



## **INDIA, AFGHANISTAN: RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA**

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### **Introduction**

The 450-year-old Grand Trunk Road linking Kolkata with Kabul exemplifies the connectivity – and security – that once bound India, Pakistan and Afghanistan in a web of economic prosperity, and underlines the imperative for land access and united action against terrorism for regional stability and development.

Terrorism being the greatest impediment to peace and progress in Afghanistan, Indian foreign minister Sushma Swaraj expressed willingness to help Kabul strengthen its defence. In an oblique reference to Pakistan, she added: “It is also the collective duty of all of us to ensure the forces of terrorism and extremism do not find sanctuaries and safe havens in any name, form or manifestation. We, in Afghanistan’s proximity, have a particular responsibility in this regard.

India remains an integral part of Afghanistan’s steady progress in institutionalizing peace, pluralism, and prosperity. Ties between Afghanistan and India go beyond the traditionally strong relations at the government level. Since time immemorial, the peoples of Afghanistan and India have interacted with each other through trade and commerce, peacefully coexisting on the basis of their shared cultural values and commonalities. This history has become the foundation of deep mutual trust. Public opinion polls in Afghanistan confirm this, as well as the sentiment Afghans share about feeling at home whenever they visit India.

Against this background of real friendship, it’s appropriate to take stock and see how far Afghanistan has gone in its journey to become a full-fledged, contributing member of the international community. It is a journey being undertaken with continued support of India, which itself is striving to become an anchor of regional stability and prosperity.

India and Afghanistan are building a partnership between the world’s largest and most recent democracies. Our countries are composed of myriad traditions and are joined together by history and civilisational contacts. Our close relations are based on cultural affinities, the shared values of multiethnicity and pluralism and the common quest of our peoples for peace

and development. India has been one of Afghanistan's foremost development partners since end-2001. India shares the collective commitment of the international community to the unity, integrity and prosperity of Afghanistan. A peaceful and stable Afghanistan is in India's interest, as also the interests of the region and the World. The trauma and the destruction Afghanistan faced in the 1990s requires a comprehensive effort to rebuild and reconstruct a war torn society and economy. India as a close neighbour and friend has sought to play its role in this effort. India's expanding partnership with Afghanistan has grown into multi-sectoral activities in all parts of Afghanistan. India's reconstruction and developmental programmes in Afghanistan follow priorities of the Afghan Government and people. These encompass education, medical services, transport, telecommunications, civil aviation, agriculture, irrigation, power generation, industry, and rural development. India is building in Afghanistan structures from public toilets to transmission lines. A strong political relationship underwrites this partnership. One of India's important infrastructure projects in South-Western Afghanistan, the highway from Zaranj to Delaram, was inaugurated by President Hamid Karzai and India's External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee on 22nd January, 2009. Built at the cost of precious Afghan and Indian lives lost in the course of its construction, the highway is a symbol of India's commitment to Afghanistan. In keeping with Afghanistan's priorities, in the latest phase of its development activities, India has focussed on capacity building and human resource development. Given the decades of destruction and dismantlement of state structures, India's latest efforts are helping accelerate the massive institution-building currently underway in Afghanistan. There has been an enthusiastic response to the 500 short and medium-term training slots provided annually to Afghan public servants, as also to the 500 scholarships to Afghan students to study in India at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels. Both these activities are being substantially augmented. Education has been the greatest single factor catalysing India's transformation, and so it shall be for Afghanistan. From mid-2009, the first of the Afghan graduates will begin returning to Afghanistan and commence their contribution to the reconstruction of their country. Afghanistan became the latest member of the South Asia Association of Regional Cooperation at the 14th SAARC Summit in New Delhi in 2007, making SAARC's western boundaries contiguous to Iran and Central Asia. With this, Afghanistan could once again become the cross-roads between Central and South Asia, linking the regional countries together in a trade, transportation and energy hub. The region has the world's largest and

