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SHADOWS OF THE PAST: INDIA-AFGHANISTAN FRIENDSHIP THROUGH THE AGES

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Abstract

This study explores the geopolitical and geostrategic significance of Afghanistan as a key state, serving as a gateway to Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia. Despite historical attempts by world powers to expand their influence in Afghanistan, the nation has proven to be a challenging resting place for invaders. India, recognizing the importance of Afghanistan, has actively sought to strengthen its ties with the country, viewing it as a hub of Indian civilization. This paper delves into the enduring bond between India and Afghanistan, grounded in shared history and culture, positioning India as a steadfast partner in Afghanistan's development and reconstruction efforts. India's development assistance has focused on enhancing Afghanistan's governance capabilities, public services, socio-economic infrastructure, safety, and livelihood opportunities. The study adopts a normative approach, emphasizing the historical and cultural ties that underpin the relationship between India and Afghanistan. The research underscores the commitment to Afghanistan's connectivity and free transit for all goods, with India and Afghanistan collaborating on identifying ways to enhance bilateral commerce. Through a two-decade lens, this study provides a comprehensive overview of India's significant contributions to the reconstruction of Afghanistan, shedding light on the multifaceted dimensions of their relationship.

Keywords: *Afghanistan's Geostrategic Significance, India-Afghanistan Relation, Development Assistance, Historical and Cultural Ties and Bilateral Commerce*

INTRODUCTION

For over two millennia, Afghanistan has stood at the crossroads of civilizations, acting as a vital nexus for trade and cultural exchange between Persia, Central Asia, and India.²⁰⁷ The intricate tapestry of Afghanistan's diplomatic history reflects the close cultural and political bonds it has shared with its neighboring nations. The geopolitical landscape underwent significant shifts, marked by the Soviet Union's invasion in 1979, which led to India supporting successive governments until the emergence of the Taliban

in the 1990s. Despite regional dynamics, India refrained from recognizing the Taliban's authority in 1996, a position distinct from that of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates.²⁰⁸ The aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan witnessed a resurgence in the ties between India and Afghanistan. India actively engaged in diplomatic relations and contributed substantial financial aid for Afghanistan's reconstruction.²⁰⁹ However, this

²⁰⁷ 'History of Civilizations of Central Asia, v. 1: The Dawn of Civilization, Earliest Times to 700 B.C. - UNESCO Digital Library' <<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000094466>> accessed 10 December 2023.

²⁰⁸ 'India-Afghanistan Relations | Council on Foreign Relations' <<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/india-afghanistan-relations>> accessed 10 December 2023.

²⁰⁹ Sayed Quadrat Hashimy, Jackson Simango Magoge and Ahsnat Mokarim, 'Relentless Violation of International Humanitarian Law During the Ongoing

resurgence in India's influence in Afghanistan has been perceived as a threat by Pakistan, further complicating regional dynamics.²¹⁰ Today, Afghanistan faces multifaceted challenges, including the preservation of its ancient architecture and art, the battle against the illegal opium trade, and the imperative to provide employment opportunities for marginalized groups, particularly women and rural residents. Amid these challenges, the cultural ties between India and Afghanistan endure, spanning music, arts, architecture, language, and food. The historical influence of the Patiala Gharana in training Afghan musicians underscores the depth of this cultural connection. India's impact extends beyond traditional cultural realms, with the widespread popularity of Indian movies, songs, and TV shows contributing to the familiarization of the Afghan public with Hindi and socio-cultural values. Dari language dubbing of popular Indian TV shows further amplifies this cultural exchange, reaching broad audiences on both public and commercial TV channels. India's commitment to Afghanistan's reconstruction involves projects aimed at preserving the country's cultural heritage. Beyond cultural endeavors, Afghanistan's strategic significance to India lies in its role as a gateway to resource-rich Central Asian nations such as Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. Seeking regional allies, India navigates the complexities of its relationship with Pakistan, as highlighted by J. Alexander Their, an expert on Afghanistan at the United States Institute of Peace. India strives to ensure that other regional nations remain neutral or supportive in its dispute with Pakistan, while Afghanistan sees India as a potential counterweight in its relationship with its neighbor. As India's influence in Afghanistan waned during the Taliban's control in the 1990s, support for the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance emerged, illustrating India's strategic maneuvers to maintain a foothold in the region.

