



Kabul celebrates Mahatma Gandhi's birthday



On the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary celebrations at Habibia School in Kabul, students singing bhajans. Also seen is school principal Mr. Askarzada (at the mike).

With its first principal from India, the 103-year-old Habibia School is no stranger to India. The school building itself, which was in a shambles following the long period of civil war, was rehabilitated and repaired with Indian assistance in 2001.

But October 2, 2007 was a special day for the school. The auditorium of the school wore a festive look with Indian and Afghan flags draped over the dais. As visitors trooped in, enthusiastic students lined up to welcome them. Supported by the Indian Embassy in Kabul, Habibia School celebrated the 138th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

The special event began with the inauguration of a photo exhibition on Mahatma Gandhi. The historic photos, carefully selected by Gandhi Smrithi Darshan of India, recalls the Mahatma's life starting from his birth at Porbander, Gujarat, to his move to England to study law, his formative experiences in South Africa, and the freedom movement of India.

The photo exhibition was jointly inaugurated by Ambassador Rakesh Sood, Acting Minister of Education Sediq Patman and the President's Advisor on Cultural Affairs, Zalmay Hewadmal.

Thereafter, the auditorium echoed with the melodious strains of the two *bhajans*, held dear by the Mahatma. The students sang *Vaishnav Jana To* and *Raghupati Raghav Rajaram*, with each rendition eliciting tremendous applause from the gathering.

As a special gesture, President Hamid Karzai sent a message, which was read out by Afghanistan's Acting Minister for Education Sediq Patman. President Karzai extolled the Mahatma's fight as a struggle for the whole of humanity and described him as a visionary statesman and true revolutionary. Acting Minister Patman said the Mahatma's movement inspired one and all, including Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, to lead the famous 'Khuda-e-Kidmatgar' movement in the North Western Frontier Province.

India's Ambassador to Afghanistan Rakesh Sood said the Mahatma's ideals and principles of non-violence have more relevance in the present day. He spoke about the influence of Mahatma Gandhi over a number of world leaders including the great American civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, South Africa's Nelson Mandela and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, popularly known as 'Frontier Gandhi'.

The hour-long celebration was made vibrant by the enthusiasm of the students. More than 300 students took part in an essay writing competition, organised by the school, on Gandhi's contributions.

Haroon, one of the participants and a Class-X student, symbolised the spirit of the programme by saying, "Gandhiji might have been born in India, but he belongs to the entire world".

President Karzai's message

Today, October 2 is the birthday of the leader of the freedom struggle of India, and a friend of humanity — Mahatma Gandhi. Every year, this day is fondly remembered throughout the Indian sub-continent. A celebration of this day by the Ministry of Education at the Habibia High School this year is an appropriate and admirable tribute to the memory of Mahatma Gandhi.

Mahatma Gandhi was not only a staunch advocate of peace and freedom for humanity but also a multi-dimensional personality.

Love and sincerity was his basic nature and opposing hatred with love was his goal in life.

Mahatma Gandhi would say: "True love is like an ocean that recognises no boundaries: it passes beyond all limits and boundaries and engulfs the whole universe."

His teachings depict the highest morals and thoughts of humanity. Mahatma Gandhi did not see war and violence as a means to victory. His struggle was aimed at gaining victory through "non-violence".

He followed his great path till victory was achieved and India was freed with his prudent leadership and the heroism of his people.

Gandhi said that non-violence was related so closely to honesty that they cannot be separated from each other. In fact, for Gandhi, these were two sides of the same coin.

Although Mahatma Gandhi was a son of India and a national leader of all Indians, yet his teachings, instructions and thoughts leave a shared legacy of human culture and they belong to the whole humanity.

In the end, I would like to convey my sincere appreciation to the teachers and students of Habibia High School for hosting this function today to celebrate the birthday of a true believer and preacher of humanity, love and honesty.