

## India to further aid Afghan troops

Stronger ties:Sushma Swaraj, right, with Afghan Minister Salahuddin Rabbani in New Delhi.Shanker Chakravarty

India agreed to enhance existing assistance to Afghan security forces, including in capacity building and training of Afghan soldiers in India, during a Partnership Council meeting on Monday, even as Afghanistan's Foreign Minister suggested a larger role for India in regional diplomacy.

"We are glad India will continue to support our security forces in terms of equipment and training Afghan cadets in India," Afghanistan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani told *The Hindu* in an exclusive interview.

"We hope also that India, as a good friend of other countries in the region like Russia and Iran, can convince those countries to work with the Afghan government to support the peace process in Afghanistan."

Addressing journalists along with Mr. Rabbani at the conclusion of the Partnership Council meeting, the second such meeting since the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) was signed in 2011, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said the strategic relationship is an "article of faith".

The meeting was the first high-level engagement between India and Afghanistan since the announcement of a new 'South Asia policy for Afghanistan' by U.S. President Donald Trump, where he vowed to take tough action against Pakistan if it fails to crackdown on terror groups, a policy that was welcomed in both Kabul and New Delhi.

### New scholarships

"We remain united in overcoming the challenges posed by cross-border terrorism and safe havens and sanctuaries to both our countries," Ms. Swaraj said in a veiled reference to Pakistan, and announced 500 new scholarships for children and kin of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) to honour their sacrifices "for the cause of entire humanity" and ensuring the safety of Indians working in Afghanistan.

Mr. Rabbani made a more pointed reference to Pakistan-based terror groups Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba, which he said had "been launching attacks against India and killing innocent civilians there", while also also launching "similar attacks along with D'aesh (ISIS), Al Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan and destroying infrastructure."

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