

India – Afghanistan Relations: Notes for UPSC

The topic about bilateral relations between India and Afghanistan is a must know for those aspirants who seek a career in the Indian Foreign Services.

This article will examine the India-Afghanistan relations that have traditionally been strong and friendly, marked by the deep cultural ties that exist through links in fields such as music, food and language, as well as Bollywood and cricket.

History of India-Afghanistan Relations

Contact between the people of modern-day India and Afghanistan has existed since the days of the Indus Valley Civilisation. One of Alexander the Great's Diadochi (Greek for successors), Seleucus Nicator, controlled most of Afghanistan before ceding much of it to the Mauryan Empire in 305 BC as part of an alliance treaty.

The northern regions of India were invaded between the 10th century to the mid 18th century by a number of invaders based in what today is Afghanistan. Among them were the Ghaznavids, Ghurids, Khaljis, Suris, Mughals and Durranis. During these eras, especially during the Mughal period (1526–1858), many Afghans began immigrating to India due to political unrest in their regions.

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan was one of the prominent leaders of the Indian independence movement and active supporters of the Indian National Congress. Even though the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) became the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, unanimous Pashtun support for the Indian freedom struggle led to great sympathy in India for the cause of Pashtun autonomy and freedom. The Indian government continued to support Pashtun leader Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan in lobbying for greater Pashtun freedom in the NWFP.

India was the only South Asian country to recognize the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in the 1980s, though relations were diminished during the 1990s Afghan civil war and the Taliban government. India aided the overthrow of the Taliban and became the largest regional provider of humanitarian and reconstruction aid to the present day Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Indians are working in various construction projects, as part of India's rebuilding efforts in Afghanistan.

India Afghanistan Relations since 2001

During Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, India provided intelligence and logistic support for the Allied forces. After the fall of the Taliban, India

established diplomatic relations with the newly established civilian government and participated in relief and reconstruction efforts.

India has provided about \$650–750 million worth of humanitarian and economic aid, making it the largest regional provider of aid for Afghanistan. India's support and collaboration extends to rebuilding of air links, power plants and investing in health and education sectors as well as helping to train Afghan civil servants, diplomats and police.

In 2005, India proposed Afghanistan's membership in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Three memorandums of understanding were signed (MOUs) between the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) and Afghan National Standardisation Authority for strengthening cooperation in the fields of rural development, education and standardisation. During Hamid Karzai's visit to India in April 2006. An agreement providing \$50 million to promote bilateral businesses between Afghanistan and India was signed during the visit of the Afghan Foreign Minister Dr. Spanta between 29 June – 1 July 2006. During the same year, India raised its aid package to Afghanistan by \$150 million, to \$750 million. In 2007, Afghanistan finally became the eighth member of SAARC.

In December 2015, India donated three Mi-25 attack helicopters, with the option to send more in the future to Afghanistan as part of the bilateral strategic partnership to counter the Taliban insurgency. Indian PM Narendra Modi visited Kabul on December 25 to open the newly constructed Afghan parliament which had been built by India for \$90 million.

On 15 August 2019, on Indian Independence Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended greetings to Afghanistan who were due to also celebrate Afghan 100th Independence Day. PM Modi in a statement issued on that day asserted that: "Afghanistan is a good neighbour of India, and I wish the country for celebrating 100 years of independence this year." President Ashraf Ghani also sent congratulations with the comment "May our friendship last forever

Economic Relations between India and Afghanistan

India seeks to expand its economic presence in Afghanistan as the international coalition fighting the Taliban have begun their withdrawal process. Especially, it wants to improve transport connectivity and economic collaboration with countries in Central and South Asia. India has already invested \$10.8 billion in Afghanistan as of 2012. More such projects are likely to come once NATO withdraws completely from Afghanistan.

This includes setting up Iron ore mines, a 6 MTPA steel plant (by SAIL—Steel Authority of India Limited), an 800 MW power plant, Hydro-electric power projects, transmission lines and roads. India helped in the reconstruction of Salma Dam in the Herat province. Besides producing 42

MW power, this Indo-Afghan friendship dam provides irrigation for 75,000 hectares of farmland in the Chisti Sharif district.

Salma Dam, officially the Afghan-India Friendship Dam, is a hydroelectric and irrigation dam project located on the Hari River in Chishti Sharif District of Herat Province in western Afghanistan. The Afghan cabinet renamed the Salma Dam to the Afghan-India Friendship Dam in a move to strengthen relations between the two countries.

The hydroelectric plant produces 42 MW of power in addition to providing irrigation for 75,000 hectares of farmland (stabilising the existing irrigation of 35,000 hectares and development of irrigation facilities to an additional 40,000 hectares of land).

India and Iran are set to ink a transit agreement on transporting goods to landlocked Afghanistan. The Indian government is investing more than US\$100 million in the expansion of the Chabahar port in southeastern Iran which will serve as a hub for the transportation of transit goods.

Relevant Questions for India-Afghanistan Relations

When did relations between India and Afghanistan fully develop?

Although contact has always existed between the populations of Afghanistan since the days of the Indus Valley Civilisations, diplomatic relations between the two nations were officially developed post the 1950's. In January 1950, a five-year Treaty of Friendship was signed between the two countries in New Delhi.

Did India establish any relations with the Taliban regime while they ruled in Afghanistan?

The Taliban regime was recognized only by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha monuments by the Taliban led to outrage and angry protests by India. In 1999, the hijacked Indian Airlines Flight 814 landed and stayed in Kandahar in Afghanistan and the Taliban were suspected of supporting them. India became one of the key supporters of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance following these developments.

What kind of military assistance does India provide Afghanistan?

Beside providing equipment such as attack helicopters, military assistance also includes the training of Afghan security personnel by the Indian Army.