

# Gurparb celebrated in Kabul



Ambassador Rakesh Sood addressing the gathering on the occasion of Gurparab.

**W**aheguru Ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji ki Fateh," (the Khalsa belongs to the Lord and the victory belongs to the Lord"), the traditional chant of the Sangat, reverberates with the collective voices of the 300-odd members gathered in the large hall of the Gurudwara at the Dharmasala in Kart-e-Parwan district of Kabul.

Kart-e-Parwan is home to most of the Sikh community in Kabul.

The Sikh community gathered at the 45-year-old building on November 24 to celebrate the Gurparb, the birthday of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism.

The nearly three-hour ceremony was infused with religious chants, prayers and devotional songs.

Schoolchildren recited poems in honour of Guru Nanak while guest speakers called for religious harmony, universal brother-

hood, peaceful coexistence and humanitarian assistance. Speaking on the occasion, Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood greeted members of the community. "I am impressed by the organisation and your ability to cherish and celebrate tradition and culture," Sood told the gathering.

Afghan Sikhs moved to Afghanistan generations ago and have always felt at home here. All of them are fluent in Dari and Pashto (local languages), while some can converse in other languages like Uzbeki.

With his neatly tied blue turban and shiny and flowing black beard, Avatar Singh, member of the Dharmasala management committee, appears no different from other Afghan. He says, "We are Afghans and think like any other Afghan."

Ravinder Singh, another member of the management committee of gurdwara, is fluent in Pashto and Dari and is a fourth gen-

eration Afghan Sikh living in Kabul. Pointing to the sizeable presence of Afghan Muslims at the function, he says, "All these are our friends. We treat them as our own brothers and sisters. Though our worship systems may be different, we are part and parcel of Afghan society."

Though his business keeps him busy, he makes it point to come regularly to the gurdwara to pray with his family.

With a broad grin, he says, "This is an important festival for the Sikhs. The Gurparb in Dharmasala attracts devotees not only from Kabul, but from all over Afghanistan."

For him, celebrations like Gurparb are also occasions for renewing bonds and contacts within the community members. The Gurparb ended with the traditional langar (free meals), served to all the devotees and invitees. ■