

INDIA SENDS FIRST BATCH OF AID TO AFGHANISTAN

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Afghanistan

Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla and Afghanistan Ambassador Farid Mamundzay flagging off the trucks.AP | Photo Credit: Prabhjot Gill

Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla flagged off a convoy of 50 trucks carrying 2500 tonnes of wheat as humanitarian aid for Afghanistan at the India-Pakistan integrated checkpost (ICP) on Tuesday, the first of about 1,000 truckloads which will head for Jalalabad over the next few weeks.

The wheat is expected to be sent across Afghanistan to help people deal with the crisis caused by food shortage and an economic collapse after the Taliban takeover of Kabul. The assistance was made “in response to appeals made by the United Nations for humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan”, the Ministry of External Affairs said.

Traders and truckers in Amritsar also welcomed the trans-shipment, which is taking place after being suspended for nearly three years, and expressed the hope that the opening for Afghan aid would also lead to a reopening of India and Pakistan trade, whose closure has caused massive economic losses in the border town.

“The wheat assistance will be delivered in multiple consignments and will be handed over to the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) in Jalalabad, Afghanistan,” an MEA statement said

World Food Program Country Director Bishaw Parajuli, who had helped complete the negotiations with India, and Afghan Ambassador Farid Mamundzay were also present at the ceremony. According to officials, the wheat, procured by the Food Corporation of India (FCI), has been specially “double bagged” to protect it from contamination along the 500-km journey from Attari to Jalalabad, and then to other centres for distribution.

The wheat shipment, which was packed in special bags stamped “Gift from the people of India to the people of Afghanistan”, marks an end to months of bureaucratic wrangles between New Delhi and Islamabad. The consignment had been originally offered to the Taliban leadership in October 2021, but was held up due to objections from Pakistan.

Once Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan announced he would allow the trans-shipment as an “exception”, and other permissions were secured from Islamabad, it was further delayed by Punjab election, and trucks from Afghanistan finally came to Attari on Monday to be loaded, a day after Punjab polling. Afghan trucks will ply the route, not Indian trucks, as per the Pakistani stipulations, and the drivers are given permits instead of visas by India.

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