

Afghan-origin terror prime concern: India

Centre says it conveyed this to the Taliban at Qatar meeting

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

With most Indians now evacuated from Afghanistan, the Government of India on Thursday said its “primary and immediate” concern was to curb any terrorism threat to India emanating from Afghanistan under the Taliban-led regime.

Responding to questions on the reasoning and nature of the meeting between the Indian Ambassador to Qatar and the chief of the Taliban political office in Doha, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) repeated that the meeting had been requested by the Taliban, and it would neither confirm nor deny whether India still considered the group a terrorist organisation.

“Let us just treat the Doha meeting for what it is... it’s just a meeting. These are very early days,” MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said when asked if India could consider recognising the Taliban government, which, officials said, is likely to be announced soon. “We used the opportunity to convey our concerns, whether it was on getting people out [from Afghanistan], or on anti-Indian terror-related activities. We received a positive response,” he said.

Mr. Bagchi, however, did



Difficult situation: Afghan refugees protesting in front of the UNHCR office in New Delhi on Thursday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

not reply to a question about the Haqqani Network, which is among the UN-designated terror groups and a key Taliban constituent.

Haqqani issue

Deputy leader of the Taliban Sirajuddin Haqqani is believed to be responsible for a number of attacks on the Indian Embassy and consulates in Afghanistan, even a suicide bombing in 2008 in which Indian diplomats were among 58 people killed, and the attack on Gurdwara Har Rai Saheb in Kabul in 2020, in which 25 people were killed. The Haqqani Network is believed to have collaborated with the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) in carrying out the attack on the gurdwara, according to the Afghan intelligence agency NDS at the time.

While Taliban interlocutor Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, who had sought the meeting with the Ambassador to Qatar, Deepak Mittal, on Tuesday, is slated to be the Foreign Minister of the new Afghan government, New Delhi will watch with concern the role played by the Haqqani leadership.

Asked why the Taliban had asked for the meeting, Mr. Bagchi said he “presumed that the Taliban wanted to reach out to all countries which have interests, and are relevant”. “Without thinking, we would not have taken such a step [meeting the Taliban]. Our main, primary and immediate concern is that the Afghan soil should not be used for anti-Indian activities or terror activities. This is our focus.”

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8