Conflict in Afghanistan' [2022] SSRN Electronic Journal <<https://www.ssrn.com/abstract=4011585>> accessed 10 December 2023.

²¹⁰ Zahid Shahab Ahmed and Stuti Bhatnagar, 'Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations and the Indian Factor' (2007) 60 Pakistan Horizon 159.

The intricate dance of diplomacy and regional power dynamics continues to shape the complex relationship between India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, with implications for the broader geopolitical landscape.²¹¹

THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT BLUEPRINT

The Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) between India and Afghanistan stands as a testament to the deep historical and cultural connections that bind these two nations. Rooted in a shared history and nurtured by years of engagement, the bilateral relationship has become a cornerstone for regional stability. India's significant contribution of \$3 billion to Afghanistan's aid and rehabilitation efforts underscores its commitment to the nation's prosperity and peace.²¹²

Signed in October 2011, the SPA marks a pivotal moment in the evolving relationship between India and Afghanistan. This comprehensive agreement outlines a commitment to supporting an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process. It goes beyond conventional aid, encompassing efforts to rebuild Afghanistan's institutions and infrastructure, laying the foundation for a self-sufficient and resilient nation. Education and technical support are integral components of the SPA,²¹³ reflecting India's dedication to fostering Afghan competency across various sectors. The agreement recognizes the importance of empowering Afghanistan at the national, provincial, and district levels, emphasizing governance and administration. Through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program, which annually provides over 1,000 positions for Afghan nationals, India addresses the specific needs of Afghanistan, promoting skills development, civil administration, and project implementation.

²¹¹ Muneeb Yousuf, 'India-Afghanistan Relations in Changing Regional Geopolitics' (2023) 43 South Asia Research 343.

²¹² 'Text of Agreement on Strategic Partnership between the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan' <<https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/5383/Text+of+Agreement+on+Strategic+Partnership+between+the+Republic+of+India+and+the+Islamic+Republic+of+Afghanistan>> accessed 10 December 2023.

²¹³ *ibid.*

²¹⁴The strong cultural ties between Afghanistan and India find expression in the rich tapestry of cultural exchange activities facilitated by the SPA. Musical ensembles and performers from both nations engage in reciprocal exchanges, fostering a deeper understanding of each other's heritage. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) spearheads a special scholarship program that awards 1,000 scholarships annually to Afghan nationals, reflecting the commitment to nurturing academic and cultural ties. Beyond cultural diplomacy, India's engagement with Afghanistan holds a significant security component. Acknowledging the complex challenges faced by Afghanistan,²¹⁵ India commits to providing additional aid for the Afghan national defense and security forces. This includes support in countering terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking, and money laundering a testament to India's recognition of the intertwined nature of security and development.²¹⁶

India's multifaceted approach to its relationship with Afghanistan since 2001 underscores a holistic commitment to the nation's development. With a keen understanding that foreign military support is crucial for Kabul's governance, India positions itself as a reliable partner in Afghanistan's journey towards stability.²¹⁷ The SPA, with its diverse provisions and commitments, not only solidifies the strategic partnership but also serves as a blueprint for collaborative efforts that transcend geopolitical challenges, reflecting a shared vision for a peaceful and prosperous future for both nations.

²¹⁴ 'Indo-Afghan Relations : India-Afghanistan Relations' <<https://eoi.gov.in/kabul/?0354?000>> accessed 10 December 2023.

²¹⁵ 'War Crimes in Afghanistan' <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367656356_War_Crimes_in_Afghanistan?_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6Ii9kaXJlY3QlLCJwYWdlIjoicHJvZmlsZSI9fQ> accessed 10 December 2023.

²¹⁶ 'Hobson's Choice for India in Taliban-Held Afghanistan – The Diplomat' <<https://thediplomat.com/2023/09/hobsons-choice-for-india-in-taliban-held-afghanistan/>> accessed 10 December 2023.

²¹⁷ Hashimy Sayed Quadrat, 'Diplomatic Kaleidoscope: Mapping the Cultural Horizon of Indian Foreign Policy' (9 April 2022) <<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=4080279>> accessed 10 December 2023.

