

**Embassy of India
Kabul, Afghanistan
India- Afghanistan Bilateral Relations**

India - Afghanistan Bilateral Relations

Political

India and Afghanistan have a strong relationship based on historical and cultural links. The relationship 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.

2. The Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) between the two sides, 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.

High Level Visits

3. Prime Minister visited Herat on 4 June 2016 in western Afghanistan where he, along with President of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan H.E Ashraf 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.

4. Prime Minister on 22 August 2016 jointly inaugurated through video conferencing, the restored Stor Palace in Kabul with President Ghani. During his his address at the inauguration Prime Minister reiterated India's commitment that the 1.25 billion Indian people will "always" stand with Afghanistan in ensuring peace and prosperity.

5. Prime Minister along with a high level delegation paid a visit on 25 December 2016 to Afghanistan. During his visit, he called on President Ashraf Ghani; met Chief Executive, Dr Abdullah Abdullah and former President Hamid Karzai. During his visit, he inaugurated the newly built Afghan Parliament with approx INR 970 crore; announced new 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 2017 along with four joint working group meetings.

6. President of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, H.E Ashraf Ghani visited India on 24 October 2017 on a one day working visit and met Hon'ble Rashrapati, PM and received EAM.

7. President Ghani paid a working visit to India on 19 September 2018 and met the Prime Minister. The two leaders reviewed and positively assessed the progress of the multi-faceted India-Afghanistan strategic partnership. They expressed satisfaction at the increase in bilateral trade that had crossed the US \$ 1 billion mark. The two leaders also appreciated the successful conclusion of the India-Afghanistan trade and investment show in Mumbai from September 12-15, 2018 and expressed determination to strengthen connectivity between the two countries, including through Chabahar port and Air-Freight Corridor. It was agreed to deepen the 'New Development Partnership' in the areas of high impact projects in this field of infrastructure, human resources development and other capacity building projects in Afghanistan.

8. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, the then Chief Executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (CE) visited India from 28-29 September 2017. He called on Hon'ble Rashtrapati, met Prime Minister and EAM. An MoU on technical cooperation on police training and development was signed and formally exchanged at the meeting between Chief Executive and Prime Minister. This created an enabling framework for training and capacity building of Afghan National Police personnel in various fields in addition to India's ongoing assistance for the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. Afghanistan was also invited to participate in the International Solar Alliance Summit meeting being held in India in December 2017 and also to the World Food Processing Show being held in November 2017 in India that would enable the Afghan businessmen to engage with international markets.

9. 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\$ 1 billion development assistance announced by Government of 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 India's assistance. India agreed to implement 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 Bamyān Province that would promote tourism; low cost housing for returning Afghan refugees in Nangarhar Province to assist in their resettlement; a gypsum board manufacturing plant in Kabul to promote value added local industry development and import substitution; a polyclinic in Mazar-e-Sharif among others. In addition, India also committed to take up additional 116 High Impact Community Development Projects in 34 provinces of Afghanistan. These projects will be in areas of education, health, agriculture, irrigation, drinking water, renewable energy, flood control, micro-hydro power, sports and administrative infrastructure. India also announced that ongoing assistance programmes for education, capacity building, skills and human resource development of Afghanistan, would continue for a further period of five years from 2017 to 2022.

10. Several other high level visits include that of Afghan Second Vice President Mohammad Danish Sarwar (December 2017), visit of former President Hamid Karzai (December 2017 and August 2019); visit of Foreign Secretary to Kabul (February 28-29, 2020), (February 27-28, 2018) and September 11, 2018; visit of Deputy NSA, Shri Rajinder Khanna to Kabul (May 29-31, 2018); visit of Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah to the inaugural cricket test match of Afghanistan with India on (June 14, 2018) and Visit of Defence Minister Assadullah Khalid (23 February 2019). Further high level visits were that of Secretary (Economic Relations), MEA to Kabul for the Joint Working Group on Development

Cooperation on 08-09 August 2018; Dr. Anup Wadhavan, Secretary (Commerce) visited Kabul for the Joint Working Group on Trade, Commerce and Investment on 25-26 October 2018.

