



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.

Solar power lights up Kapisa province



Afghan Minister for Rural Development Ehsan Zia (left), Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood (right), and project officials with a solar lantern

Abdul Gayoom, a resident of the Mullah Khatir Khel village in Kapisa province, cannot contain his excitement at the solar panels set up in his home, which light up two bulbs in his living room and bedroom. This is the first time his village is seeing electricity and the transformation is remarkable. Gayoom beams with pride and says: "From now on, no more oil lamps, which cost me quite a bit of money from my farm income." Gayoom's neighbour, Abdul Haq, too, is equally ecstatic. With a broad grin, Haq says, "My children now can study even at night and I can take this lantern wherever and whenever I want. Whether it is the kitchen in the night, or the fields early morning, it is no more a problem. It is a great blessing." Both Gayoom and Haq are talking about the solar lanterns provided by India to the village under a \$750-million assistance programme for Afghanistan.

In energy starved Afghanistan, renewable energy is being seen as one of the key long-term and sustainable options. Nowhere such urgency is felt more than in the remote, infrastructurally underdeveloped and inaccessible hilly regions, where it would be logistically daunting and extremely expensive to provide grid electricity, given the high costs of transmission and distribution.

Recognising this complex task and the importance of providing electricity to remote

areas, the Indian government undertook the task of electrifying 100 villages in the remote hilly regions of Afghanistan by harnessing solar power.

Kapisa province is one of the five provinces benefiting from the solar project, the others being Badakhshan, Balkh, Bagdhis and Kandahar. The project is being implemented by Central Electronics Limited (CEL), with Afghan Solar as the local partner. It covers 20 villages each in the five provinces, covering nearly 5,500 households.

Each household has been provided a home lighting system with a 40-watt solar panel capacity, which will light up two CFL bulbs and one portable solar lantern.

Additionally, in each village, the central mosque has also been provided with a 80-watt solar panel capacity that will light up three lamps and provide power to the public address system for prayer and communications. To provide back-up services for the solar system for a period of five years, 20 local resource persons have been trained.

The state-of-art solar technology has been developed indigenously by CEL and has met all international technical standards. CEL has similarly executed village electrification projects on turn-key bases in more than 1,000 villages in India, Nepal, Myanmar, Africa (Mali, Sudan, Senegal, Namibia, Zambia), South and Central America (Colombia and Cuba)

and Syria. In Afghanistan, in 2006, CEL had also solar electrified a teachers' training centre in Shegnan in Badakhshan province under an Indian government project in collaboration with the Agha Khan Development Network at a cost of \$0.7 million.

The project in Kapisa province was inaugurated by the Afghan Minister for Rural Development Mohammad, Ehsan Zia, and the Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan, Rakesh Sood, on October 10 with a large number of locals attending the function. Several dignitaries including the Governor of Kapisa, Ghulam Ghus Abubakar, and Member of Parliament from Haji, Mohammad Iqbal, were also present.

Speaking on the occasion, Zia described India's help as timely and most advantageous for the power starved Afghanistan. He said that such technologies using natural renewable resources would help greatly in Afghanistan's rebuilding.

Ambassador Sood said that training of local stakeholders in the installation and maintenance of the solar systems was an integral part of the project.

The success of the project in Kapisa has inspired other provinces who now want to be included under the scheme. Meanwhile, there is high excitement in Mullah Khatir Khel and adjoining villages and the atmosphere is truly electric! ■

India reiterates its commitment to the rebuilding of Afghanistan at UN meeting in New York

Following is the statement made by External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee at the High-Level Meeting on Afghanistan at the U.N. on September 23.

First of all, I would like to express our solidarity with Italy on the issue of the missing Italian officials.

It is a pleasure to participate in this High-Level Meeting on Afghanistan, and to discuss co-operation between the Government of Afghanistan and its international partners in the reconstruction and development of the country. This is a timely event which will allow the participants to reaffirm their commitment to support the consolidation of the many achievements recorded so far, and to overcome the current challenges and work more effectively together in future to achieve our shared goal of a stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

India remains fully committed to the Joint Co-ordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) structure and processes, put in place painstakingly by the Afghan government and the international community to support the implementation of the Afghanistan Compact benchmarks adopted at the London Conference in January 2006, as well as to address the security, political and developmental challenges facing Afghanistan.

Excellencies, India's commitment to the rebuilding and development of Afghanistan remains unflinching. Our assistance, which started with the Berlin Conference soon after the ouster of Taliban from Kabul has now reached \$750 million, despite our limited resources, making India one of the largest bilateral donors of the country. Of the total pledge, India has already disbursed around \$300 million in the implementation of various assistance projects since 2002.

