

## From Turkmenistan with natural gas

A two-member delegation from India, led by Minister of State for External Affairs M.J. Akbar, attended the ceremonies in Turkmenistan and Afghanistan on Friday for the launch of a pivotal trans-border gas pipeline. The \$22.5-billion project will transport natural gas from the resource-rich Turkmenistan to India via Afghanistan and Pakistan, and seeks to promote regional integration and stability.

Mr. Akbar, along with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Pakistani Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, was welcomed by Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov for the first inaugural at Salem Chashma in Turkmenistan. Later, all four leaders travelled to the western Afghan Province of Herat to commemorate the success of the project. "It's a moment of great pride for Afghanistan," Jalil Jami, an official from the office of the Mayor of Herat, told this writer.

The event organised by the local government involved welcoming the guests with a grandiose display of art and culture. Streets were lined with flags of the four nations, and artists and performers wowed the attendees with local dance and music. "Even the security situation was under control and well-managed," Mr. Jami said.

### Backing from Taliban

Interestingly, the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) project has received support from the Taliban. In a statement made in 2016, the group's spokesperson offered "protection" to all projects of national interest, including the TAPI. The Taliban reiterated this position in a statement issued on Thursday, taking some credit for initiating the project in the late 1990s.

"It is a national project that can help everyone in the region and perhaps that's why the Taliban has shown support," reasoned Mr. Jami. While construction on the Turkmen phase of the project began in 2015, this year will see the development of the Afghan phase, perhaps the most sensitive part, which is expected to be completed in 2019. For Afghanistan, the project holds tremendous potential in terms of economic growth and stability. Afghans stand to gain about \$500 million annually in transit fees, apart from jobs. The Afghan stretch of the pipeline is about 800 km.

Orzala Nemat, director of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, remains cautiously optimistic about the impact the project can have on improving not just economics, but also security. "This region, especially Afghanistan, has been in turmoil for a long time and there has been a political failure in curbing the bloodshed," Ms. Nemat observed. The project might not put an end to insurgency, but it could help Afghanistan move away from aid dependency, she added. "With better jobs, improved capacity, a good economy and equitable distribution of resources, we could hope for a semblance of stability."

In a press conference broadcast from Herat, leaders from the four states greeted the Afghan ground-breaking of the pipeline, which will transfer 33 billion cu. m of Turkmen natural gas annually for 30 years. "Galkynysh, the world's second-biggest gas field, will feed the TAPI," Mr. Berdymukhamedov said, adding that apart from the economic benefits, the project will be an important step forward in the political dynamics of the region.

"Indeed, this project will help bring India and Pakistan closer. It is a triumph for Afghanistan to be able to be part of a project that could help bring peace and stability in the region," said Mr. Jami.

***The \$22.5 billion project will transport natural gas from the resource-rich Turkmenistan to India via Afghanistan and Pakistan and seek to promote regional integration and stability***

END

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](http://crackIAS.com)

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

crackIAS.com