

JWG provides boost a for rural development

In pursuance to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation in the field of Rural Development between the Government of India and the Government of Afghanistan, signed on April 10, 2006, in New Delhi, the first joint meeting to operationalise the MoU was held in Kabul from February 4-10.

From the Indian side, Dr. Amar Singh, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, led a seven-member delegation, while the Afghan side was led by Mohammad Asif Rahimi, Deputy Minister (Programmes), Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation & Development.

Discussions were held with the different programme-based wings of the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation & Development. Areas of common interest, assistance and potential cooperation were identified.

The Afghan side thanked the Government of India for its support to rural development in Afghanistan. On its part, the Indian side, while appreciating the tremendous needs and investments required for the reconstruction of the rural development sector in Afghanistan, also highlighted the necessity to prioritise the areas of cooperation.

Both the delegations also held intensive interactions with Mohammad Ehsan Zia, Minister for Rural Rehabilitation & Development, as well as Rakesh Sood,



Deliberations of the Joint Working Group, with Minister for Rural Rehabilitation & Development Mohammad Ehsan Zia (fifth from right), Deputy Minister Raz Mohammad (centre right), Joint Secretary, Indian Ministry of Rural Development, Amar Singh (centre left), and Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood (third from left)

Discussions were held with the different programme-based wings of the Afghan MoRD.

Ambassador of India to Afghanistan. Site visits were made to various projects — including micro-hydel, Shakar Dara road project and raisin drying facility — to get first-hand experience of the systems in place on the ground.

The Agreed Minutes of the joint meeting were signed by the heads of the delegations. The highlights include exposure-cum-training visits to micro-hydel, wind energy and water-harvesting projects in India; technical support for local water purification and water testing systems; technical support in the field of rural enterprise development including for

rural women entrepreneurs; technical assistance for developing training course modules and training programmes for execution, management and maintenance of rural roads; exposure-cum-training visit to Panchayati Raj institutions in India in the area of local self-governance; as well as forging of institutional linkages and potential for signing of an MoU and Work Plan between the National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad, and the Afghan Institute of

Rural Development, Kabul, incorporating areas of joint training programmes, seminars and conferences, research projects, ICT, as well as GIS and remote sensing for rural development.

The focus on technical assistance has been in keeping with the reorientation of the second phase of India's assistance programme towards capacity development and institution building in Afghanistan — in cognizance of the massive needs of the country in this sector.

Afghan Minister for Rural Rehabilitation & Development Mohammad Ehsan Zia fully appreciates the new orientation.

"India is doing the right thing in proposing technical assistance for various programmes run by the Ministry, which will instill the much required capacity, skills and confidence in the work force," is his verdict.

Extracts from Ambassador Sood's statement at JCMB

India has demonstrated its full commitment to rebuilding its neighbour — Afghanistan. The modest assistance of the Government of India, which started soon after the ouster of Taliban from Kabul, has now expanded several-fold. During the recent visit of External Affairs Minister of India to Kabul on January 23-24, 2007, India announced an additional pledge of \$100 million, thereby taking India's total pledge to Afghanistan to \$750 million.

Mr. Co-Chairmen, India fully shares the concerns expressed by the Afghan government over the escalation of violence in recent months due to revival of Taliban, Al Qaeda and other extremist groups, the existence of cross-border safe havens for these groups, and growing incidents of suicide bombings and IEDs. India believes that the reality with respect to the prevailing security paradigm in Afghanistan needs to be reflected accurately in the JCMB



reports to enable the international community, especially those countries that are involved in the security sector, to adopt effective policies and measures against cross-border terrorism, which is having a destabilising influence in Afghanistan and the region.

Mr. Co-Chairmen, Afghanistan's recent admission as a member of SAARC is recognition of its historical links with South Asia and would encourage free trade and participation in shared economic activities. I would like to endorse the Government of India's firm commitment to support the efforts of JCMB in carrying forward the Compact and implement the development of Afghanistan in a coordinated manner as projected in the document. To conclude, I would like to reiterate India's commitment to work with the government and the people of Afghanistan and the international community for socio-economic upliftment of Afghanistan and peace and stability of the region.