

# Jaishankar meets Ghani, discusses Taliban

They focus on advances by the militia within days of the U.S. and NATO troop pull-out from Bagram

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Worries over growing violence and Taliban gains in Afghanistan overshadowed External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's meetings ahead of a connectivity conference here on Thursday, as he called on Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani and met the U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser and Special Envoy as well as other Foreign Ministers.

"Discussed the situation in and around Afghanistan. Reiterated our support for peace, stability and development of Afghanistan," Mr. Jaishankar tweeted after the meeting, which focused on the rapid developments and advances by the militia within days of the U.S. and NATO



**Worrying situation:** External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on Thursday. ■PTI

troops' pull-out from the Bagram airbase this month.

The Afghan president's office said that Mr. Jaishankar had also promised to continue India's humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, with a gift of 150,000 tonnes of

wheat.

According to sources, the Ghani government is conducting a review of the Afghanistan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) military strategy, which could see it shift tactics in

dealing with the Taliban that have claimed several key towns and border checkpoint areas in the last week.

This was the first high-level meeting between Delhi and Kabul since the government decided to pull out all Indian personnel from the Consulate in Kandahar. Internal assessments have suggested that while the Taliban has not been successful in moving in to many more populated cities, it will seek to control Kandahar, which was its traditional base. Officials said President Ghani was "determined" to take back some of the strategic areas taken over by the Taliban.

Mr. Jaishankar also met U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser Elizabeth Sher-

wood-Randall and U.S. Special Representative on Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad, who are attending the conference, and are understood to be discussing the possibility of an American military base in one of the Central Asian countries, including in Uzbekistan, where the U.S. had shut down its Karshi-Khanabad base in 2009.

Mr. Jaishankar said he had "exchanged views on the evolving situation in Afghanistan".

In his speech on Friday, Mr. Jaishankar is expected to speak about the importance of security in the region for connectivity to prosper, including an end to terrorist safe havens and support cross border terrorism.