

Mr. S. M. Krishna, External Affairs Minister's intervention at the meeting on New Silk Road in German House, New York, on September 22, 2011

His Excellency, Mr. Zalmay Rassoul, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,

His Excellency, Mr. Guido Westerwelle, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Federal Republic of Germany,

Her Excellency Mrs. Hilary Clinton, Secretary of State of United States of America,

And Fellow Ministers,

At the outset, on behalf of the Government and people of India, I would like to convey my deepest condolences on the tragic demise of Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani, Chairman of the High Peace Council and former President of Afghanistan in a dastardly act of terrorism which we strongly condemn.



It was not so long ago, about two months back, in the month of July, that I had an opportunity to receive Prof. Rabbani in Delhi and exchange views with him on his mission to bring about peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

We welcome the initiative of the international community to support and assist Afghanistan in building a self-reliant and sustainable economy, at a time when the country seeks to take control of its own destiny. With the onset of the drawdown of foreign security forces and the transition process, it is all the more important for the international community, especially the regional countries, to remain committed in this crucial phase, when Afghan national institutions are still being developed and consolidated.

It is also important that Afghanistan's growth strategy is built upon the country's comparative advantage of abundant natural resources and its strategic geographical location. These would have to be the building blocks of our vision for Afghanistan as a hub linking Central and South Asia through pipelines, trade and transit routes for the common good of the people of our region and the world. In our opinion, the New Silk Road initiative is an important step in that direction and will receive our support.

We are already undertaking reconstruction and development activities in Afghanistan, with our total bilateral assistance commitment reaching US \$ 2 billion approximately. India has taken up projects in all parts of Afghanistan and in a wide range of sectors, which have been identified by the Afghan Government as priority areas.

We have laid special emphasis on capacity building and human resource development, which in our opinion would form the basis for a robust and self-reliant economy. Indian companies have presented bid for the development of the Hajigak iron ore reserves to the Afghan Government and India is participating in the TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India) gas pipeline project. These are projects which would call for large investments and express our resolve to cooperate with Afghanistan on plans involving regional integration for the mutual benefit of all stakeholders. SAARC, of which Afghanistan is a full member, is an important vehicle for regional economic cooperation within the South Asian region. We have always considered Afghanistan as a South Asian country with natural complementarities and synergies with other countries of South Asia and one which is uniquely placed to build bridges even beyond it. India's rapidly growing economy and its large market make it a natural destination for Afghan exports. Similarly, India can be a cost-effective and efficient source for Afghan imports. In this regard, we welcome the operationalization of APTAA (Afghanistan Pakistan Trade and Transit Agreement). This could serve as a start for trade and transit through the land route for other countries including India.

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh had succinctly articulated his vision for the region much before the idea of a New Silk Road initiative. I conclude by reiterating what he so eloquently stated: "I dream of a day, while retaining our respective

identities, one can have breakfast in Amrtisar, lunch in Lahore, and dinner in Kabul. That is how my forefathers lived. That is how I want our grandchildren to live.” The time has come for all of us to start the process of building a better future for the generations to come.

Thank you

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