NURTURING A SYNERGISTIC BONDS FOR FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS

In the aftermath of the post-Taliban 1.0 era, India has strategically embraced a "soft power" approach to deepen its ties with Afghanistan, demonstrating a commitment to the nation's development and rehabilitation. At the forefront of this endeavor are prominent initiatives such as the Afghan-India Friendship Dam and the Afghan Parliament Building, symbolizing India's active role in reshaping Afghanistan's infrastructure. These initiatives go beyond mere construction projects, embodying a commitment to long-term stability and prosperity. Air linkages and power facilities, critical components of a functional society, have been reconstructed with Indian support, showcasing a comprehensive approach to nation-building. Moreover, India's investments extend into crucial sectors like health and education, acknowledging the foundational importance of these areas in Afghanistan's resurgence. As part of its commitment to capacity building, India actively engages in training civil officials, diplomats, and police officers, contributing to the strengthening of Afghanistan's administrative capabilities.²¹⁸ Drawing upon the deep-rooted historical and cultural ties, India has welcomed the Afghan people with open arms, fostering collaboration across various domains. The annual influx of thousands of Afghans traveling to India for tourism, healthcare, and education is a testament to the trust and camaraderie between the two nations. This people-to-people exchange serves as a conduit for mutual understanding and shared experiences, solidifying the bonds of friendship. India's status as the greatest regional donor to Afghanistan, with a contribution of \$1.2 billion since 2001, underscores its commitment to the country's rehabilitation. Beyond immediate aid, Afghanistan also represents a potential pathway for India to access the energy-rich

²¹⁸ Sayed Quadrat Hashimy and others, 'Nurturing Leadership and Capacity Building for Success: Empowering Growth' (2023) 3 International Journal of Rehabilitation and Special Education 1.

Central Asian region. As an observer in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, India actively pursues enhanced relations with Central Asian countries. Strategic collaborations include a memorandum of understanding with Turkmenistan for a natural gas pipeline traversing Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as a \$17 million grant for the upgrade of a hydropower facility in Tajikistan. In a gesture of technological cooperation, India has granted the Afghan government access to its satellite network for communication, enhancing connectivity and facilitating effective governance.²¹⁹ Despite India's official stance emphasizing the altruistic nature of its financial support for Kabul, geopolitical objectives undoubtedly play a crucial role in motivating these initiatives. The strategic partnership between India and Afghanistan is not just about bricks and mortar; it is a nuanced approach that combines infrastructure development with capacity building, technological cooperation, and people-centric collaborations—all aimed at fostering stability, progress, and enduring friendship in the region.

AIRBORNE COLLABORATION OF INDIA-AFGHANISTAN

The establishment of a direct air freight corridor between India and Afghanistan marked a significant milestone in their pre-Taliban 2.0 regime engagement. On June 19, 2017, the inaugural cargo flight, laden with 60 tonnes of goods, took off from Kabul and landed in Delhi, symbolizing a new era of connectivity and economic collaboration. The genesis of this air freight corridor can be traced back to September 2016 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Afghan President Ghani, during the latter's visit to India, jointly decided to construct the corridor. Recognizing Afghanistan's landlocked status and the logistical challenges it faced, the corridor aimed to provide the country with direct and efficient access to Indian markets. Beyond being a mere transport link, the air freight corridor represented a

strategic partnership aimed at fostering economic growth, trade, and mutual prosperity. The establishment of this corridor held immense economic implications. By facilitating the movement of goods between the two nations, it not only streamlined trade processes but also opened up new avenues for economic cooperation. Afghanistan, traditionally landlocked, gained a crucial gateway to the vast Indian markets, allowing for the export and import of goods with greater efficiency.

Moreover, the air freight corridor served as a testament to the diplomatic and strategic ties between India and Afghanistan. The joint initiative reflected a shared commitment to strengthening bilateral relations, with leaders from both nations actively participating in the inauguration events. It was not just a symbol of economic cooperation but also underscored the enduring friendship and solidarity between the two countries. In essence, the direct air freight corridor was more than a physical infrastructure project; it was a manifestation of the diplomatic vision and economic collaboration between India and Afghanistan. As they looked beyond geopolitical challenges, both nations embarked on a journey to enhance connectivity, foster economic development, and create a foundation for a resilient and mutually beneficial partnership. This corridor represented a tangible step towards realizing the shared aspirations of progress and prosperity for the people of both India and Afghanistan.

