

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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