India has taken up projects in virtually all regions of Afghanistan, covering almost all sectors, including education, health, telecommunication, transport, construction, civil aviation, agriculture and irrigation, industry, power generation and transmission, information and broadcasting as well as human resource development.

In the second phase of our assistance, India's focus is on Small Development Projects, focusing on the participation of local communities, which will be able to provide aid quickly to the provinces that have not yet seen the benefits of development. Our diverse assistance programme is fully



External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee speaking at the special meeting on Afghanistan at the U.N.

aligned with Afghan priorities and is implemented in close coordination with Afghan stakeholders, focusing particularly on local implementation, management and ownership of assets.

The present meeting is both a time for stocktaking and a valuable opportunity to look at ways to make existing mechanisms more effective by reaching a consensus amongst donors and Afghan partners on the way forward.

The real challenge is to turn high-level political commitments into concrete outcomes that will create the conditions for greater national ownership and leadership of the security, reconstruction and developmental processes in the long term.

With respect to security, India fully appreciates the Afghan government's position that the challenge of terrorism, suicide attacks, bombing, poppy cultivation, cross-border infiltration, corruption and dissidence among the Afghan people requires both, a robust international political solution as well as a stronger internal military response.

At the same time, we sense that security challenges need to be addressed realistically: we need to provide appropriate tactical responses, including both security enforcement measures and also economic and developmental strategies. India shares the deep concerns of the international community at the security situation. We cannot and must not underestimate the ferocity of the Taliban and Al Qaeda resurgence.

None of us can afford to improvise partial

solutions that seemingly provide temporary relief. There is no option to remaining resolute and determined. With respect to the developmental challenge, India is fully convinced that the key to the sustainability of the work being undertaken in Afghanistan will be capacity and human resource development of Afghan people.

For this, a multi-pronged approach is required, which will ensure that skills are transferred to the Afghan people, along with decision-making powers, and that employment opportunities exist in the fields where these skills are transferred.

So far, India has trained more than 2,700 Afghan citizens in India. Since 2006, we have embarked upon a programme of annually training 500 Afghan public officials through short-term courses and 500 Afghan students through university-level courses in India. India is also implementing a capacity development programme in public administration with UNDP for deputation of 30 Indian civil servants to various Afghan ministries.

In addition, India is including a strong capacity development component in all its infrastructure projects in Afghanistan. India also fully supports the Afghan Government's focus on South-South Cooperation as an appropriate and affordable strategy towards enhanced national capacity.

Excellencies, the regional aspect is crucial in the reconstruction and donor-led development processes in Afghanistan. Regional economic cooperation is an important benchmark of the London Compact, and a strategic element of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. Several regional cooperation events have taken place since the Bonn Conference, including the Kabul and New Delhi Regional Economic Cooperation Conferences.

Afghanistan's entry into the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation in April 2007 will not only further strengthen in its historical links with the South Asian region, but will also provide the region lasting benefits in free trade and shared economic activities. The challenge will be in developing coordinated measures to implement programmes formulated in these regional processes covering cross-border terrorism, law enforcement, land transit as well as the broader investment, trade and business issues.

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India welcomes focus on regional economic co-operation at sixth JCMB



The JCMB-VI meet in progress in Kabul on October 3. The meeting focused on regional cooperation in energy, trade, transit and labour migration among other areas.

The sixth meeting of the Joint Coordination & Monitoring Board (JCMB-VI) was held on October 3 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kabul. The Indian delegation was led by Rakesh Sood, Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan and supported by T.C.A. Raghavan, Joint Secretary, dealing with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran affairs in the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi and Sandeep Kumar, Minister at the Indian Embassy in Kabul.

The meeting focused on regional economic co-operation and it took a number of decisions on energy, trade, transit, and labour migration.

Important decisions were also taken on anti-corruption, elections, counter-narcotics and the disbandment of illegal armed groups (DIAG).

Special invitees to the meeting included delegates from Afghanistan's northern neighbours — Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan — as well as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) attended JCMB-VI as an observer.

India welcomed the centrality accorded to the regional economic co-operation at JCMB-V — which is an important benchmark of the Afghanistan Compact as well as a strategic cross-cutting theme of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. In his address, Ambassador Sood referred to the several regional co-operation events that had taken place since the Bonn Conference, including the Kabul and New Delhi Regional Economic Cooperation Conferences. He spoke of the challenges in developing co-ordinated measures for the implementation of the programmes formulated in these processes covering cross-border terrorism, law enforcement, land transit, energy corridors as well as trade and business.

