

The growing ties between India and The Afghanistan Taliban

India had sent a multi-member senior diplomatic delegation to Afghanistan for the first time since leaving the Indian embassy in Kabul in August 2021, when the Taliban visited the Afghan Capital.

The Indian team was led by **J.P. Singh**, Joint Secretary, Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran division of the Ministry of External Affairs.

Here he met the leaders of the Taliban. The Indian delegation also met **Amir Khan Mottaki**, Foreign Minister of the Interim Government of Afghanistan, and saw the condition of the ongoing Indian project in Afghanistan.

"Post 15th of August 2021, in the light of the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, it was decided to bring back all Indian personnel. However, local staff continued to function to ensure proper maintenance and preservation of our premises there. Our local staff has also been helping deliver humanitarian assistance," the MEA's official spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said during the weekly briefing, providing an update on the present condition of India's diplomatic facilities in Kabul. The comment was made shortly before the Taliban's representatives said that the two sides had discussed "diplomatic relations between India and Afghanistan."

India had been in touch with the Taliban from behind the scenes before they took over. But now India is entering directly into Afghanistan. India has described it as a meeting related to humanitarian aid.

Why is India going to Afghanistan?

Most decisions in international relations are for long-term gains. India may not get any benefit, but there should be no loss. It's because India's two enemies, China and Pakistan, are engaged in making their hold in Afghanistan. On Thursday, when the Indian delegation met with the Taliban, on the same day, Chinese Ambassador Ding Yinan also met the Taliban's Deputy Foreign Minister, Sher Mohammad Abbas. China's concern is its western border and its projects in Pakistan, which could be harmed by terrorism, separatism, and religious fundamentalism.

India has had no formal diplomatic ties with the Taliban government. Still, its envoys have met previously with Taliban representatives in Doha, where they have an office.

Both sides can be seen approaching to normalise the relations. Afghan Defence Minister Mullah Yaqub, son of Taliban founder Mullah Omar, has expressed willingness to send Afghan army personnel to India for **military training**. He said: "We don't see any issue with it. Afghan-India relations get strengthened and set the ground for this. There will be no issues with it".

He also urged India and Pakistan to resolve their issues through bilateral dialogue and mutual understanding, clarifying that the Taliban administration did not want to intervene in the bilateral matters of the two rival neighbours.

After America's exit from Afghanistan, if China and Pakistan become closer to the Taliban, India will suffer the most significant loss. Pakistan can increase terrorism in India through the Taliban, while China can harm India on the economic front. India's experience with the old Taliban has not been good. Still, the new Taliban has consistently said that it will not allow its ground to be used against India. Along with this, Taliban has said that it will not support Jihadist groups in Kashmir.

What is Pakistan thinking?

This meeting has alarmed Pakistan because India has been calling the Taliban a proxy of Pakistan. According to the Pakistani newspaper Tribune, an official said that India's change of heart shows that it accepts the existence of the Taliban. The official also admitted that the talks between the two countries are being closely watched.

Pakistan also admits that this meeting was more important than humanitarian aid. Still, India deliberately did not make any noise about it. A Pakistani official said that there is no problem with India coming to Afghanistan. Still, our interests should not be affected by this. He said there was no problem with the embassy's opening. Still, there was no need for an Indian consulate on the Afghan-Pakistan border. At the same time, in a statement after the meeting, Pakistan expressed its concern. It said, "Pakistan does not want any country to play a role to spoil the situation in the way of a stable and prosperous Afghanistan."

Views of the United States

New Delhi has a **set of interests** when engaging with the Taliban regime, the United States said on Monday.

US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said to reporters, "Several countries worldwide have a discrete set of interests in Afghanistan and who predicate their engagement with the Taliban on those interests, India similarly has a set of interests when it comes to the Taliban."

Price further added, "Different countries will engage with the Taliban in different ways. We have a team on the ground in Doha that is responsible for, as appropriate, engaging with the Taliban on our set of interests just as other countries do."

The United States will continue to monitor and take steps to increase pressure on the Taliban government to reverse some of its recent decisions in restricting the rights of women and girls.

India's helping hand to the people of Afghanistan

Since the Taliban takeover, India has supplied wheat and other essential food items and 500,000 COVID-19 vaccines as **humanitarian aid to Afghanistan**. Carrying this engagement forward, the Indian government has announced financial assistance of USD 27 million to Afghanistan in its 2022-23 budget

India, in February 2022, sent the first shipment of 2,500 tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan via Pakistan land routes as humanitarian assistance to the war-torn country. In total, 50,000 tonnes will be supplied to Afghanistan.

Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid had commended India for assistance and tweeted, "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is grateful to India for its humanitarian assistance and cooperation."

The Current Visit:

India chose to send diplomat Deepti Jharwal, a 2011 batch Indian Foreign Service Officer, which was a clear signal from New Delhi to make its point that it stands for **women's rights** in the country.

The Indian team visited four projects and programs that had some Indian roles. They discovered that the situation in the country's health and education facilities was in dire need of help.

One of Kabul's key and wise changes was the general improvement of the security situation. The Indian team got to know that there was a perception of improved security in the Capital. Unlike in the past, the Indian team found the Taliban have ensured a better security environment in the Afghan Capital.

In their conversations with the key Taliban leaders, the Indian team sensed that the Taliban was **"ready to engage"** and desperately sought assistance to improve its infrastructure. But they are facing challenges in governance and capacity, as many well-qualified and trained Afghan nationals have left the country.