

India welcomes focus on regional economic co-operation at sixth JCMB



The JCMB-VI meet in progress in Kabul on October 3. The meeting focused on regional cooperation in energy, trade, transit and labour migration among other areas.

The sixth meeting of the Joint Coordination & Monitoring Board (JCMB-VI) was held on October 3 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kabul. The Indian delegation was led by Rakesh Sood, Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan and supported by T.C.A. Raghavan, Joint Secretary, dealing with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran affairs in the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi and Sandeep Kumar, Minister at the Indian Embassy in Kabul.

The meeting focused on regional economic co-operation and it took a number of decisions on energy, trade, transit, and labour migration.

Important decisions were also taken on anti-corruption, elections, counter-narcotics and the disbandment of illegal armed groups (DIAG).

Special invitees to the meeting included delegates from Afghanistan's northern neighbours — Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan — as well as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) attended JCMB-VI as an observer.

India welcomed the centrality accorded to the regional economic co-operation at JCMB-V — which is an important benchmark of the Afghanistan Compact as well as a strategic cross-cutting theme of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. In his address, Ambassador Sood referred to the several regional co-operation events that had taken place since the Bonn Conference, including the Kabul and New Delhi Regional Economic Cooperation Conferences. He spoke of the challenges in developing co-ordinated measures for the implementation of the programmes formulated in these processes covering cross-border terrorism, law enforcement, land transit, energy corridors as well as trade and business.

In particular, he spoke of the need for developing specific projects that could yield commercial gains so that all regional countries could feel encouraged to take part in Afghanistan's reconstruction from a 'win-win' perspective.

Ambassador Sood also spoke of the imperative of acknowledging various regional technical assistance and capacity building

measures already underway whilst devising future programmes relating to regional economic co-operation. In this context, he referred to the training provided under Indian Technical and Economic Co-operation scheme to the large number of Afghan officials in various ministries in areas of relevance to regional co-operation including energy, research and information, crime records, human settlement, government accounting, parliamentary studies and bank management. He stressed on the need of ensuring that personnel trained so far were deputed to positions where they could put to practice their acquired skills.

India also supported the Regional Economic Co-operation Strategy presented at the conference.

India affirmed that together with the other donors, it would work towards deepening the government's ownership of the strategy for the realisation of its fully potential, which will help Afghanistan use its strategic location as a fulcrum to seek stronger economic co-operation as well as extend trade throughout the region. ■