In particular, he spoke of the need for developing specific projects that could yield commercial gains so that all regional countries could feel encouraged to take part in Afghanistan's reconstruction from a 'win-win' perspective.

Ambassador Sood also spoke of the imperative of acknowledging various regional technical assistance and capacity building

measures already underway whilst devising future programmes relating to regional economic co-operation. In this context, he referred to the training provided under Indian Technical and Economic Co-operation scheme to the large number of Afghan officials in various ministries in areas of relevance to regional co-operation including energy, research and information, crime records, human settlement, government accounting, parliamentary studies and bank management. He stressed on the need of ensuring that personnel trained so far were deputed to positions where they could put to practice their acquired skills.

India also supported the Regional Economic Co-operation Strategy presented at the conference.

India affirmed that together with the other donors, it would work towards deepening the government's ownership of the strategy for the realisation of its fully potential, which will help Afghanistan use its strategic location as a fulcrum to seek stronger economic co-operation as well as extend trade throughout the region. ■

These Indian villagers no longer head for cities

We have read it in books and seen it in movies so many times — the scene of a simple village boy packing his bags to leave for the city in search of a better life. But in some parts of the sprawling central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, that is not quite the story.

The District Poverty Initiatives Project (DPIP) has given renewed hope to youth in 14 backward districts of the state and brought down migration rate by nearly 20 percent in six years. Run by the State Government and funded by the World Bank, the project provides a means of livelihood to people living in interior villages. Six years after its implementation, the results have started showing an impact. One of the more prominent achievements, perhaps, is that the migration rate has come down.

“Earlier one didn’t have much of a choice if one decided to stay back in the village. Farming was what most usually had to resort to. But since youths wanted to achieve more, earn more, they usually went the city way. But after this project started about two years ago, there are a lot more choices...”

“One can learn the skills of almost anything of their choice, be it carpentry, bicycle and rickshaw repairing, operating a rice and flour mill and making carpets and shoes, besides others, and use these to earn his living,” said Ram Kailash, one of the farmers of Nalajhiri village.

Biswajeet Sen of the World Bank, who looks after the DPIP programme in Madhya Pradesh, said the project is not supply-based, but demand-based. “The project is demand-based, not supply-based. For instance, we won’t give cattle to a person and ask him to start dairy farming if he is not interested and feels that he won’t benefit



Some of the newly trained rural women in a village in Madhya Pradesh

from it. “We help people through a number of community interest groups (CIGs) involved in different skills, both in the farm and non-farm sector, depending on their interest,” Sen said.

A survey in 2,902 villages in the 14 districts where DPIP has been implemented since 2002 revealed that there has been a 65 percent increase in the family income of all CIG households.

“The figures are excellent. In agriculture, for instance, after we intervened and helped them set up more wells and tube wells for better irrigation purposes, there has been a 15 percent increase in the total irrigated land in the state. This has resulted in a 93 percent increase in the value of agricultural production in terms of rupee per acre. In terms of income, there has been an increase of 66 percent in CIG households,” Sen said.

In animal husbandry, the CIG households have seen an increase of 158 percent in income, in poultry and pig and goat rearing

there is an increase of 19 percent and in non-farm sector four percent.

“With an increase in income, we are now capable of spending more as well. We can spend on our children’s education, health and in other household expenditures. We have also started saving... This has greatly benefited us because we no longer depend on the moneylender,” said Lekha Bharadwaj, a woman in the village.

Bharadwaj is, in fact, now secretary of the Village Development Committee (VDC) that lends money to the villagers.

“We lend out a particular amount of money after asking the reason and then getting the signature of the person that the money will be returned within a particular period and on an interest of 1.5 percent.

“This is much better than going to the local moneylender who charges a higher interest rate,” she said. With the money collected from the interest thus paid, the committee does various things for the benefit of the village. For instance, the committee got a team of doctors from Bhopal when there was an outbreak of malaria in the village.

If there are still people who want to go to the city despite the positive changes and the decline in migration from 30 percent to 14 percent, project officers ensure that they don’t go there without honing a skill.

“Instead of going to the city and remaining unemployed, it’s much better that they learn something and then go there. That’s why we also started training people in other skills that will help them get jobs as security guards, cooks, domestic servants or waiters in the hotel industry,” added Sen. The total outlay for the project is Rs.5.21 billion. ■

Statement by EAM at the High-Level Meeting on Afghanistan

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India is willing to take on any appropriate supportive role in the regional cooperation process in the context of Afghanistan’s reconstruction. India also welcomes the decision to make regional economic cooperation the main focus of the next meeting of the JCMB next month in Kabul.

