspect. India after Pakistan is the major export destination of Afghanistan. One of the objectives of building Zaranj-Delaram road by India was to boost bilateral economic relations besides offering Afghanistan another outlet to Sea port. The successful operation of the Chabahar port in Iran could 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.

India and Afghanistan signed a Preferential Trade Agreement in March 2003 under which India allowed substantial duty concessions, ranging from 50% to 100%, to certain category (38 times) of Afghan dry fruits. Afghanistan in turn has allowed reciprocal concessions to Indian products, including tea, sugar, cement and pharmaceuticals. In November 2011, India removed basic customs duties for all SAARC LDCs at the SAARC Summit in Male which gave all products of Afghanistan (except alcohol and tobacco) duty free access to Indian market. Afghanistan (as LDC) is signatory to SAFTA and is required to lower its tariffs of all goods not on its sensitive list of 5% or less. This decade-long process helps avoid any sudden or dramatic reductions in tariffs and eases the changes with minimal disruption to Afghan industry. Afghanistan recently reduced its sensitive list from 1,063 tariff lines to 850 out of roughly 6,000 total tariff lines. Only 30% of the tariff lines on Afghanistan's sensitive list have tariff rates above the requisite 5%. Under Afghanistan's sensitive list, the highest tariff rates are applied on fruits, vegetables and nuts, basic construction materials, beverages, plants, articles of leather and carpets. Some other items that are not produced in Afghanistan are also subject to higher tariffs for revenue collection purposes such as tobacco, ceramic products, perfumery, minerals and fuel.

Transit is a major bottleneck in Indo-Afghan trade due to denial of export of Indian goods via Wagah border and delays at Karachi port. Most of the trade occurs via Bandar Abbas port in Iran or through Dubai. Earlier Banks/Insurance companies were refusing to provide their services via Bandar Abbas port due to US sanctions but after lifting of sanctions now the situation may change. Many Indian companies are engaged in the infrastructural development of Afghanistan and are contributing in the development of the country.

In the recent times, there are quite a number of visits by business delegations of both the countries to each other's country. The important Afghan/Indian Trade/Business delegations that visited India/Afghanistan in the recent times are:

Surajkund International Crafts Mela 1-15 Feb 2015: The event was organized by Haryana State Tourism department and seven craftsmen from Afghanistan attended the event. They were provided with free booths. This is an annual event.

7th MP Expotech 2015: Reverse Buyer Seller Meet 16-18 January 2015; Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh. 28 Afghan participants attended the event.

Pharmaexcil International Exhibition at Ahmedabad: 45 Afghans attended the event on 9-10 Jan 2015.

Vibrant Gujarat 2015: A 45 strong Afghan delegation attended the event on 11 Jan 2015 at Ahmadabad.

India Stone Mart 29 Jan-01 Feb 2015: 18 Afghan participants attended. The Afghan participation was supported under the TCI CBM process with the assistance of FICCI and USAID (ATAR).

Renewal Energy Summit, Delhi, August 2015: A delegation of 43 members led by HoM attended the summit.

Indian Pharmaceuticals and Healthcare Expo, Kabul, 28-31 October 2015: 12 Indian Pharmaceuticals company participated.

35th IITF, 2015 at New Delhi, 14-17 Nov 2015: 24 Afghan companies attended the 35th Indian International Trade Fair (IITF, 2015) and showcased their products such as saffron, dried fruits carpet, jewelry and handicraft from 14 – 27 November 2015 at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi.

Punjab International Expo, Amritsar 2015, 4 - 6 December, 2015: 20 Members from KCCI attended the Expo.

Rice Expo, Kabul, 08 - 11 December 2015, organized by Afghan Expo Centre, Kabul.

9th MP Expo, 29-31, January 2016: 22 members from KCCI participated.

30th Surajkund Mela 1-15 Feb 2016: Six Afghan participants have been nominated by the Mission. The event is being supported by SAARC Division of MEA.

India-Afghan Culture Relations

Afghanistan has been an important trading and craft center 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 illegal opium trade and providing employment to the most vulnerable communities, particularly women and the rural people. 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, in the old days, most Afghan musicians were trained in the Patiala Gharana.

* Today, Indian films, songs and TV serials are hugely popular with the masses, contributing significantly to the popularization of Hindi and familiarization of the populace with Indian socio -cultural value system.

* TV serials like Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi, Kasauti Jindagi Ki, Kum Kum and Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki, Saare-ga-ma-pa, Pratigya, Utran have been dubbed in Dari language. They have the highest overall viewership and shown on prime time slots, both on the national as well as private TV Channels. As part of India's restructuring programme for Afghanistan, India has aimed to take up projects that will render Afghanistan's cultural heritage sustainable. The Indian cultural centre has also been working towards building o or 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 3500 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**. The prominent Indian companies doing businesses in Afghanistan are:

- (1) BSC and C&C – New Parliament Project
- (2) KEC – Electrical Transmission Lines
- (3) Phoenix – Consultancy in Electrical Transmission
- (4) AIPL – Establishment of Hydro Power Project in Hilmand Province
- (5) WAPCOS – Salma Dam
- (6) ANGELIQUE International – Salma Dam and other Power project
- (7) APTECH – Computer & Management Education
- (8) GAMMON INDIA – Power Transmission Line & Power Sub-stations
- (9) KPTL – Power Transmission Line
- (10) ANAAR GROUP (AIR INDIA GSA)
- (11) Spice Jet

The Mission arranged the return to India of 99 distressed Indians, in 2014, while 58 in 2015 (till date), who were stranded in Afghanistan either due to expiry of their visa, loss of passport or lack of funds. In most cases, they were deceived by unscrupulous agents in India and Afghanistan with promises of lucrative jobs in Afghanistan after payment of exorbitant sums of money to the agents. Their arrival in Afghanistan is arranged by the agents with a 30-days tourist visa and they get stranded when they do not get work within the visa period, in many cases their passports not being returned by the concerned agents while some also exhaust their funds. In all these cases, the Mission liaised with Afghan authorities, including the Attorney General office and the Airport authorities, to arrange their return after issue of EC in case of loss of passport, exemption of visa overstay fines by the Afghan authorities and accommodation during the period in which the legal processes were completed. **During the year 2015, the return air tickets for thirty two distressed Indians were also arranged by the Mission from the ICWF**, while 26 stranded Indians arranged return air tickets through their family members in India. The details of the agents involved in India and Afghanistan were shared with MOIA as well as the Afghan authorities for action against them.

The security is the prime concern of the Indian Diaspora in Afghanistan. During the year 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. Four Indians were killed on May 13, 2015 in an attack on Hotel Park Palace, Kabul. The Mission liaised and facilitated expeditious despatch of their mortal remains and informed their families. **The Mission periodically issues security advisories (though e-mails & WhatsApp)**

to all registered Indians apprising them of the security situation and security precautions to be taken while staying in the country. An Indian, Alexis Prem Kumar, working for a NGO, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), in Herat was kidnapped by armed militants on June 2, 2014 from Saahadat township in Zindajan district about 35 kms from Herat where he had gone to inspect a school run by JRS. He was released by the efforts of Mission and Govt. of India, New Delhi officials and sent back to India on February 22, 2015. Another Indian, Gajinder Singh, who had come to Kabul to visit his Afghan brother-in-law on the latter's invitation, went missing from Jalalabad, where he had gone with his brother-in-law and some other Afghans, on June 1, 2014. Afghan authorities have been requested by the Mission repeatedly for his safe recovery but he is untraceable. However, out of five Afghan nationals involved in the case, two have been imprisoned for eight years each while three are still absconding.

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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