India offers technical assistance to AAAS

he establishment of an Afghanistan Academy of Agricultural Sciences (AAAS) is one of the cherished goals of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, as a means towards reforming the agricultural research sector in Afghanistan, crippled severely over the long years of conflict and strife.

The genesis of the idea goes back to November last year when President Karzai participated in the Indo-Afghanistan Symposium on "Converting Deserts into Oasis", at the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences (NAAS), New Delhi, and zeroed in on the strong imperative for strengthening agricultural research in Afghanistan.

Following this, the Indo-Afghan Joint Committee arrived at a conclusion to recommend establishment of a dedicated organisation to strengthen the national agricultural research system in Afghanistan.

The main aim of the proposed organisation will be to cater to the needs of Afghan farm-



(From Left) Dr. S.P Ghosh, Dr. R.K Singh and Prof. M.L Madan gifting books on agriculture to Afghan Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock Obaidullah Ramin (second from right).

ers and farming systems in particular, as well as management of natural resources and agriculture sector in general.

The AAAS would be under the patronage of the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock to organise and supervise research institutes within the country.

To take the idea forward, recently a five-member team from NAAS, New Delhi, led by Prof. M.L. Madan, Secretary, NAAS and Vice-Chancellor, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Veterinary University, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, visited Kabul, May 15-22, in connection with the establishment of the AAAS.

The other members were Dr. R.K. Singh, Ex-Director (Research), Nand Education Foundation for Rural Development, Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh, Dr. S.P. Ghosh, Ex-DDG (Horticulture), Indian Council for Agriculture Research and Food and Agriculture Organisation expert, Dr. Farid Waliya, Principal Scientist, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, Hyderabad and Dr. P.S. Pathak, Forestry and Fodder Expert.

During the visit, the delegation had wideranging meetings with leadership of Afghan Ministry of Agriculture as well as Ministries of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and Energy and Water.

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India provides fortified biscuits to 1.4 mn school children

ndian Embassy in Kabul recently organised the high-protein biscuit distribution ceremony at Feroz Nakhshir Boys school and Naswan Girls school in the backward northern province of Samangan in Afghanistan. "Healthy and strong children today will make a healthy and strong Afghanistan tomorrow" was the message projected by Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood. The ceremony held on June 27 also saw the participation of the Afghan Education Minister Hanif Atmar, affirming the commitment of the Ministry of Education to the school feeding programme, Richard W. Corsino, Country Director, World Food Programme, that administers the programme and Governor of Samangan Abdul Haq Shafaq.

Afghanistan faces a chronic food shortage after long periods of strife, instability and natural disasters. Despite international efforts, a large populace still lives in acute poverty. As part of the post conflict relief and rehabilitation efforts, India has been a major contributor to the WFP's On-site School Feeding Programme. In October, 2001, the Indian Government approved the donation of 1 million tonnes of wheat for Afghanistan, which is then converted into



School girls at Naswan Girls school at Samangan, Afghanistan, with their protein biscuit packets and pencil boxes.

biscuits, fortified with micro-nutrients that boost a child's nutrition, reduce short-term hunger and enhance the ability to concentrate and benefit from the learning imparted. The \$100-million programme is the largest humanitarian assistance programme being undertaken by India in partnership with WFP in the country, with the distribution of 100 gm of high protein biscuits daily to 1.4 million school children (almost a

quarter of the total of 6 million children enrolled in schools country-wide) in the most remote, poverty stricken areas, where enrolment is low. The aim is to prompt parents to send their children to schools, alleviate short-term hunger, improve education and nutritional health of Afghan students as also of reducing the gender gap among school children. (In the last 5 years, the overall ratio of girls at schools has risen from 3 to 6 girls for every 10 boys). Since November 2002, around 57,000 tonnes of biscuits supplied by India have been distributed in four tranches. School kids in 31 provinces and around 210 districts in Afghanistan are beneficiaries of the project. The three excluded provinces are Kabul and Panjsher — which are less vulnerable in terms of food security, as well as Bagdhis where a separate nutrition programme is being run by a NGO.

At the biscuit distribution ceremony in Feroz Nakhchir Boys school, the 450 school children, teachers and village elders braving the soaring temperature and dust storm, spilled out of the massive colourful tent put up in the school courtyard to witness the ceremony and listen to the dignitaries.

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