

Pact is signed for India-Afghanistan Foundation

The Government of India and the Government of Afghanistan signed an MoU on India-Afghanistan foundation on April 3 in New Delhi. The MoU was signed by Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan Rakesh Sood, and the Ambassador of Afghanistan to India, Sayed Makhdoom Raheen, in the presence of External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Afghan Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta. The India-Afghanistan Foundation (IAF) is being set up with the objective of



Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan Rakesh Sood and Afghan Ambassador to India, Sayed Makhdoom Raheen signing the MoU in the presence of Union Minister of External Affairs Pranab Mukherjee and his Afghan counterpart Rangin Dadfar Spanta in New Delhi on April 3.

fostering bilateral cooperation in areas of education, culture, science and technology, agricultural research, health, technical training, developmental studies and women's studies. IAF will facilitate higher studies, research and other educational activities for Afghan students at institutions of learning in India and vice versa, as well as promote exchanges between India and Afghanistan of scholars, poets, writers, journalists, artists, teachers, and professionals in the above-mentioned areas. ■

Afghanistan's isolation must not be repeated: Karzai

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At the same time, he also called for speeding up the process of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline and offered to expand it to other SAARC nations. The multi-billion-dollar TAPI project is still in conceptual stage and, if implemented, it could prove crucial to energy security in the region.

Karzai's remarks evoked strong praise from all the leaders, including Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz.

"Afghanistan is a natural and indispensable member of the SAARC community. I am sure Afghanistan will play its valuable role to strengthen the organisation," Aziz said in his remarks.

In his strong speech, Karzai recounted the last five years of his government and said that important developments had taken place during this period and underlined the "investment-friendly climate" in his country. Touching on the pivotal issue of drugs, he said the "narcotics trade was damaging to all of us".

"Afghanistan respects national sovereignty. Our foreign policy relies on the multilateralism that SAARC represents... We are ready to play our part," Karzai said.

Declaring that it was his privilege to take part in this important summit, he said April 3 would be remembered as the day when



Afghan President Hamid Karzai being received by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on his arrival to attend the inaugural session of the 14th SAARC Summit, in New Delhi on April 3.

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Afghanistan became a member of SAARC.

Stating that challenges must be overcome to realise the advantages of greater economic cooperation, the Afghan president suggested access to each other's airlines and airports, trade and transit facilities as important constituents.

"Cooperation of member countries in meeting energy needs to be strengthened," he said. "Afghanistan today presents a largely untapped market for business and investing. Our vision for Afghanistan and its people is one where we act as a conduit for growing regional trade," he added.

Upon his arrival in New Delhi, President Karzai met with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to discuss bilateral relations and Afghanistan's role in strengthening relations between SAARC's member states. The President also met with Head of Bangladesh's Transitional Administration Fakhruddin, President of Sri Lanka Raja

Paksa, and Prime Minister of Pakistan Shaukat Aziz to discuss bilateral relations and regional cooperation

Karzai was accompanied by Minister of Foreign Affairs Rangeen Dadfar Spanta, National Security Advisor Zalmay Rasoul, Advisor to the President on International Affairs Sharifa Sharif, Chief of Staff Umer Daudzai, and Spokesman Karim Rahimi. ■