ELEVATING TRADE VIA CHABAHAR PORT

The Chabahar Port development emerges as a pivotal infrastructure project, symbolizing the collaborative efforts between India and Iran to enhance sea-land connectivity with Afghanistan and the broader Central Asian region.²²⁰ Nestled in the Iranian province of Sistan-Baluchistan, Chabahar Port is poised to become a strategic gateway, facilitating trade and fostering regional economic growth. The

²¹⁹ Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, 'The Fourth World Approaches to International Law: A cursory Glance' (2023) 6 International Journal of Law Management & Humanities 3297.

²²⁰ 'Chabahar Project' <<https://www.drishitias.com/daily-news-analysis/chabahar-project>> accessed 10 December 2023.

ambitious project encompasses the construction of two terminals, each playing a crucial role in the port's multifaceted capabilities. The Chabahar Port, a cornerstone of this development, serves as a versatile 600-meter-long multipurpose terminal. This extensive terminal, spanning 640 meters in total, is designed to accommodate a diverse range of cargo and vessels, facilitating efficient and seamless maritime operations. Beyond its immediate logistical implications, the Chabahar Port project is deeply intertwined with Iran's strategic balancing act, particularly concerning its relationships with China and India. The port's location in Sistan-Baluchistan strategically positions it along key trade routes, providing Iran with a valuable asset in its geopolitical considerations. As India and Iran collaborate on the Chabahar Port, it reflects a shared vision of bolstering regional connectivity and economic cooperation.

A noteworthy aspect of this collaboration is the emphasis on establishing a reliable legal framework to ensure the smooth movement of products and vehicles between Chabahar Port and Afghanistan, facilitated through Iran. This commitment is poised to materialize through the formulation of a trilateral transit and transport agreement involving India, Afghanistan, and Iran. Such an agreement not only streamlines logistics but also fosters trust and cooperation among the involved nations, creating a conducive environment for sustained economic development. The Chabahar Port project signifies more than just a physical infrastructure development; it represents a diplomatic and economic initiative aimed at transforming the regional landscape.²²¹ By fostering connectivity between sea and land routes, India and Iran are laying the groundwork for enhanced trade, cultural exchange, and people-to-people ties across borders. The multipurpose terminal at Chabahar Port stands as a symbol of collaboration and shared aspirations for prosperity, acting as a beacon

for increased economic engagement in the region. As this ambitious project unfolds, it is set to redefine the dynamics of regional trade and contribute to the overall growth and stability of the participating nations.

NOURISHING BONDS- A NEW CHAPTER WITH THE FIRST WHEAT SHIPMENT FROM INDIA

The inaugural shipment of wheat from India to Afghanistan, routed through the Chabahar port in Iran, represents a watershed moment in regional connectivity and humanitarian assistance.²²² Commencing on October 29, 2017, the event was marked by a joint video conference between the foreign ministers of India and Afghanistan, underscoring the collaborative nature of this initiative and the shared commitment to fostering stronger ties. This historic delivery is a tangible manifestation of the Indian government's pledge to donate a substantial quantity 1.1 million tonnes of wheat to the people of Afghanistan. Going beyond mere aid, this act reflects India's dedication to addressing the pressing needs of its Afghan counterparts, especially in the realm of food security. The symbolic gesture of sharing essential commodities not only strengthens diplomatic bonds but also signifies a humanitarian response to the challenges faced by Afghanistan.²²³ A crucial aspect of this shipment lies in its role in operationalizing the Chabahar port as a reliable and robust alternative connectivity route for Afghanistan. The utilization of this strategic port for the transportation of wheat inaugurates a new chapter in regional logistics, creating a direct link between India, Iran, and Afghanistan.²²⁴ This shift in transportation routes holds the promise of increased efficiency, reduced dependency on traditional routes, and enhanced connectivity between these nations.²²⁵ The delivery of wheat,

²²¹ 'Chabahar Port: Geopolitical Significance - ClearIAS' <<https://www.clearias.com/chabahar-port/>> accessed 10 December 2023.

²²² 'India Continues to Aid Afghanistan, Sends Supply via Iran's Chabahar Port' (*mint*, 18 August 2023) <<https://www.livemint.com/news/world/india-continues-wheat-medical-aid-in-afghanistan-shipments-routed-via-irans-chabahar-port-report-11692377654398.html>> accessed 10 December 2023.

²²³ Hashimy, Magoge and Mocarim (n 5).

²²⁴ s Hashimy, 'Impact of COVID-19 on the Trade in Afghanistan' (2021) 6 52.

²²⁵ 'India to Send 20,000 Metric Tonnes of Wheat to Afghanistan via Chabahar Port | India News - Times of India' <<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-to-send-20000-metric->

therefore, carries significance beyond the immediate humanitarian impact. It serves as a catalyst for increased trade and business interactions between India, Iran, and Afghanistan. By leveraging the Chabahar port, these nations are not only diversifying their connectivity options but also creating new avenues for economic collaboration. This development holds the potential to stimulate economic growth, boost employment, and foster greater regional integration. Additionally, the successful shipment of wheat paves the way for fresh opportunities in transit and trade for Afghanistan. The Chabahar port emerges as a strategic gateway that offers Afghanistan an alternative route for importing and exporting goods, reducing reliance on traditional transit routes that may be subject to geopolitical uncertainties. In essence, the first shipment of wheat from India to Afghanistan via the Chabahar port is more than a logistical achievement; it is a testament to the evolving dynamics of regional cooperation. As this initiative unfolds, it has the potential to reshape trade patterns, strengthen diplomatic ties, and contribute to the socio-economic development of the involved nations, fostering a more interconnected and resilient regional landscape.

TRANSFORMATIVE CONSTRUCTION FROM ZARANJ TO DELARAM

The construction of the 218 km road from Zaranj to Delaram stands as a testament to the collaborative efforts between nations in fostering regional connectivity and economic development.²²⁶ This strategic road project was meticulously designed to facilitate the efficient movement of goods and services to the Iranian border, playing a pivotal role in enhancing trade routes and bolstering economic ties between Afghanistan and its neighboring countries.

tonnes-of-wheat-to-afghanistan-via-chabahar-port/articleshow/98482433.cms?from=mdr> accessed 10 December 2023.
²²⁶ 'India Hands over Strategic Zaranj-Delaram Highway to Afghan' (*Hindustan Times*, 22 January 2009) <<https://www.hindustantimes.com/world/india-hands-over-strategic-zaranj-delaram-highway-to-afghan/story-WSbFNMguMWjvY39V7fR46H.html>> accessed 10 December 2023.

The significance of the Zaranj-Delaram road lies not only in its physical infrastructure but also in its role as a key link between Iran and the Garland Highway.²²⁷ The Garland Highway, a major transportation artery, seamlessly connects critical Afghan cities such as Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Kunduz, Kabul, and Kandahar. By integrating the Zaranj-Delaram road into this extensive highway network, a comprehensive and efficient transportation corridor is established, promoting smoother transit and trade flows. This road project, beyond being a conduit for goods and services, becomes a catalyst for regional development. It not only facilitates cross-border trade but also enhances accessibility for local communities, opening up opportunities for economic growth and social development. The improved connectivity is poised to stimulate commerce, create jobs, and contribute to the overall well-being of the regions traversed by the road. In tandem with the Zaranj-Delaram road, the Afghan-India Friendship Dam emerges as a monumental symbol of bilateral cooperation and development. This multifaceted dam, a cornerstone of India's support in the development of Afghanistan, faced its fair share of challenges during implementation, ranging from logistical intricacies to security concerns. Despite these obstacles, the project was officially launched on June 4, 2016, in a ceremony attended by the Prime Ministers of India and Afghanistan. The Afghan-India Friendship Dam is not merely an infrastructure project; it represents a commitment to addressing critical needs within Afghanistan. With an impressive installed capacity of 42 MW, the dam serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it supplies water for the irrigation of 75,000 hectares of land, contributing significantly to agricultural productivity and food security. Secondly, through its electricity generation capabilities, the dam becomes a sustainable source of power, meeting the energy requirements of the region.

²²⁷ *ibid.*

Since its launch, the dam has been operational, pumping water for irrigation and producing electricity. This dynamic infrastructure initiative showcases the tangible outcomes of international collaboration and underscores the transformative impact that well-planned projects can have on the socio-economic fabric of a nation. Therefore, the Zaranj-Delaram road and the Afghan-India Friendship Dam are emblematic of the shared vision and commitment between India and Afghanistan to foster development, enhance connectivity, and uplift the lives of the people in the region. These initiatives, overcoming challenges and complexities, serve as beacons of progress and cooperation in the landscape of regional infrastructure development.

COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS AND SHARED VISIONS BETWEEN INDIA AND AFGHANISTAN

The collaborative efforts between Afghanistan and India have resulted in the establishment and execution of various developmental projects aimed at fostering friendship and mutual growth.²²⁸ The inception of this alliance dates back to August 28, 2005, when both nations entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) spanning multiple sectors, including agriculture, education, labor, rural development, and public health. One significant outcome of this partnership is the implementation of Small Development Projects, organized in three phases. The first phase witnessed the submission of 50 project proposals in July 2006, followed by 51 proposals in June 2008, and a substantial increase with 303 project proposals in November 2012.²²⁹ These projects have been executed through the involvement of local entities, non-governmental organizations, charity trusts, as well as educational and vocational institutions.

Under the India-Afghanistan New Development Partnership, a range of aid initiatives has been

launched, emphasizing the initiation of 116 new "High Impact Community Development Projects" across 31 Afghan provinces. These projects span diverse domains, encompassing infrastructure development for sports, administration, irrigation, agriculture, drinking water, renewable energy, flood control, education, and health. Noteworthy projects include the construction of the Shahtoot Dam, aimed at providing Kabul with a sustainable drinking water source and facilitating irrigation. Additionally, a low-cost housing project in Nangarhar Province has been initiated to encourage the relocation of refugees returning from Afghanistan. Furthermore, a road connection to Band-e-Amir in the Bamyan province is expected to stimulate economic growth and tourism in the national park.

Several specific projects are underway, such as the enhancement of the water supply network in Charikar, Parwan Province, the construction of a Gypsum board manufacturing facility in Kabul to support value-added business, and the establishment of a polyclinic in Mazar-e-Sharif. Moreover, the partnership extends support for Afghanistan's utilization of remote sensing technology, particularly in resource management and agriculture.²³⁰ To nurture human capital, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has initiated a scholarship program benefiting 500 children and dependents of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) in the 2018-19 school year. The collaboration also includes training programs, extending expertise to Afghan civil servants, defense personnel, and police personnel through institutions in India. This multifaceted development partnership stands as a testament to the shared commitment of Afghanistan and India to mutual progress, economic development, and the well-being of their citizens.²³¹ Through joint endeavors, these nations are working towards creating a

²²⁸ Vinay Kaura, 'India-Afghanistan Relations in the Modi-Ghani Era' (2017) 30 *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs* 29.

²²⁹ TPC Desk, 'Afghan-India Vision for a Shared Future: A Relationship as Ancient as History | The Policy Chronicle' (13 May 2023) <<https://www.thepolicychronicle.co.in/afghan-india-vision-for-a-shared-future-a-relationship-as-ancient-as-history-2/>> accessed 10 December 2023.

²³⁰ 'Business News Today: Read Latest Business News, India Business News Live, Share Market & Economy News | The Economic Times' <<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/>> accessed 10 December 2023.

²³¹ 'Indo-Afghan Relations : India-Afghanistan Relations' (n 10).

sustainable and prosperous future for both countries.

