

Foreign Minister Mukherjee visits Kabul

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The MOU was signed by Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood, Dr. Ahmad Mushahed, Chairman, Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission of Afghanistan, and Ms. Anita Nirody, Country Director of UNDP. The programme aims at providing 30 Indian experts with experience in governance sectors to work with the Afghan government and other agencies to help build competence and capability in the challenging task of reconstruction and rebuilding of the country.

At the joint press conference following the talks, Minister Mukherjee appreciated the commendable progress made by Afghanistan since the Bonn Agreement of December 2001, despite the tough challenges faced by the people of Afghanistan. He stressed on the importance of Afghanistan joining SAARC and its benefits to the entire region. Minister Mukherjee also announced an additional amount of \$100 million towards Afghanistan's reconstruction. With this, India's total assistance to Afghanistan becomes \$750 million, the largest quantum of aid from a "non-traditional" donor to Afghanistan.

Giving details about the additional assistance, Minister Mukherjee told the media that the amount would be for projects under the Small Development Projects (SDP) programme. An MOU on SDP was signed on August 28, 2005, at the time of the PM's visit to Afghanistan. The projects under SDP are small scale (less than \$1 million), quick-gestation projects, identified at grass-roots level in consultation with the local government and implemented by local communities.

Praising India's firm commitment to Afghanistan's stability and progress, Dr. Spanta appreciated the support received from India for their membership to SAARC. He also spoke about Afghanistan's role as a "land bridge" between Central and South Asian regions.

Minister Mukherjee visited the Indira Gandhi Institute for Child Health (IGICH) in Kabul, an important humanitarian project renovated and reconstructed with Indian assistance. IGICH is the only child hospital in entire Afghanistan. At a well-attended ceremony in IGICH, Minister Mukherjee handed over the new Polyclinic Block to the local authorities. The Polyclinic Block, along with a diagnostic centre and a pathology laboratory, is set to enhance the medical care and health services, in particular for children and women from Kabul and

also from far-flung areas. Minister Mukherjee also gifted a consignment of lifesaving drugs for the benefit of patients. IGICH, a place in high demand and heavily crowded due to its popularity, has an Indian Medical Mission (IMM), with a team of doctors and paramedics since 2001, serving the local patients. Similar IMMs also function at Indian consulates in Herat, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Mazar-e-Sharif, attending to more than 150,000 patients every year. Minister Mukherjee also unveiled a plaque naming the street adjacent to IGICH as 'Indira Gandhi Street', in memory of former PM Indira Gandhi. At the ceremony, attended by local dignitaries, including Kabul Mayor Eng. Rohullah Aman, Minister Mukherjee thanked the Afghan government and local authorities for this special gesture that further cements the friendly ties between the two countries.



Pranab Mukherjee with Speaker of Wolesi Jirga (Lower House) Mohammad Yunus Qanooni in Kabul.

Later in the day, Minister Mukherjee had an hour-long meeting with Afghan President Karzai, where he handed over the formal invitation to President Karzai on behalf of PM Manmohan Singh for attending the New Delhi SAARC Summit.

During the meeting, Minister Mukherjee informed President Karzai about the enhanced Indian assistance and reiterated India's sustained commitment to Afghanistan and firm resolve to carry on with various assistance projects, despite the difficulties and security-related challenges. President Karzai appreciated the time-tested friendly ties and enduring cordial relations with India. He also thanked the Government of India and its people for the assistance in rebuilding Afghanistan.

In the evening, Minister Mukherjee interacted with the Indian community in Afghanistan. He lauded their services in Afghanistan, especially in light of the challenging environment in which they work. He also inaugurated the website of the Indian Embassy (<http://meakabul.nic.in>)

The website has detailed information on various issues covering bilateral relations, educational opportunities, consular services, etc.

The website has a special link for registration of Indian nationals in Afghanistan, which is expected to provide a regular access and interface to the Indian community living in Afghanistan with the Indian Embassy.

Prior to his departure on January 24, Minister Mukherjee took a short break from his hectic schedule to visit the historic Bagh-e-Babur, National Museum and site of the new Parliament complex being built with Indian assistance. ■

EAM's Opening Statement

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... We are glad to be able to contribute to the reconstruction and rebuilding of Afghanistan. As part of India's long-term commitment to the stability, progress and peace in Afghanistan, I would like to announce the following new initiatives:

(a) Enhancement of India's assistance pledge by an additional \$100 million.

(b) Launching projects under the Small Development Projects programme, for which an MOU was signed on August 28, 2005, during the visit of PM of India to Afghanistan. The objective of the programme is to focus on small projects of less than \$1 million which have short gestation and can be implemented by local communities who can derive immediate benefit from them.

(c) Contribution of \$1.08 million for Capacity Development Facility of Afghanistan, the MOU for which has been signed.

(d) Handing over of Polyclinic Block of Indira Gandhi Institute for Child Health (IGICH)... The new Polyclinic will be instrumental in providing holistic health care to patients, in particular to children and women.

(e) I also propose to visit IGICH Care where I will hand-over a consignment of medicines from India.

Later today, I will have the honour of unveiling the plaque naming the road adjacent to IGICH as 'Indira Gandhi Road', in memory of former PM Indira Gandhi. I would like to convey my deep appreciation on behalf of Government of India and people of India for this special gesture, by the Government of Afghanistan.