most rapidly expanding markets. Kandahari anars are a treasured delicacy, of which India consumes almost half of the Afghan exports. Together, India and Afghanistan intend to work with our neighbours to dismantle trade and transit barriers for free movement of goods, investments, and peoples and unfettered and constructive regional relationships. Since 2006 the rising spectre of terrorism and violence has targeted Indian developmental projects in Afghanistan. The effectiveness and popularity of these programmes has led to attacks on them by the enemies of Afghanistan's progress and stability. A number of Indian technicians along with an even larger number of their Afghan colleagues have been killed in such terrorist attacks. The Indian Embassy in Kabul was itself directly attacked on 7th July, 2008 leading to the death of a number of Embassy personnel and scores of Afghan nationals waiting to receive visas to travel to India. India is determined to continue the work of these martyrs to India-Afghanistan friendship. India's commitment to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan remains unwavering.

### **Post-Taliban Gains**

Although it's true that conflict continues in Afghanistan, a great deal of progress has been made in just over a decade. Let's start with the gains made by Afghan women and girls, who were denied, under the Taliban, their most basic human rights, such as access to education and healthcare, let alone the opportunity to serve as vocal representatives of their constituencies in the Afghan parliament. Yet today female MPs now occupy 28 percent of the seats, a higher percentage than can be found in the legislative bodies of India, Britain, or even the United States.

In the 1990s when factional infighting and the tyranny of the Taliban systematically devastated the country, Afghanistan had barely any diplomatic representation abroad. Today, it has more than 50 diplomatic missions around the world, including a well-resourced embassy in Delhi, which serves thousands of Afghan students and medical tourists, while working with its Indian counterparts in the public, private, and civil society sectors to deepen the multi-faceted relations that have always underpinned Afghanistan's partnership and friendship with India.

### **Indian Development Aid**

Afghanistan's monumental gains in its polity, economy, and society would have been impossible without the continued support of the international community, and particularly the assistance of the country's trusted friends and strategic partners like India, the United States,

and NATO. Despite its own many domestic needs, India is Afghanistan's sixth largest donor, providing the country with some \$2 billion in effective aid since 2001.

India's well-targeted aid programs include infrastructure development, institutional capacity building, small development projects, as well as food security assistance in the form of ongoing deliveries of wheat to Afghanistan. Since 2001, more than 10,000 Afghan students have studied in India on ICCR scholarships, with some 7,000 returning home armed with an education and technical skills, which they are using to drive Afghanistan's stabilization and development. Meanwhile, many mid-career officers in the Afghan government have benefited from the technical capacity building programs of ITEC and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, while some 8,000 Afghan students are pursuing self-financed degrees in different fields across India.

And India's signature infrastructure projects – the building of the Afghan parliament in Kabul and the Salma Dam in Herat – are nearing completion. The former will soon give Afghan MPs the secure space they need to further institutionalize democracy in Afghanistan, while the latter will generate 42 MW of much-needed power for the electrification of rural and urban Herat, as well as helping irrigate 80,000 hectares of agricultural land.

In spite of many transit obstacles, the volume of Indo-Afghan trade stood at \$680 million during 2013-2014, a figure that should exponentially rise, following the full implementation of the Afghanistan and Pakistan Trade and Transit Agreement (APTTA). Moreover, air connectivity between the two countries has grown steadily. There are now four to five flights operating daily between Kabul and Delhi, bringing to India nearly 1,000 Afghans, many of them medical tourists, seeking treatment in Delhi hospitals.

India has played an active role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, based on the understanding that social and economic development is key to ensuring that Afghanistan becomes a source of regional stability. India's pledged assistance to Afghanistan stands at 1.2 billion US dollars. Indian projects cover all parts of Afghanistan, in a wide range of sectors, identified by the Afghanistan as priority areas for reconstruction and development. All the projects are undertaken in partnership with the Afghan government, in total alignment with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, and with focus on local ownership of assets. An innovative element has been the focus on small and community-based development projects, with a short gestation period and having a direct impact on community life, unveiled during Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh's visit to Afghanistan in August 2005. The latest

phase of the bilateral development partnership focuses on capacity development and building Afghan institutions. India's assistance activities and development partnership with Afghanistan covers many areas:

⊖ Daily supply of 100 grams of fortified, high-protein biscuits to nearly 2 million children under a School Feeding Programme administered through the World Food Programme.

