

Talks on India, Iran, Afghanistan transit pact 'by the month-end'

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New Delhi keen to expedite negotiations

New Delhi, March 8:

The second round of talks on India-Iran-Afghanistan trilateral transit corridor is expected to take place by the end of this month. India plans to expedite the negotiations in an effort to gain greater access to the Central Asian market. The first round of talks was held in Iran last year.

“The second round of talks will take place in New Delhi. The idea is to now expedite its conclusion with the lifting of trade sanctions from Iran,” a top official told *BusinessLine*.

Development of Iran’s Chabahar Port, which gives India direct access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, is at the centre of this transit corridor. The idea is to smoothen trade relations with these markets “bypassing Pakistan”, the official said.

Under this, India will also develop a rail link between Chabahar in South-East Iran to Zahedan, near the Afghan-Iran border.

India also plans to rope in some private players to develop the projects enlisted under the trilateral corridor. However, Iran is not keen on allowing private players from India to become part of the infrastructure projects at this stage.

Minister of State for External Affairs VK Singh said in the Lok Sabha that the government had taken measures to improve trade relations with Iran after the lifting of sanctions.

“Negotiations on an agreement on India-Iran-Afghanistan Trilateral Transit Corridor have made progress and the next meeting of experts to finalise the clauses will be held in India shortly,” the Minister said.

Recently, during his visit to India, Afghanistan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah had also urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to expedite talks.

“Together in a cooperative framework it will lead to higher economic activity with access to newer markets. India will directly be able to access the landlocked Central Asia. So trade and movement of people will substantially increase. In turn, South Asia and Central Asia gets connected and becomes a hub too,” said RU Das, professor, Research and Information System for Developing Countries.

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