



India's move towards recognizing the Taliban? Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi is coming to India on a five-day visit.

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Why is in the news?

Taliban flag poses diplomatic dilemma ahead of Amir Khan Muttaqi's first visit to India

India is yet to grant official recognition to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

Key points:

- Since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021, India has not yet formally recognized the new government. However, events are rapidly changing.
- Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi's visit to India and India's presence at the "Moscow Format" meeting held in Russia before that, indicate that India is moving towards a new era of dialogue and cooperation with the Taliban regime.

UN sanctions still apply to Taliban Foreign Minister

- Significantly, Amir Khan Muttaqi's name is on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Sanctions List.
- Nevertheless, India has granted him permission to visit- that is, granted him an "exemption" from UN sanctions- to enable him to undertake diplomatic travel.
- This "exemption" is granted only when a country's government and the United Nations agree on diplomatic and humanitarian purposes.
- India has not only granted Muttaqi permission to visit, but has also decided to accord him protocol at the level of Foreign Minister- a significant symbolic step.

Foreign Minister Protocol

According to reports in The Hindu and Reuters, the Indian government is preparing to provide Amir Khan Muttaqi with all the diplomatic privileges accorded to any other country's foreign minister-

- Official reception and security arrangements at the airport
- Formal meetings at Hyderabad House
- Hosting diplomatic lunches or dinners
- Interactions with senior Indian officials and institutions

“Moscow Format” Meeting: India and the Taliban's first official joint presence

- A “Moscow Format” meeting of 10 countries was recently held in Moscow, the capital of Russia.
- It included India, Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.
- For the first time, Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi participated in this meeting as an “official member.”
- The Taliban’s black and white flag was also hoisted at this meeting- a symbol of Russia and other regional countries’ acceptance of the Taliban as a “ground reality.”
- India also did not oppose the Taliban representative from this forum, but instead agreed to a joint statement- this in itself signifies a “de facto” recognition.

India’s Policy Shift: “Influence Through Contact”

- India vacated its embassy when the Taliban seized power in 2021.
- However, in 2022, India again sent a "Technical Mission" team to Kabul, which remains active today.
- This team provides services such as humanitarian aid, medical support and scholarships to Afghan citizens.
- India's policy now clearly focuses on "Engagement without Recognition."
- New Delhi believes that completely ignoring the Taliban would be against India's interests, especially as China and Pakistan are deepening their influence there.

Why the setback for Pakistan?

- Pakistan has always had influence in Afghanistan, but its relationship with the Taliban is no longer the same.
- Pakistan had hoped that the Taliban would remain its full ally, but now the Taliban has tried to balance Islamabad's diplomacy by increasing contacts with countries like India.
- This growing closeness between India and the Taliban is a major blow to Pakistan because:
- India's soft power in Afghanistan has been quite influential;
- The Taliban needs humanitarian aid and trade cooperation from India; and through India, the Taliban is trying to gain international legitimacy.

Potential Issues in India-Taliban Talks

The following issues may be prominent in the meeting between External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Amir Khan Muttaqi:

1. Humanitarian assistance – increasing the supply of wheat, medicines and other relief materials from India.
2. Education and scholarships – re-entry and visa facilitation for Afghan students in Indian universities.
3. Security cooperation – controlling the activities of terrorist groups such as ISIS-K or al-Qaeda.
4. Trade and connectivity – reviving Afghan trade through the Chabahar Port and international transit routes.

Regional Equations: The Role of Russia, China and Iran

Russia's role in the Moscow Format has been crucial. China and Iran- all three countries- are now close to practically recognizing the Taliban. These countries' goals are:

- To eliminate US influence in Afghanistan,
- And to strengthen regional stability and counter-terrorism cooperation.

India is part of this group and its challenge is to derive strategic advantage from the Taliban while maintaining its democratic credentials.

Criticism from Former Afghan Leaders

- Former Afghan Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta and other diplomats have cautioned India that this engagement could "strengthen the legitimacy of the Taliban regime.
- The Taliban remains restrictive on issues of women's education, human rights and freedom. India should not compromise its democratic identity."
- However, Indian diplomats maintain that "dialogue does not mean support."
- It is part of a strategic balance- to protect India's geopolitical interests.

The Hindu reports: "This is practical diplomacy, not formal recognition."

- The Hindu report states that India's move is part of practical diplomacy.
- India has understood that the ground realities in Afghanistan have changed.
- India cannot protect its interests by remaining isolated from the Taliban regime, especially when China has begun infrastructure investments there.
- Former Ambassador Vivek Katju said-

"India should work in coordination with the United Nations and the international community. But our interests in Afghanistan are very deep- so dialogue with the Taliban is essential."

Conclusion: India's "Diplomatic Rebalancing" Strategy

While India is currently refraining from formally recognizing the Taliban, every move makes it clear that New Delhi is now adopting the "Politics of Realism."

Muttaqi's visit to Delhi is not just a visit, but the beginning of a rebalancing of its Afghan policy.

India has now begun to view Afghanistan not as a "crisis-ridden country" but as a "partner in regional stability."