Commercial Relations

11. Given the geographical proximity and historical linkages, India has been a natural trading partner for Afghanistan and is the largest market in South Asia for its products. The total bilateral trade between India and Afghanistan for CY 2019-20 was at US\$ 1.5 billion. While there is immense potential to expand bilateral trade, the difficulties in transit via Pakistan was a major hurdle in expanding the trade ties. In order to expand trade to India, the Afghan government in collaboration with Government of India launched a dedicated Air Freight Corridor on 19 June 2017.

12. Since its inauguration in 2017, India-Afghanistan Air-Freight Corridor has witnessed close to a 1000 flights, carrying goods valued at over USD 216 million. This has provided a boost to Afghan exports to India and has directly benefited Afghan farmers and small traders and exporters. India and Afghanistan now aim to expand the Corridor to other cities in both the countries.

13. Another important initiative which strengthened bilateral trade was the operationalization of the Chabahar Port in December 2017, followed by commercial agreement to manage port operations in February 2018. The Port has so far handled over 5,000 containers ferrying over 110,000 tons of wheat and over 2,000 tons of pulses sent by India as assistance to Afghanistan via Chabahar. These were delivered to various parts of Afghanistan and average transportation time (excluding processing time) involved was less than 2 weeks. In 2019, Afghanistan shipped around 700 tons of agricultural and mineral products to India through the Chabahar Port, clearly demonstrating the feasibility of Chabahar Port as a transit point for Afghanistan and eventually to Central Asia.

14. Following the success of the first and second edition of India-Afghanistan Trade & Investment Show, titled 'Passage to Prosperity' in September 2017 in New Delhi and September 2018 in Mumbai, the third edition of the event was held on 24-26 September 2019 at Delhi. As with the previous editions, show was executed in cooperation with U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The event saw 105 Afghan businesses. Trade worth US\$ 33.6 million were signed and US\$ 23.3 million in pre-contract agreements were discussed.

Afghanistan India Culture Relations

15. Given the extensive cultural linkage between India and Afghanistan, there is considerable interest in cultural exchange events on both sides. There have been several exchanges of artistes and music troupes over the past few years. Major such events include an "India-Afghanistan Culture Week" held in New Delhi in November 2017 in collaboration with India-Afghanistan Foundation (IAF) and ICCR; visit of a cultural troupe headed by Smt. Kumud Diwan to Kabul in September 2017; visit of 'Awayee Band-e-Amir' - a folk musical troupe from Bamiyan Province of Afghanistan for the 5th International Folk Music and Dance Festival organised by ICCR at New Delhi in December 2018; visit of a three-member Instrumental 'Sarod' group led by Shri Avijit Ghosh in October 2019.

16. In addition to the above people to people exchanges, the two Governments came together to establish an India- Afghanistan Foundation (IAF) in 2007. IAF is a trust fund which finances projects aimed at fostering India-Afghanistan relations through enhancement of economic, scientific, educational, technical as well as cultural cooperation. The management and direction of the Foundation are vested in a Board of Directors consisting of 10 members. Ambassador of India to Afghanistan in Kabul and Ambassador of Afghanistan to India in New Delhi are the Co-Chairpersons of the Board. The other eight members are nominated by the two Governments. The 12th Board Meeting of the India Afghanistan Foundation was held in August 2019 at the Kabul Chapter. The Board reviewed the working of the Foundation and looked into new proposals from both the Chapters.

Sports Cooperation

17. India and Afghanistan have robust relations in the field of sports. Since 2011, Afghanistan Under-14 & Under-17 Boys' and Under-17 Girls' football teams have been participating in the Subroto Cup International Tournament organised every year by the India Air Force.

