

Education co-operation marks new height in India-Afghanistan relationship

The first meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on Education between India and Afghanistan was held in Kabul from February 3 to 6 to follow up on the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the field of Education signed between the two governments on April 10, 2006 in Delhi.

The MoU provides for exchange of research material, publications, educational literature and teaching aids; organisation of training programmes for educational administrators and teachers; exchange of scholars, teachers, academics, experts and students; twinning arrangements between institutions of higher learning; setting up of chairs on contemporary studies, or any other mutually-agreed subject; provision of scholarships for Afghan students for studying in India; promoting and developing programmes between institutions of technical, vocational and higher education; providing mutual assistance in the fields of Information Technology and Computer Science.

The six-member Indian team, led by Champak Chatterji, Secretary, Department of School Education & Literacy, had four days of productive talks with a large Afghan team led by Dr. Suraya Paikan, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Higher Education, and Dr. Abdul Ghafoor Ghaznawi, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education.

Visits to the Kabul Education University and Sayed Jamaluddin Institute of Teachers Education exposed the Indian side to the practical problems. Select documents related to the field of education, viz. national curriculum and syllabus for school education, sample school text books, publications and CDs on literacy and other pro-



Agreed Minutes of the Joint Working Group meeting being signed by Dr. Suraya Paikan, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Higher Education (seated, left), Champak Chatterji, Secretary, Department of School Education & Literacy, Government of India (centre) and Dr. Abdul Ghafoor Ghanawi, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education (right) in the presence of Mr. Rakesh Sood, Ambassador of India to Afghanistan (standing, centre) and members of Afghan and Indian delegations.

grammes were handed over.

Both the delegations also had very productive discussions with Dr. Mohammad Azam Dadfar, Minister of Higher Education, Mohammed Haneef Atmar, Minister of Education, and Rakesh Sood, Ambassador of India, and apprised them about the proceedings of the meetings. Both sides agreed that investment in education is vital to the development of Afghan society and strengthening of democracy, peace and stability in the country.

Agreed Minutes of the JWG meeting were signed by the heads of the delegations. These included, twinning arrangements between institutes of higher education, technical assistance for curriculum development; provision of 15 English language teachers; revival of the

Pushto Chair at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU); possible establishment of a Dari Chair at JNU; provision of a Sanskrit Faculty at Kabul University; strengthening of research methodology at Kabul University as well as assistance in satellite and TV/radio-based training.

The JWG meeting was part of the on-going assistance programme of the Indian government for the restructuring of the education sector in Afghanistan. The various projects include the annual award of 500 long-term scholarships for undergraduate and postgraduate courses in universities throughout India; reconstruction of the Habibia High School in Kabul; training of teachers; gifting of 20,000 Desk-cum-Benches for schools in Nangarhar provinces (proposal for another 30,000 is being considered); and the proposed construction of schools in border provinces under the Small Development Projects scheme. ■

Afghan craftswomen participate in Surajkund Crafts Mela

The Surajkund Crafts Mela is an annual event that highlights some of the finest handloom and handicraft traditions of India. From February 1 to 15 every year, rural India basks in the exuberance of a rich crafts ambience at the Suraj Kund Mela village that lies some 8 km from South Delhi. The Mela also celebrates the rhythms of folk theatre and dance — that leave the visitors totally mesmerised.

The Mela, organised under the aegis of the Suraj Kund Mela Authority, aims to create a rural ambience for the foreign and domestic tourists; to educate patrons from urban centres and educational institutes about the fascinating techniques and skills involved in crafts creation; to introduce crafts and craftspersons directly to the buyers; as well as to identify, nurture and preserve languishing crafts of the country and save it for posterity.

Suraj Kund is a beautiful tourist location of Haryana Tourism and in its lovely setting, folk

painters, metal workers, stone and wood carvers, the dye craftspersons, embroiders, lace makers, textiles printers, carpet and loom weavers, jewelers and sculptors - execute and display their skills.

In view of the fact that Afghanistan will officially be joining the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation forum in April, three craftswomen from Afghanistan were specially invited to participate in the Mela.

These were Ayesha Sadiqi from the Handicraft Promotion Centre, with specialisation in needlework and embroidery; Momina Nizam from the Rooh Afza Organisation (member of the Afghan Business Federation), with experience in lapis-based inlay work as well as other stones, and Shahla Hamed from AWWSON organisation, with specialisation in carpet weaving and traditional handicrafts.

The Mela gave the Afghan craftsmen an important platform for networking with other craftspersons from India and abroad, as well as to

showcase the best of Afghan crafts.

The Afghan products, particularly the exquisite lapis-based inlay work, as well as embroidered kurtas, table cloths, purses, caps and accessories were greatly appreciated. This was also evident in the brisk sales done by the Afghan craftswomen.

Most of all, the participation of Afghan craftswomen was a huge empowerment measure, exposing them to an international business milieu and providing a valuable platform for networking and business skills development.

Ayesha, Momina and Shahla can't help talking about their enriching experience at the Crafts Mela. Their only regret has been the limitation of baggage allowance imposed by the airline, which restricted their being able to carry the large volume of exhibits that they wanted to carry with them! But despite this, they are already making plans to participate in next year's Mela — with or without government sponsorship. ■