If this dialogue progresses, the coming months could see

- humanitarian assistance agreements,
- trade agreements,
- formal security coordination arrangements between India and the Taliban.

And the day is not far off when India will recognize the Taliban- if not "de jure" (formally), then at least "de facto" (practically)- as a recognized government.

India, Afghanistan and the Taliban: Regional Diplomacy

- India and Afghanistan's relations are decades old. These relations encompass historical, cultural, religious, economic and diplomatic dimensions.
- Afghanistan's geopolitical importance is enhanced by its position as a strategic bridge between South Asia and Central Asia.
- Afghanistan has repeatedly faced political instability, war and external intervention. In this complex scenario, the Taliban's rise and
- seizure of power are significant developments that have a direct impact on regional security and India-Afghanistan relations.

Taliban: Origin and Ideological Background

- Name and Meaning: "Taliban" is derived from the Arabic word "talib," meaning student or disciple.
- Founded: In 1994, by Pashtun students educated in Pakistani madrassas under the leadership of Mullah Mohammad Omar.
- Objective: To impose Sharia law-based governance and a "pure Islamic system" in Afghanistan.
- Social and ideological basis: The Taliban emerged in protest against the chaos, tribal conflict and corruption that followed the Soviet-Afghan War (1979–1989).

First Taliban Regime (1996–2001)

Seizure of Power

- Captured Kabul in 1996.
- Country name: Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.
- Mullah Omar: "Amir-ul-Momineen" (Leader of the Believers).

Key Features

- Complete ban on women's education and employment.
- Media, music, films, dance, sports, etc. prohibited.
- Strict punishments for theft, adultery and apostasy, such as flogging and stoning to death.
- 2001: Destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, considered an inhumane act against world cultural heritage.

US Intervention and the Fall of the Taliban (2001)

- September 11, 2001: Terrorist attacks on the United States (9/11).
- Accusations against the Taliban: Providing shelter to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda.
- US-led NATO forces invaded Afghanistan.
- Taliban rule ended by December 2001; a new government was formed under the leadership of Hamid Karzai.
- Taliban underground, but active in rural areas.

Resurgence and the Doha Agreement (2004–2020)

- 2004–2020: Gradually regained influence in southern and eastern Afghanistan.
- Support from Pakistan.
- Gradually becoming a well-organized insurgent organization.

Doha Agreement (2020)

- Agreement between the US and the Taliban, reached in Qatar.
- US agreed to withdraw troops.
- The Taliban promised to reduce violence and enter into talks with the Afghan government.
- This was seen as the first step towards the Taliban's legitimacy internationally.

Second Takeover (2021)

- August 2021: US and NATO troops withdraw.
- The Taliban capture Kabul without major conflict.
- President Ashraf Ghani flees the country.
- The Taliban re-declares the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.
- Current leadership: Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada.

Current Regime (2021–2025) and Challenges

- Restrictions on women's education (after grade 6), higher education and employment.
- Restrictions on media, the arts and free expression.
- Acute economic crisis: foreign aid suspended, banking system in shambles.
- Hunger, unemployment and humanitarian crisis.
- Terrorist groups such as IS-K are challenging the Taliban regime.
- According to the United Nations, approximately 28 million people depend on humanitarian aid.

India-Afghanistan Relations

Historical and Cultural Perspective

- Cultural, religious and trade exchanges.
- After independence, India considered Afghanistan a friendly nation.

2001–2021: India's Investments and Contributions

- Over \$3 billion invested in education, health, infrastructure and humanitarian assistance.
- Major projects: Parliament building, roads, power projects, schools and hospitals.

India-Taliban Relations and Policy (2021–2025)

- No formal recognition, but humanitarian and strategic engagement.
- Policy: “Engagement without Recognition”
- Humanitarian aid: wheat, medicines, vaccines.
- Limited diplomatic engagement: security, terrorism control, development projects.
- Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi's visit to Delhi in 2025 is indicative of this policy.

India's Priorities

- Not using Afghanistan for anti-India terrorism.
- Controlling Pakistan-backed networks.
- Contributing to the humanitarian and development needs of the Afghan people.

International Scenario

- China, Russia, Iran and Qatar opened embassies in Kabul, but did not formally recognize.
- Limited international aid and investment under Taliban rule.
- Global community: Considering recognizing the Taliban on the condition of adopting “inclusive and rights-based governance.”

India and Afghanistan Relations: Strategic Importance

Afghanistan is a geopolitical bridge between South Asia and Central Asia.

India's Strategy:

1. Security: Preventing anti-India terrorism.
2. Development: Investment in education, health and infrastructure.
3. Diplomatic Balance: Dialogue and assistance without formal recognition.

Challenges and Future

- The Taliban regime's harsh religious policies and human rights violations.
- The threat from Pakistan-backed terrorist groups.
- The security and effectiveness of India's aid projects.
- Limits on international recognition and investment.

Question: What facilities will be provided to Taliban Foreign Minister Muttaqi during his visit to India?

- A) Only normal visa facility
- B) Signing of a foreign investment agreement
- C) Diplomatic protocol equivalent to that of a foreign minister
- D) Only participation in humanitarian aid distribution programs