

INDIA, IRAN AGREE TO ACCELERATE CHABAHAR PORT DEVELOPMENT

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Iran Foreign Minister Javad Zarif welcoming his Indian counterpart S. Jaishankar in Tehran on Sunday.

Days after his visit to Washington, External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar met with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif for a meeting of the 19th India-Iran joint commission, including talks on the Chabahar port, during a visit that could see him dealing with concerns of Indian expatriates over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act as well.

In a tweet after the meeting on Sunday, Mr. Zarif said they had “excellent discussions on closer bilateral relations and regional and global issues affecting our respective countries,” adding that India-Iran ties are “ancient, historic and unbreakable”.

Productive meeting

Mr. Jaishankar said the meeting with Mr. Zarif and the Iranian delegation had been “very productive”. “ [We] reviewed the entire gamut of our cooperation [and] agreed on accelerating our Chabahar project,” he said in a tweet.

The meeting of the two ministers was the first since last month, when Mr. Zarif had told a group of visiting Indian journalists that he was “disappointed” that India had allowed itself to be “bullied” by the United States and stopped all oil imports from Iran. Speaking in Delhi, Iran’s Ambassador Ali Chegeni had earlier suggested that India’s adherence to U.S. sanctions was also affecting Chabahar port development plans.

In Washington last week, however, a senior U.S. official made it clear that it would continue its “narrow exemption” to India to develop the Chabahar port, recognising its role as “as a lifeline to Afghanistan in terms for India to be able to export humanitarian supplies and potentially helping Afghanistan diversify its export opportunities.”

Subsequently, diplomats from India, Iran and Afghanistan met in Delhi on Friday and discussed several new initiatives for the trilateral project at Chabahar.

Citizenship Act flagged

Meanwhile, the *Mehr* news agency reported that a “number of Indian businesspersons, professionals, university and seminary students and scholars living in Iran” sought a meeting with Mr. Jaishankar to discuss protests in India.

MEA officials did not respond to a query about whether the groups had been granted a meeting with Mr. Jaishankar, or if the CAA had come up during his talks with the Iranian leadership. Mr. Jaishankar is expected to meet with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani before he leaves Tehran on Monday and travel next to Oman for bilateral talks.

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