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## **AFGHANISTAN AND TURKMENISTAN SIGN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

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Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov and Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani have signed an agreement on strategic partnership between their countries.

Turkmenistan's State Information Agency said the two leaders signed the document in Ashgabat on February 21 after discussing bilateral trade, energy, and cultural ties.

The Strategic Partnership Agreement will help both countries expand bilateral relations on a number of key areas including economy, trade, transit and joint efforts in fighting terrorism.

According to a statement by the Afghan Presidential Palace, the signing of Afghanistan-Turkmenistan Strategic Partnership Agreement will help the two countries to further expand their political, economic and security cooperation, Afghan broadcaster TOLONews reported.

Currently, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan are cooperating in a number of areas including energy and commerce and in the ongoing construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) natural-gas pipeline.

The Turkmen leader said that the implementation of TAPI project will create over 12,000 jobs in Afghanistan and that the country will gain \$1 billion in benefits from the project annually.

Afghanistan officials earlier said the country expects to earn more than \$400 million USD in transit duties annually from the project.

Berdymukhammedov reportedly said that Turkmenistan was ready to try to help bring Taliban negotiators together with Afghan officials for peace talks.

Agreements also were signed to boost cooperation in the energy and transports sectors, including an accord on customs cooperation and construction of a railroad connecting Turkmenistan with Tajikistan via Afghanistan.

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