

# In contact with stakeholders on Afghanistan, says India

## MEA comment adds to reports of backchannel talks

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NEW DELHI

India on Thursday said it was in contact with “various stakeholders” in and around Afghanistan, confirming that South Block has adopted a broad-based approach to discuss the future of Afghanistan and the region around with various parties involved. The response came after National Security Adviser **Ajit Doval addressed a meeting of his counterparts of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) held on Thursday in Dushanbe.**

**“India supports all peace initiatives and has a long-term commitment towards development and reconstruction of Afghanistan.** In this context, we remain in touch with various stakeholders, including regional countries,” said Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi. The comment has added more substance to the reports that India has held a round of secret talks with the members of the Taliban in Doha.

Arguing in favour of stron-

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ger ties with Kabul, Mr. Bagchi said India has brought development to Afghanistan which was ravaged by violence inflicted by cross-border actors. **“India has brought electricity, dams, schools, health clinics, roads and community projects to Afghanistan. The world knows what Pakistan has brought to Afghanistan.”**

The comments on dialogue with relevant stakeholders has also added to the officially unconfirmed reports of backchannel talks that India has been conducting with Pakistan through third parties. Mr. Doval attended the SCO NSAs meeting, which also saw the participation of his Pakistani counterpart Moeed Yusuf, who has

been in the news over reports of backchannel talks.

Sources said Mr. Doval argued for the “need to preserve gains made in the last two decades in Afghanistan and give top priority to the welfare of its people”. **He also proposed an action plan against Pakistan-based terror outfits Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) as part of the anti-terror framework of the SCO and sought adoption of international standards to counter terror financing, including an MoU between the SCO and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).**

**Cross-border attacks against India by LeT and JeM have been at the centre of recent tensions with Pakistan.** The issue was being discussed at the FATF on Thursday and a decision on grey-listing of Pakistan is expected as early as Friday. Mr. Doval also called for monitoring of new technologies used by terrorists, such as drones, dark web, Artificial Intelligence, blockchain and social media.