INDIA LAUNCHES NEW TRADE ROUTE TO AFGHANISTAN VIA IRAN

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India has launched a new trade route to landlocked Afghanistan by sea through Iran's strategic Chabahar port, a move that bypasses Pakistan and could have significant geopolitical ramifications in the region.

India shipped 1.1 million tons of wheat to Afghanistan from the western seaport of Kandla on October 29. The shipment will be taken by trucks to Afghanistan from the Iranian port.

"I believe that this is the starting point of our journey to realize the full spectrum of connectivity -- from culture to commerce, from traditions to technology, from investments to IT, from services to strategy and from people to politics," Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said in a statement on October 29.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Twitter on October 29 that the launch of the trade route "marks a new chapter in regional cooperation & connectivity."

U.S. President Donald Trump urged India to play a bigger role in Afghanistan's development when he presented his new South Asia strategy in August.

India, Afghanistan, and Iran decided in 2016 to establish the trade route, which would allow Indian goods to reach Central Asia.

India committed up to $500 million for the development of the Chabahar port, along with roads and rail lines.

The trade route lessens Afghanistan's reliance on Pakistan and allow India to open up a sea route

to landlocked Afghanistan. New Delhi will also get access to the oil-rich Central Asian republics.

Pakistan has banned India from transporting goods through its territory to Afghanistan.

The Chabahar port will rival the Gwadar port in Pakistan that is being currently developed by China, India's regional rival. The two ports are less than 80 kilometers apart.

In 2016, New Delhi and Kabul also launched an air-freight corridor in an attempt to provide greater access for Afghan goods to the Indian market.

Kaynak/Source: