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GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO: 596

ANSWERED ON: 27.02.2013

CO OPERATION WITH AFGHANISTAN AND IRAN

K. SIVAKUMAR ALIAS J.K. RITHEESH

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:-

- (a) the steps taken by the Government to strengthen the bilateral relations with Afghanistan, Iran and Canada;
- (b) whether there is any improvement in the bilateral relations after the visit of Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai; and
- (c) if so, the details thereof?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED)

(a) to (c) Government remains committed to maintaining and further strengthening our bilateral relations with Afghanistan, Iran and Canada.

India has a close strategic partnership with Afghanistan covering a broad spectrum of areas.

This is based on India's historical and civilisational links and has been strengthened by India's active role in the development of Afghanistan based on the understanding that social and economic development is the key to Afghanistan enhancing its contribution to regional stability. India and Afghanistan have regular high level exchanges, both at the official and people to people level. Prime Minister visited Kabul in May 2011 during which he pledged an additional assistance of US\$ 500 million, taking India's total financial commitment to about US\$ 2 billion for reconstruction in Afghanistan. President Hamid Karzai visited India from November 9-13, 2012 during which four MoUs were signed, namely MoU on Cooperation in the field of development of coal mineral resources, MoU on Cooperation in the field of fertilizer sector, MoU on Cooperation in youth affairs and MoU Regarding Indian Grant Assistance for Implementation of Small Development Projects through Local Government Bodies, Community Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations, Charitable Trusts and Educational and Vocational Institutions. President Hamid Karzai had earlier visited India on October 4-5, 2011 and during his visit, a historic agreement on Strategic Partnership was signed, the first such agreement signed by Afghanistan with any country. The agreement reinforced the strong, vibrant, and multi-faceted relations between the two countries and at the same time formalized a framework for cooperation in various areas between the two countries: political & security cooperation; trade & economic cooperation; capacity development and education; and social, cultural, civil society & people-to- people relations. This agreement is a strong signal of our abiding commitment to peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan during this critical period of security and governance transition.

India shares civilisational and historical ties with Iran which underpin a rich and multi-faceted contemporary relationship strengthened by regular interactions, both official and non-official.

There have been regular high-level exchanges including consultations at Ministerial level to discuss bilateral relations and issues of regional and global importance. Meetings of the Joint Commission and Joint Working Groups and exchange of delegations have been held to promote economic and commercial cooperation, cultural and educational ties and address consular matters.

The interactions of academic and research institutions as also of chambers of commerce and industry and commercial entities have been facilitated. These include the organization of bilateral seminars, meetings and exchange of visits and promotional events. Prime Minister visited Tehran on August 28-31, 2012 to attend the NAM Summit during which he met the Supreme Leader and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Bilateral relations between India and Canada have expanded substantially in recent years. Exchanges of several high-level visits on both sides have contributed to further strengthening of bilateral ties. Prime Minister visited Canada in June 2010, while Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper visited India in November 2009 and November 2012. During PM Harper's State Visit to India in November 2012, both sides agreed to significantly enhance the bilateral relationship and agreed on specific steps as reflected in the Joint Statement issued on the conclusion of the State Visit.