An effective national communications and public outreach strategy, to which the Afghan government already attaches high priority, remains a compelling policy element. This will involve creation of the appropriate sup-

port infrastructure and dissemination systems, to reach out to the people at the sub-national levels.

This will not only assuage overloaded public expectations, but also help mainstream the provinces into the national polity, which is one of the key objectives of the JCMB platform.

Excellencies, ultimately, all the different political and developmental processes in place in Afghanistan must be “Afghanised”, with Afghan-led identification and prioritisation of projects, implementation, ownership

and management. At the same time, there is a need for a realistic assessment of key needs and capacity impacts, clearer prioritisation and costing of projects, due focus on infrastructure, capacity building, anti-corruption efforts, improved information sharing as well as greater donor coordination.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate India’s continued commitment to partner the government and the people of Afghanistan, as well as the international community, in the socioeconomic uplift of Afghanistan, for peace and stability of the region.



Queen of melody, Lata turns 78

She turned 78 on September 28, but the 'Nightingale of India', Lata Mangeshkar, still has the Midas touch and even today the 'Queen of melody' rolls out hits and continues to lend her voice to the latest crop of actresses, some young enough to be her granddaughters.

From her first superhit 'Aayega aanewaala' to 'Jab pyaar kiya to darna kya' and 'Noorie' to her recent sellouts like 'Yeh hum aa gaye hain kahaan' (*Veer-Zara*) and 'Luka chuppi' (*Rang De Basanti*), Lata has managed to thrill music lovers of every generation with her soulful singing.

This year this legendary singer offered two back-to-back rare treats to her fans — a ghazal album 'Saadgi', and a devotional 'Sumiran'. While the ghazal album is her first in 17 years after 'Sajda', 'Sumiran' is a 17-year-old private recording done by the singing sensation for a temple, which was unearthed by a quirk of fate. Her brother Hridayanath Mangeshkar has composed the songs of 'Sumiran'.

From popular and light classical music to film songs, from ghazals to bhajans and pop, she has sung all kinds of songs in her more than five-decade-long career. Lata has worked with almost all the top music composers and singers in the industry. She has sung more than 30,000 songs in over 20 Indian languages. "I have sung thousands of songs and I feel there are many which are not good, but there are also many songs which are the best."

The septuagenarian singer also enjoys working with new young music directors. "I love working with new talent. In recent times I've sung the first compositions of Vishal Bharadwaj, Rahul Sharma and now

Mayuresh," she said.

Asha Bhonsle, her sister and popular singer, was quoted as saying, "Have you ever seen a waterfall retrace its path? I have seen it... rather heard it in didi's voice. The tinkling notes of her *taan* (fast trill of notes performed in a very high speed by a classical vocalist) tumble forth like a waterfall plunging down a cliff and then go back exactly the same way."

Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan echoed her when he said: "When the voice achieves perfect harmony with a *sur* (note), it is as if the soul has soared up to become one with the Supreme Being. That is how I feel when I listen to Lataji."

Headstrong and confident, Lata also pioneered many constructive changes in Bollywood, which proved to be beneficial for singers, not only for her contemporaries but also new generations. She was the one who introduced the royalty system for singers in the industry. She also insisted that the singer's name be published with the songs instead of actors. However, her revolutionary

ideas were not taken to kindly by many big-wigs of the era and they tried to stop her. For instance, she stopped singing with Mohammed Rafi. She even refused to sing for S.D. Burman. She had a tiff with Bollywood's biggest showman Raj Kapoor as well. But such was her clout that she had her own way and they came back to her.

In the beginning, however, it was very difficult for Lata to find a foothold. Well-known producer S. Mukherjee refused to engage her for his film 'Shaheed', saying her voice was too thin. However, the film's music composer Ghulam Haider was impressed with this new singing talent and used her voice for the song 'Dil mera toda' in *Majboor*. The film was released in 1948 and opened new avenues for the struggling singer. The very next year Lata struck gold with *Barsaat*, *Andaaz*, *Dulari* and *Mahal*. The songs changed Lata's fortunes. Her high-pitched singing proved to be a welcome change in front of the base nasal voices of the day. Her initial style of singing was reminiscent of Noorjehan, but she soon evolved her own distinct style. The iconic success of *Mahal* made Lata the most powerful woman in the film industry during that period.

After the 1962 Indo-China war, Lata sang 'Aye mere watan ke logon' which moved the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to tears, and he said, "*Beti toone mujhe rula diya* (Daughter, you have made me cry)". It was at this time that the then Pakistani Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan said he would gladly "exchange Lata for Kashmir".

Satyajit Ray and Lata are the only two people to have received both the Bharat Ratna — India's highest civilian honour — and the Dada Saheb Phalke award. ■

