

INDIA GUIDED BY INTEREST OF AFGHANS: DOVAL IN NSA MEET

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Afghanistan must ensure education for girls, National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval said at the 4th Regional Dialogue on Security being held in Tajikistan capital Dushanbe.

Emphasising India's decision to help Afghanistan with humanitarian aid even though it doesn't have relations with the Taliban regime, he asserted that India remained an "important stakeholder". "The special relationship with the people of Afghanistan over centuries will guide India's approach. Nothing can change this," he stated at the conference of NSAs and State Security Council Chiefs attended by China, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. "Women and youth are critical for the future of any society. Provision of education to girls and employment to women and youth will ensure productivity and spur growth. It will also have a positive social impact including discouraging radical ideologies among youth," he observed, according to official accounts of the closed-door two-day meeting released to the media.

In the past few weeks, international calls for the Taliban to rescind an order that mandated girl students in secondary schools, from grade 6-12 were not allowed to attend school. India was part of a United Nations Security Council statement criticising the Taliban regime's actions, as well as other restrictions on women in education and employment.

"There is need for all present at the Dialogue to enhance the capability of Afghanistan to counter terrorism and terrorist groups which pose a threat to regional peace and security," Mr. Doval remarked, according to news agency *PTI*, indicating that the government is prepared to distinguish between the Afghan regime and trans-national terror groups.

While India has refused to recognise the Taliban regime, it has engaged Taliban officials in Doha and other locations since their takeover of Kabul in August 2021. After Pakistan gave clearance for transit trade access, India has sent about 17000 metric tonnes (MT) of wheat out of a total commitment of 50000 MT, and has also sent vaccine doses for COVID-19 and Polio, urgently needed medicines and winter clothing on flights to Kabul. The Ministry of External Affairs has refused to confirm reports that India is also considering re-establishing its diplomatic presence in Kabul, as at least 15 countries, including Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan and a few Central Asian States have.

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