INDIA'S COMMITMENT TO AFGHANISTAN'S LEARNING LANDSCAPE

The India-Afghanistan Educational Programme is a testament to the robust collaboration between the two nations in the realms of education, human resource development, and capacity-building. The program encompasses a multifaceted approach, reflecting India's commitment to supporting Afghanistan's progress and development.²³²

a) The initiative extends beyond traditional educational support, as India actively participates in the repair and rebuilding efforts of educational institutions. An exemplary instance is the restoration of the Habibia School in Kabul, where India not only provided assistance for the physical reconstruction but also contributed to the training and maintenance of the school. This holistic approach emphasizes the importance of sustainable education infrastructure.

b) Human resource development and capacity-building projects play a pivotal role in India's assistance portfolio in Afghanistan. Recognizing the significance of empowering individuals with skills and knowledge, India invests in initiatives that contribute to the professional growth of Afghan nationals. These endeavors are crucial for building a skilled workforce capable of addressing the evolving needs of Afghanistan.²³³

c) The India Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program stands out as a flagship initiative, offering 500 scholarships to Afghan nationals annually. The success of this program is evident in its 100% utilization, showcasing the high demand for these scholarships. By providing training across

various disciplines, ITEC aims to equip Afghan individuals with the expertise needed for sustainable development.

d) The ITEC training program goes beyond conventional education by facilitating the sharing of experiences and technical expertise. It is designed to enhance civil administration and project implementation capacities at the national, provincial, and district levels. This collaborative effort is aligned with Afghanistan's developmental goals, addressing specific needs in administration and governance.

e) The establishment of the Afghanistan National Agricultural Sciences and Technology University (ANASTU) stands as a testament to the commitment to academic excellence and innovation. This institution, supported by the Government of Afghanistan, reflects the joint efforts to enhance agricultural sciences and technology, crucial for the country's economic growth.

The collaborative spirit extends beyond education to include restoration and infrastructure development projects:

f) In 2016, India played a pivotal role in restoring the historic Stor Palace, a century-old architectural gem located within the Afghan Foreign Office buildings in Kabul. This initiative not only preserves cultural heritage but also fosters diplomatic ties through shared history and appreciation.

g) The construction of power substations at Doshi and Charikar is a response to Afghanistan's growing energy demands. These substations, set up at the request of the Afghan government, are integral to the broader energy infrastructure, ensuring a stable and reliable power supply to support economic activities.

h) The Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health (IGICH), established with Indian aid in the 1970s, stands as a beacon of healthcare support for Afghan children. With financial and technical support from the Government of India, IGICH continues to evolve, incorporating state-of-the-art medical equipment and facilities to provide

²³² 'The Constitutional Failures in Afghanistan: A Narrative of Agonising Constitutional Death' <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373806416_The_Constitutional_Failures_in_Afghanistan_A_Narrative_of_Agonising_Constitutional_Death?_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6Il9kaXJlY3QlLCJwYWdlIjoicHJvZmlsZSJ9fQ> accessed 10 December 2023.

²³³ Dr Ramesh and s Hashimy, 'Impact of War on the Environment: A Critical Study of Afghanistan'.

comprehensive healthcare services to hundreds of thousands of children annually. Hence, the India-Afghanistan Scholarships Programme and associated development initiatives showcase a holistic and enduring commitment to fostering education, skill development, and sustainable growth for the people of Afghanistan. India's active involvement in diverse sectors underscores the depth and breadth of this strategic partnership.

ICCR'S INITIATIVES IN SHAPING THE EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE FOR AFGHAN STUDENTS

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) stands as a beacon of educational empowerment, offering unparalleled opportunities for Afghan students to pursue academic excellence at various levels, from Bachelor's to Ph.D. degrees.²³⁴ This initiative not only signifies a commitment to higher education but also serves as a catalyst for the development of cognitive capabilities and research skills among Afghan scholars. By providing this scholarship, ICCR seeks to pave the way for a secure and prosperous future for Afghan students, allowing them to contribute meaningfully to their communities and the wider global landscape.²³⁵ ICCR's dedication to transforming higher education prospects for Afghan students is a commendable effort, reflecting the government of India's earnest desire to support individuals whose pursuit of higher education may have been hindered by various challenges.²³⁶ This initiative aligns with India's broader commitment to fostering international collaborations and nurturing global talent.

