

Ashraf Ghani's Visit to India

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On 19 September 2018, the President of Afghanistan visited India and met the Prime minister, Shri Narendra Modi in Delhi. Ghani also attended a civic reception hosted by the India Foundation before heading back to Afghanistan. A host of issues were discussed between both the leaders including Regional security and India-Afghan developmental partnership

on ways to further boost bilateral cooperation. Ghani and Modi further reviewed India-Afghan strategic partnership.

The Afghan President spoke about his government initiatives towards peace and reconciliation and also raised the threat of growing terrorism and extremism in Afghanistan. PM Modi also reiterated India's support to an Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process that would enable Afghanistan to continue as a united, peaceful, inclusive and democratic nation, emerging as an economically vibrant country. India continues to maintain that peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan have to be "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned". Modi also condemned terrorist attacks and violence in Afghanistan and expressed solidarity with the people and national defense forces in their fight against terrorism.

The Ghani visit comes just days after India and Afghanistan agreed to enhance cooperation under the New Development Partnership initiative, following which New Delhi had announced taking up 116 "high impact community developmental projects" in the war-torn country. Both leaders expressed determination to strengthen connectivity, including the Chabahar port and air freight corridor.

Both countries agreed to further strengthen cooperation at various international fora and decided to work even more closely with Regional and international partners for prosperity, peace, stability and progress in the region. The two leaders reviewed the progress of the multi-faceted India-Afghanistan strategic partnership and expressed satisfaction at the increase in bilateral trade that has crossed the \$1 billion mark.

During the meeting, the two countries also agreed to deepen their partnership in the areas of high impact projects in Afghanistan in the fields of infrastructure, human resources development and other capacity building projects.

Coincidentally, Afghanistan's Ambassador to India, Dr. Shaida Abdali resigned on the same day Afghanistan's President visited India. Posting on a social media platform, Abdali wrote,

“India not only gave me a home feeling but added a wealth of knowledge and a plethora of experiences to my over two decades long political career.”

Also, on Indo- Afghan relations he remarked that in his tenure, he has seen Indo- Afghan relations getting strengthened day by

day, expressing that the limit to the exceptional relationship of both countries is only the sky, followed by the exclamation, *“Long Live India-Afghanistan friendship!”* The timing of his resignation has strengthened the speculation that he has differences with Ghani’s government and will run for office on return. *“The purpose is to serve,”* Abdali said, when he was asked about his political ambitions, further he continued,

“right now, I want to look at the priorities for Afghanistan. Today if you tell me I have to choose between being the Ambassador and a situation in Afghanistan where national unity and peace is at risk, I would prefer to work for peace and national unity in my country. It is time to prioritize that.”

The visit gains significance also because both PM Modi and Dr Ghani face elections in the next few months. Both leaders hoped that once the Chabahar port in Iran becomes fully operational, trade with and via Afghanistan to larger Central Asia will grow manifold.

India, Iran and Afghanistan recently held the first tri-partite meet in Kabul to deliberate on the fast completion of the port. Chabahar is strategically important for both India and Afghanistan. Like Chabahar, the work on another connectivity project, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline, is on. Last month, India ceremonially broke ground on the Afghan section of the pipeline, where Ghani and the

president of Turkmenistan were joined by the Indian Union Minister, MJ Akbar. Further, capacity building and other projects are ongoing, which have earned India unmatched respect and the goodwill of common Afghans, as well as politicians.

However, Kabul expects New Delhi to be more forthcoming, and play a bigger role in the region, instead of sticking to textbook diplomacy.

References:

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