

India donates eco-friendly toilet complexes to Afghanistan



From right to left : Minister of Public Health Sayed Mohammed Amin Fathimi, founder of Sulabh Social Service Organisation Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak, Ambassador Rakesh Sood and Mayor of Kabul Mr. Rohullah Aman at the inauguration of public sanitation and toilet complex in Kabul.

At the inaugural ceremony of a public sanitation and toilet project, Rohullah Aman, Mayor of Kabul, said: "This is the best thing to happen to the city. We appreciate this special gesture from the Government of India."

The project was inaugurated by Kabul Mayor Rohullah Amin and Ambassador Rakesh Sood in the presence of Afghan Minister for Public Health Sayed Mohammad Amin Fatimi, and founder of Sulabh International Dr Bindeshwar Pathak. "This is Gandhiji's dream coming true," said Pathak, who flew in with his team from India to attend the ceremony in Kabul on September 23.

The complexes, part of the India's assistance to Afghanistan, are being built by Sulabh International Social Service Organisation (SISSO).

Started in 1970, Sulabh is now the largest nationally and internationally recognised Indian NGO in the field of environmental sanitation.

With more than 60,000 volunteers on its rolls, Sulabh has already built more than 5,500 low-cost, self-financing and eco-friendly public toilet complexes spread across 1,075 towns in India. Each day, a

record 10 million people use these toilet complexes. Besides its much lauded work in India, Sulabh provides technical assistance in building such public sanitation complexes in South Asia and Africa.

Recognising the contribution made by Pathak, the Government of India conferred on him the prestigious Padma Bhushan in 1991. Pathak and Sulabh have received numerous awards, including one in recognition of "urban best practice" at the Habitat-II conference, "Special Consultative Status" from ECOSOC of the United Nations, and the St. Francis Prize for Environment from Pope John Paul II.

Built at a cost of around \$1 million, the five public toilet complexes in Kabul are at Sarai Shyamolie, Char Rah-e-Khote Sangi, Deh-e-Afghanan, Froshgah and the Indra Gandhi Institute of Child Health.

With 2 afghanis (around 4 U.S. cents) for the use of a toilet and 5 afghanis (around 10 U.S. cents) for a shower, the "pay and use" complexes have around 4,500 regular users each day, and generate an average income of 11,000 afghanis.

A special feature of this eco-friendly facility is the bio-digester technology that con-

verts human waste, on-site, to bio-fertiliser, which can be later sold in the market as organic manure. Mayor Aman is all praise for the multi-functional nature of these facilities. "We have a lesson to adopt for other government activities from this programme, which is self-financing and at the same time takes care of public health."

Speaking on the occasion, Sood said the facility represents the diverse nature of Indian assistance to Afghanistan.

He urged the international community to come forward and assist the Kabul municipality in building more such facilities. Aman feels that the fast-expanding Kabul requires at least another 20 such facilities.

In a city where the sewage system needs a complete overhaul, and 80 percent of its residents lack hygienic sanitation facility, the complexes with its innovative low-cost technology and multiple benefits has brought cheer to both officials and the public.

"Every one here is grateful to the Government of India for such a thoughtful facility. This public sanitation and toilet complex is reflection of deep understanding of local needs," says Sayed Sharif, a regular user of the toilet complex at Deh-e-Afghanan. ■