
RABBANI HIGHLIGHTS AFGHANISTAN'S IMPORTANCE FOR CONNECTIVITY

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Acting Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani said at the India-Central Asia Dialogue in Uzbekistan on Sunday that Afghanistan can provide the most cost-effective transit routes as he highlighted the country's importance for connecting the region.

Afghanistan can provide the most cost-effective transit routes, serving as a hub for energy supplies including from Central Asia to the energy markets of South Asia, he said.

The work on other major transport and transit corridors [] between Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, as well as between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan [] underway, Rabbani said.

According to him, both India and all Central Asian partners have remained actively involved in the post-conflict reconstruction and recovery of Afghanistan in the last 17 years.

We once again emphasize the importance of the leadership and ownership of the peace efforts by the Government and people of Afghanistan, he said.

The first India-Central Asia Dialogue which is expected to focus on a plethora of regional issues including enhancing connectivity to war-ravaged Afghanistan.

The dialogue, being held in Samarkand city of Uzbekistan, co-chaired by Sushma Swaraj and Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov.

India supports the people and the Government of Afghanistan in their efforts to build a united, sovereign, democratic, peaceful, stable, prosperous and inclusive nation. India supports all efforts for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan which are inclusive and Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled, Swaraj said at the opening ceremony of the event.

These efforts should preserve the gains of the last 18 years. The violence and terror imposed on Afghan people should end. It should strengthen unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, she said.

While geographically Afghanistan and Central Asia are landlocked, there are several ways in which India, Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries can join hands to work on promoting connectivity in the region so that trade and commerce may flow between us and our people to people exchanges may prosper, Swaraj said.

We have already sent a very substantial quantity of wheat to Afghanistan using the Chabahar port. Last month, the Indian company opened its office and took over operations at the Shaheed Behesti port at Chabahar, she said.

We are looking at developing the Chabahar-Zahedan railway link which would bring us close to the Zaranj-Delaram road link which India has already built in Afghanistan, she added.

Swaraj said Iran will hold Chabahar Day International Conference on 26 February at the Chabahar port to introduce to the invited delegations the capacities of the port.

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