⊖ Gift of 250,000 metric tonnes of wheat, announced in January 2009 to help Afghanistan tide over its current food crisis, to be shipped immediately, subject to transit and transportation arrangements being finalised.

⊖ Free medical consultation and medicines through 5 Indian Medical Missions to over 30,000 Afghans monthly.

⊖ Reconstruction of Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health in Kabul. ⊖ Gifting of vehicles (400 buses and 200 mini-buses for mass urban transportation, 105 utility vehicles for municipalities, 285 military vehicles for the Afghan National Army, and 10 ambulances for public hospitals in five cities).

⊖ Five toilet-cum-public sanitation complexes in Kabul.

⊖ Construction of 218 km road from Zaranj to Delaram to facilitate movement of goods and services from Afghanistan to the Iranian border and, onward, to the Chahbahar Port (completed).

⊖ Construction of 220kV DC transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul and a 220/110/20 kV sub-station at Chimtala to bring additional power from the northern grid to Kabul (completion by April 2009).

⊖ Construction and commissioning of Salma Dam power project (42 MW) in Herat province (completion by 2011). ⊖ Construction of the Afghan Parliament (completion by 2011). ⊖ Restoration of telecommunication infrastructure in 11 provinces (completed).

⊖ Expansion of national TV network by providing an uplink from Kabul and downlinks in all 34 provincial capitals for promoting greater integration of the country (completed). Small and Community-based Development Projects These are in vulnerable border areas, with focus on local ownership and management and extend to agriculture, rural development, education, health, vocational training, and solar energy. These have a direct, immediate and visible impact on community life.

⊖ 84 small projects are under different stages of implementation in 19 provinces of Afghanistan. Education and capacity development ⊖ Reconstruction of Habibia School, Kabul.

⊖ 500 annual long-term university scholarships Construction of the Zaranj-Delaram Highway sponsored by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations for under-graduate and postgraduate studies for Afghan students in India.

⊖ 500 annual short-term ITEC training programmes for Afghan public servants in Indian technical and professional institutions of their choice.

⊖ Deputation of 20 Indian civil servants as coaches and mentors under Capacity for Afghan Public Administration (CAP) programme supported by UNDP and the Governments of Afghanistan and India.

⊖ India–Afghanistan Vocational Training Centre for training Afghan youth in carpentry, plumbing, welding, masonry and tailoring executed by the Confederation of Indian Industries.

⊖ Women’s Vocational Training Centre in Baghe-Zanana for training of Afghan women (warwidows and orphans) in garment making, nursery plantation, food processing and marketing, executed by the well-known Indian NGO SEWA (Self-Employed Women’s Association).

⊖ Capacity building programmes are also underway in the fields of diplomacy, media and information, civil aviation, agricultural research and education, health care and medicinal science, tourism, education, standardisation, rural development, public administration, electoral management and administration, and local governance. A major initiative of the Government of Afghanistan in 2002 was the “Back to School” campaign. This has been a success, with 6.4 million children now in schools, a third of them girls. A critical component of this programme was the School Feeding Programme, to encourage attendance and enhance school performance, especially for girl students. In June 2002, when World Food Programme (WFP) was facing a serious resource shortfall and was looking for donors to fund the new school feeding operation, India proposed conversion of the one million tonnes of wheat donated by India (that could not be transported to Afghanistan due to transit difficulties) into high protein biscuits to be distributed in schools, in partnership with WFP.

⊖ The distribution started in 2003 and is still continuing. For the school year 2008-09, 32,000 tonnes of biscuits are being supplied to Afghanistan.

⊖ Everyday, nearly two million Afghan school children in 33 out of 34 provinces (excluding Kabul) receive a packet each of 100 gms of biscuits.

⊖ This provides children necessary nutrients to prevent shortterm hunger and encourages school attendance. It has, thus, been a big factor in increasing school enrolment in Afghanistan. New Food Aid During President Hamid Karzai's working visit to India on 12th January, 2009, the Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh announced that Humanitarian Assistance Biscuits distribution under school feeding programme in order to help the fraternal people of Afghanistan in tiding over their current food crisis, India would gift Afghanistan a quarter of a million metric tonnes of wheat. The shipment is to be effected immediately, as soon as transit and transportation arrangements are finalised. Of this, 100–150,000 metric tonnes is expected to go towards creation of Afghanistan's strategic food reserves. The supply of the wheat will be a considerable logistical exercise, involving transportation by sea to Iran and thereafter overland to Afghanistan by road. A faster and cheaper route across Pakistan by road and trains would depend on facilitation by Pakistan. Class room scene in Khas Kunar, Kunar Province Medical services in Afghanistan were badly affected due to decades of fighting. To attend to the massive and urgent medical needs, India rushed a team of 13 doctors and paramedics to Kabul in end-2001. Camps for fitting artificial limbs were held in different parts of Afghanistan throughout 2002. Since then, five Indian Medical Missions (IMMs) have been working in Kabul, Herat, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Mazar-e-Sharif, attending and disbursing medicines to 30,000 patients per month. The five IMMs cater to the poorest of the poor patients, many of whom come for consultation and free medicines from the contiguous provinces. Nearly 360,000 patients are availing of these services annually. India undertook the rehabilitation of the Indira Gandhi Institute for Child Health (IGICH) in Kabul, the largest paediatric hospital in Afghanistan, and completed its new threestoried Surgical Block in 2005. The Polyclinic Block was completed in 2007. Now, the newly constructed Diagnostic Block is being equipped with diagnostic equipment, including CT scan and MRI facilities. Capacity building of Afghan doctors is a vital component of assistance and batches of IGICH specialists train at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi.

### **Attracting Indian Investment**

To deepen economic ties between the two countries, the Afghan Embassy in Delhi has frequently engaged with the national and local chambers of commerce and industries of India.

The embassy has so far signed five memorandums of understanding (MOUs) covering commercial and medical cooperation between Afghanistan's respective chambers of commerce and hospitals, while it has initiated another 20 MOUs with state chambers and hospitals across India, in the coming months.

Indian investors remain deeply interested in the many "virgin markets" of Afghanistan, including mining, agriculture and agribusiness, information and technology, telecommunications, and others. Although more than 100 largely midsize Indian businesses have already invested in Afghanistan, the Afghan government is strongly encouraging capital intensive investment in the natural resources and infrastructure sectors. There is no doubt that this investment will gradually be made, as the key regional players address the existing interstate tensions and hostilities that impede investment in Afghanistan and the rest of the region.

### **Building Sister-City Relations**

Moreover, in an effort to further solidify ties between Afghans and Indians, the Afghan Embassy in Delhi has initiated the creation of sister-city relations between major Indian cities and states and their Afghan counterparts. To date, the embassy has proposed the creation of relations between Delhi and Kabul, Mumbai and Kandahar, Ajmer Sharif (Rajasthan) and Herat, Hyderabad and Jalalabad, Ahmadabad (Gujrat) and Asadabad (Kunar), as well as the State of Assam and the Province of Helmand.

As soon as these proposals are procedurally processed by both sides, the major cities of Afghanistan and India will be connected through tourism, student and faculty exchange programs, as well as private sector investment, which the embassy has been promoting through its vigorous economic and cultural diplomacy outreach throughout India.

### **Ghani's State Visit**

As Afghan President Ashraf Ghani told his Indian counterpart Pranab Mukherjee during the former's April state visit to India, "We are two countries that are bound by a thousand ties and millions of memories." Ghani added, "The ties between our two countries are engraved in our landscapes, from the haunting, empty frames where the giant Buddhas of Bamiyan once stood, to the remnants of Hindu temples that stud the Afghan countryside, to the Sufi shrines and the mosques and minarets, forming the cultural heritage of India."