18. Cricket has been a major factor in promoting people-to-people ties between the two countries. Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) has been allotted three cricket home grounds in India (Noida, Dehradun and Lucknow). India is also involved in construction cricket stadiums and grounds in various provinces of Afghanistan under the aegis of HICDP. The first India- Afghanistan test match was held in Bangalore in 2018. A bilateral test series, Afghanistan versus West Indies was held in India, with Afghanistan as the host country from 06 November 19 to 01 December 2019. The series comprised of 3x One day Matches, 3 x T-20s and One test match at the Ekana Stadium in Lucknow. Indian FMCG, Amul was the sponsor for Afghan National Cricket Team for the ICC Cricket World Cup in 2019.

High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP)

19. Since 2005, India and Afghanistan have partnered in the area of community development through the HICDP program. Under this scheme, US\$ 120 mn has been committed till date to various small to medium scale projects in areas such as education, health, water management, government buildings, sport facilities, agriculture and irrigation, etc. Around 433 High Impact Community Development Projects have been completed with Indian financial support in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan so far and around 110 projects are ongoing in various provinces of Afghanistan. On 05 July 2020, India signed five (05) agreements for construction of schools and roads worth US\$ 2.6 mn.

20. During FY 2019-20, 37 projects were completed in various provinces of Afghanistan under the High Impact Community Development Project (HICDP) scheme of Government of India. An MoU for financial commitment of US\$ 80 mn towards HICDP Phase- IV is currently under negotiation by both sides. This would take total commitment of Indian Government to HICDP to US\$ 200 mn.

Human Resource Development and Capacity Building

21. Human resource development and capacity building initiatives constitute an important segment of India's assistance in Afghanistan. On an average, more than 3,500 Afghan nationals undergo training/education in India every year. More than 15,000 Afghan students

pursue education in India on self-financing basis. India's assistance in human resource development has helped to create a large pool of trained manpower that has been an asset to both the public and private sectors in Afghanistan. India's initiatives in this field include:

(i) Following the reconstruction and renovation of Habibia School in Kabul, India extended assistance for training and maintenance of the school.

(ii) A Special Scholarship Scheme of 1,000 scholarships per annum to Afghan nationals (administered by ICCR) with 100% utilization in most years.

(iii) India offers over 1,000 Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) slots to Afghanistan annually in the areas of . The ITEC training is expected to address Afghanistan's need to strengthen its administration and governance at national, provincial and district levels, including through sharing experiences and technical assistance in building capacities of civil administration and project implementation.

(iv) The Afghanistan National Agricultural Sciences and Technology University (ANASTU) established with India's assistance is contributing to capacity building in agricultural sciences. The Indian Agriculture Research Institute (IARI) is involved in training, equipping and establishing the University.

(v) Under India-Afghanistan Agricultural Fellowship Programme, Afghan students and scholars pursue graduation and research courses at various agricultural universities and institutes in India.

(vi) Nearly 50 Afghans are completing graduation in the Indian school of Mines Dhanbad with a view to strengthen technical man-power in mining sector in Afghanistan.

Humanitarian Assistance

22. Major humanitarian assistance by India to Afghanistan in recent years include the following:

(i) To combat the global pandemic of COVID-19 and related issues of food security, India is committed to deliver 75,000 MT of Wheat to Afghanistan in 2020. In addition, India has also undertaken supply of 5 lakh tablets of Hydroxy-chloroquine, 1 Lakh tablets of Paracetamol and 50,000 pairs of surgical gloves to Government of Afghanistan in 2020.

(ii) Provision of food assistance of 11 lakh tonnes of wheat, both as grains and biscuits, was distributed to approximately 1.5 million school children

(ii) To promote food security, particularly children during the times of drought, India has distributed 2000 tonnes of pulses to Afghanistan in 2018.

(iii) A Medical Diagnostic Centre in Kabul was set up in 2015. The Centre provides latest diagnostic facilities to children of Afghanistan thereby generating goodwill for India.

Indian Diaspora in Afghanistan

23. Presently, there are estimated to be about 1710 Indians in the country. Most of the Indians in Afghanistan 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 members of the Indian Diaspora, assisting wherever required. The Diaspora members also actively participate in the Mission's cultural activities and celebrations of national days.

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Source: Embassy of India, Afghanistan Web site August 2020.