In conjunction with other diplomatic missions, including those of Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the European Union, Indonesia, and four Central Asian nations, the Indian Embassy in Kabul has taken on a crucial

role as the 15th mission to maintain personnel stationed in the region, even throughout the Taliban government. This demonstrates India's commitment to closely monitor and coordinate efforts for effective humanitarian assistance, reflecting a deep-rooted historical and civilizational relationship with the Afghan people. Despite challenges such as the cancellation of Afghan visas and the suspension of operations at the Indian embassy in Kabul, India's unwavering support is evident.²³⁷ The deployment of an Indian technical team to Kabul underscores the country's dedication to engaging with Afghanistan and ensuring the delivery of essential services. Thousands of Afghan students, recipients of Indian scholarships for higher studies, are waiting for visas, emphasizing the critical need for continued support and collaboration. The people-to-people bond between Afghanistan and India is invaluable, as evidenced by the mutual appreciation and friendly ties. The hope remains that the Indian government will address the visa-related challenges faced by stranded students in Kabul, providing them with the opportunity to pursue their educational aspirations for a more certain and promising future.²³⁸

In a broader historical context, Afghanistan and India share a rich common history and culture, dating back to the ancient Indus Valley Civilization. The enduring relationship has weathered geopolitical shifts and conflicts, with India consistently supporting Afghan leaders from King Zahir Shah to the present Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani. India's impartiality and constructive approach during Afghanistan's internal conflicts exemplify a strategic and enduring commitment. India's core strategy towards Afghanistan, rooted in historical, cultural, and strategic considerations, has remained consistent since Independence. The ability to adapt swiftly to changing situations in

²³⁴ Hashimy Sayed Qudrat (n 13).

²³⁵ *ibid.*

²³⁶ 'Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Government of India' <<https://a2ascholarships.iccr.gov.in/home/page/indian-council-for-cultural-relations-scholarship-schemes>> accessed 10 December 2023.

²³⁷ Hashimy and others (n 14).

²³⁸ Sayed Qudrat Hashimy, 'India Is an Incredible Place for Education: A Cursory Glance' [2022] figshare 1.

Afghanistan underscores India's commitment to regional stability, recognizing that the security of India is intricately linked to a strong and stable Afghanistan. The respect for Afghanistan's independent and non-aligned foreign policy is a testament to India's commitment to fostering strong diplomatic ties based on mutual understanding and cooperation. In essence, India's multifaceted engagement with Afghanistan transcends geopolitical shifts, underlining a commitment to shared values, historical ties, and a vision for a stable and prosperous future for both nations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the historical tapestry of India-Afghanistan relations is woven with threads of shared culture, mutual understanding, and strategic collaboration. Afghanistan, positioned at the crossroads of civilizations, has witnessed the ebb and flow of geopolitical tides, yet it remains an enduring ally for India. This study has delved into the multifaceted dimensions of their relationship, from historical ties and development assistance to strategic partnerships and educational initiatives. The Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) signed in 2011 encapsulates the depth of their commitment, extending beyond conventional aid to encompass governance, infrastructure, and security. India's proactive approach in fostering soft power through initiatives like the Afghan-India Friendship Dam, direct air freight corridor, and Chabahar Port underscores a dedication to Afghanistan's holistic development. These projects serve as beacons of progress, connectivity, and shared prosperity, transforming the regional landscape. The collaborative efforts, from the Zaranj-Delaram road to humanitarian gestures like the wheat shipment, highlight the tangible outcomes of India's commitment to Afghan well-being. The enduring partnership is not confined to infrastructure; it extends to cultural, educational, and human resource development. The ITEC program, the ICCR scholarships, and the restoration of heritage sites like the Habibia School exemplify India's holistic engagement,

nurturing the human capital essential for Afghanistan's future. As Afghanistan faces complex challenges, India's unwavering support is evident. The commitment goes beyond geopolitics, resonating in the people-to-people bond, as evidenced by the ongoing efforts to address the visa-related challenges faced by Afghan students. The shared history, cultural ties, and commitment to Afghanistan's independent foreign policy exemplify the enduring nature of this relationship. Looking forward, the collaborative endeavors between India and Afghanistan are poised to play a pivotal role in shaping regional dynamics. The multifaceted approach, encompassing diplomacy, infrastructure, education, and humanitarian aid, reflects a shared vision for stability, progress, and enduring friendship. The shadows of the past illuminate a path towards a future where India and Afghanistan continue to stand as steadfast partners, navigating challenges and embracing opportunities for mutual growth and prosperity.

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43 South Asia Research 343