

# Street named after Ahmad Shah Massoud



Afghan President Hamid Karzai, unveiling the naming plaque of Ahmad Shah Massoud Marg in New Delhi on April 5. External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Chief Minister of Delhi Sheila Dikshit are also seen in the photo. Mukherjee described Massoud as visionary-friend of India and 'Lion of Panjshir'.

India on April 5 underscored its special ties with Afghanistan by naming a street in the Indian capital in honour of Ahmad Shah Massoud, the legendary Afghan commander and 'Lion of Panjshir'. The crossroad No. 1 between Niti Marg and Shantipath, near the Afghanistan Embassy in the diplomatic enclave of Chanakyapuri, has been named the Ahmad Shah Massoud Marg.

A plaque bearing the name of the Afghan leader, revered as a hero in the war on the hardliner Taliban militia, was unveiled by Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee. Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit was also present at the ceremony.

Crossroad No. 1 will be the first street in Delhi named in honour of any Afghan leader.

"This road is not just another path in the city of Delhi, this is a symbol of ties that bind India and Afghanistan and I am confident that it will pave the way for even stronger ties between our two countries and in our region," Mukherjee said. Describing Massoud, affectionately called *Sher-e-Panjshir* (Lion of Panjshir), as a visionary and a friend of India, the minister said the slain Afghan leader understood the threat of "globalisation of terror" and fought, dreamt and prayed all his life for a free Afghanistan, which is a living reality today.

Massoud was assassinated by suicide bombers of Taliban or Al Qaeda on September 9, 2001, two days before the Al Qaeda ter-

rorists destroyed the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington. Massoud had earlier played a leading role in driving the Soviet Army out of Afghanistan. He was the country's defence minister under the presidency of Burhanuddin Rabbani.

"Afghanistan is honoured to have him as our hero. Afghanistan is honoured to have the road here, in a very important part of Delhi, named after him. We are very very grateful to you," said Karzai, who thanked India for this special gesture and remembered Massoud as "a friend who waged a life-long struggle against Al Qaeda, interference from neighbours and the rule of terror in Afghanistan".

"He was so important in the war against terror and for the freedom of Afghanistan that terrorism found every possible way to get him out of their way and that was to assassinate him," he said.

Massoud joins the select pantheon of world leaders like South Africa's Nelson Mandela, Sweden's Olaf Palme, South America's Simon Bolivar, Uruguay's Jose Artigas and Argentinian icon Jose De San Martin who have roads named after them in the Indian capital.

Karzai left for Kabul about an hour after the road-naming ceremony, ending his four-day visit to India to attend the 14th SAARC Summit, which saw the inclusion of Afghanistan as the eighth member of the regional grouping. ■

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