Against this backdrop of strong people-to-people and civilizational ties, Afghanistan presents a clear economic opportunity for India and the region. Afghans are working to make



their country “the Asian roundabout, a key hub in the revival of the Silk Road.” Last April, Ghani spoke with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Indian business community about his vision of Afghanistan, and encouraged India to consider investing in Afghanistan’s highly profitable markets.

The Afghan president even promised personal intervention to facilitate significant Indian investment in Afghanistan, provided that Indian businesses consider moving in with major investment plans. In a proactive step to facilitate Indian investment in Afghanistan, Ghani has ordered the opening of a new consulate, either in Kolkata or Hyderabad. A feasibility study is currently underway.

In this connection, Afghanistan’s Minister of Energy and Water and Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development visited Delhi in August to participate in the Afghanistan-India Renewable Energy Summit, hosted by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). The ministers discussed business opportunities in the renewable energy sector in Afghanistan, and invited Indian businesses to take advantage of the chance to invest in a vast unexplored market in this critical sector.

Also, appreciating India’s efforts to expand regional connectivity, Ghani invited India to join the PATTA (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan Trade and Transit Agreement), an invitation currently under review. If agreement is reached, it would go a long way to enabling Afghanistan to play its natural role as a land-bridge connecting South and Central Asia.

In the same vein, Ghani lauded India’s investment in the Chabahar Port project, and encouraged its speedy implementation, which would ensure wider regional connectivity, increasing North-South transit trade and investment through Iran and Afghanistan.

At the same time, Ghani welcomed India’s decision to provide support to the Habibia School in Kabul over the next 10 years; contribute to the Afghan Red Crescent Society’s program to treat Child Congenital Heart disease over the next five years; and offer assistance for a program of the Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health in Kabul over the same period.

The Afghan president also appreciated India’s decision to extend the 1,000 ICCR scholarships per year scheme another five years until the academic year 2021-22. And both sides agreed to sign in the coming months a number of commercial, consular, and mutual legal assistance MOUs to further expand bilateral cooperation between Afghanistan and India. These range from an extradition treaty to a agreement on visa-free entry for holders of diplomatic passports.

## **The Way Forward**

Afghanistan and India have a full agenda of shared objectives to execute. The framework, within which bilateral aid programs and projects should be implemented, is the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), which Afghanistan signed with India in 2011. Over the long run, the multi-dimensional Indo-Afghan relationship will only grow, in line with the two nations' historic ties and converging interests, which they share with China and Russia.

Like Afghanistan, India, China, and Russia have been targets of terrorist attacks, and remain concerned about the growing threats of terrorism, radicalism and criminality that primarily destabilize Afghanistan but also undermine regional peace and stability. Afghanistan has of course long been fighting the threat of terrorism. Its forces continue to wage a relentless campaign that has found consistent institutional support outside of Afghanistan. Casualty estimates vary, but about 92,000 innocent Afghans are believed to have been killed since 2001, while nearly 100,000 others have been wounded. Just recently, the United Nations reported that in the first six months of 2015, 5,000 Afghans were killed by terrorist attacks across Afghanistan.

The recent summits of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS in Ufa, Russia, also discussed the intertwined security challenges of terrorism, radicalism, and criminality that confront the entire region, with far-reaching implications for international peace and security. As Ghani said in the two summits, Afghanistan occupies “a prominent place in the narrative and activities of terrorist organization networks; they are betting on our failure and should we fail, three of our neighbors, China, India, and Russia, out of the big countries, will be in harm's way, but also all our other neighbors, near and far.”

To avoid this scenario, especially in light of the rising presence of ISIS in Afghanistan, Ghani called on the three key regional players to join in a “forceful and coherent action” against any threats that undermine the security and stability of the region. He strongly recommended that the SCO – which will include India and Pakistan as full members – adopt a comprehensive strategy to overcome terrorism, since international actions have so far been “partial and fragmented,” while terrorist networks such as ISIS and Al Qaeda have moved “with coherence, determination, and decisiveness.”

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