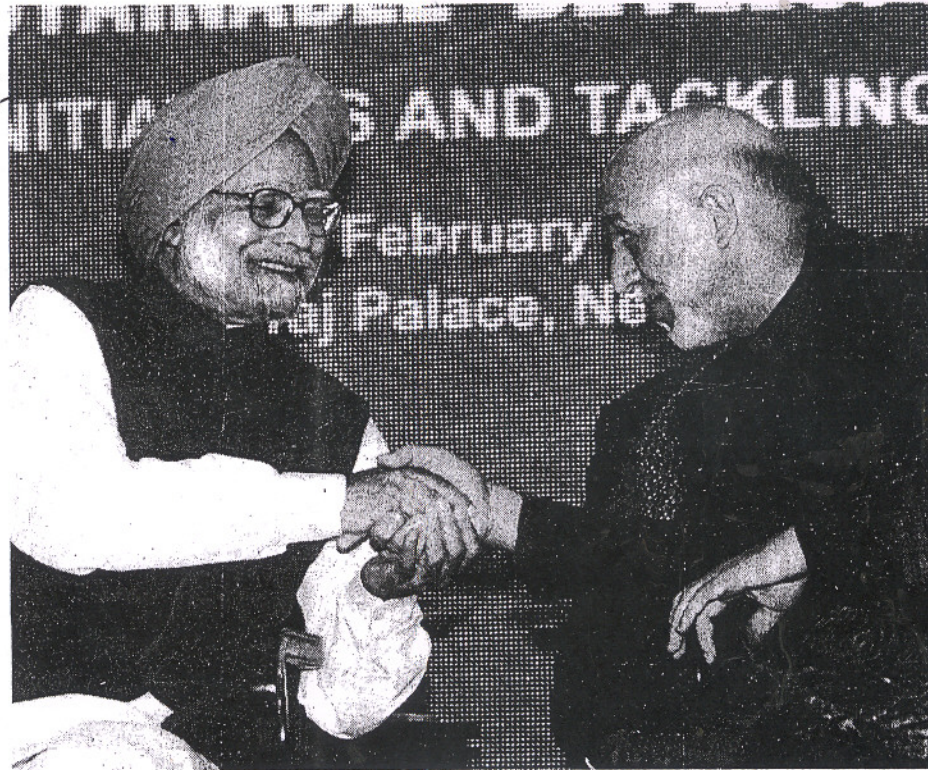


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Karzai, Manmohan discuss wide-ranging issues



Afghan President Hamid Karzai with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during the 11th Delhi Sustainable Development Summit in New Delhi on Thursday.

- PHOTO: R.V. MOORTHY

Sandeep Dikshit

NEW DELHI: Visiting Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai held talks on several subjects with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh here on Thursday. "Generally everything was discussed. All issues, economical and political, were discussed," said sources in the government.

Mr. Karzai was here to address the inaugural session of the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit earlier in the day. He also met President Pratibha Patil.

On the political side, both sides took stock of the current situation, especially the reaching out by Pakistan to the Northern Alliance leadership and India's overtures to the Pashtuns. They noted the timetable for the withdrawal of foreign security forces and the raising of the Afghan police and the Army. The two leaders also dwelt on the Kunduz offensive against the Taliban in the Northern Areas.

In economics, India and Afghanistan took note of the

potential areas where both sides can work together, especially in mining. Mr. Karzai was informed about the potential earnings of \$500 million as transit fees from the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline and development of gas fuel based industries as well as allied activities in the country.

The sources were tight-lipped about details. They said the issues were sensitive or in the formative stages. The meeting comes less than a month after External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna visited Kabul and met Mr. Karzai and the bulk of his top leadership.

The sources claimed that Mr. Karzai primarily came down to attend the environment-related meeting and his presence was utilised for a meeting with Dr. Singh.

A joint statement issued after the meeting said the visit reflected the "continuing tradition of high-level and frequent consultations between the leaders of the two countries." The two sides held detailed discussions on issues of bilateral and regional inter-

est. The Indian side reiterated its long-term commitment to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan, and to the efforts of the government of Afghanistan under Mr. Karzai's leadership to build a strong, independent, democratic, peaceful and prosperous nation.

"The two leaders agreed that the strategic partnership between India and Afghanistan is a positive factor for peace and stability in the region. In this context, they also discussed the common threat faced by both their societies from terrorism. They agreed that this ran counter to the aspirations of their peoples," said the joint statement.

Mr. Karzai expressed the gratitude of Afghans for the assistance provided by India over the years and underlined the need for the two countries to work in close cooperation in the interest of the peoples and stability in the region at large.

Dr. Singh accepted an invitation from Mr. Karzai to visit Afghanistan at an early date.