

Jagjit Singh performs in Kabul, promises to return in future

Kabul was agog with the news — ghazal maestro Jagjit Singh would perform live in the city. Mausiqi was reviving in a country whose people had always enjoyed music. On March 17 all roads in Kabul led to the Loya Jirga tent. Sham-e-Ghazal was organised by the Anaar Group, led by Sumeer Bhasin, in association with the Afghan Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA) and the Indian Embassy in Kabul.

Jagjit Singh, along with his team of musicians performed for nearly three hours, generously meeting all requests made by the enthusiastic audience. Time and time again, the audience joined Jagjit Singh in humming along his most famous numbers — *Wo Kagaz Ki Kashti Wo Barish Ka Paani*; *Hoton Se Chu Lo Tum*; and *Bahut Pahle Se Un Kadmo Ki Aahat Jan Lete Hain*.

In the audience were a large number of Indian expatriates for whom it was an evening that brought them closer home. For the older



PHOTO ABOVE, Jagjit Singh performing at the Loya Jirga tent in Kabul on March 17. PHOTO BELOW, Jagjit Singh addressing a press conference at the Kabul Serena Hotel in Kabul on March 17.

ones, it was a nostalgic evening and for the younger ones, a dream come true. Habibullah in his e-mail said, "Since I was 14, I have wanted to see Jagjit *sahib* and meet in person, thank God for this opportunity. Some college students presented Jagjit Singh with the volume of his poetry translated into Dari.

Showered with so much love and warmth, Jagjit Singh promised the people of Kabul that he would return in the near future. ■



Ghulam Qadir Niazi Qawwal's performance marks Nauroz celebrations

Traditionally, Afghans used to celebrate their new year 'Nauroz' (March 21), but during the Taliban days the celebrations were frowned upon. Today, music performances are making a come back as an integral part of Nauroz.

Ghulam Qadir Niazi Qawwal is a famous Indian artist in the Sufi style. Born and brought up in Delhi, he learnt music from his father Ustad Inam Ahmad Khan. Today, he is associated with Dargah Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia and Hazrat Amir Khusro as a Darbari Aastana singer.

This year, Ghulam Qadir Niazi Qawwal and his group represented India at an International Music Festival at Mazar-e-Sharif. In addition, the five-member Sufi qawwal group also performed at India House in Kabul on March 24, to a small but select audience. Celebrating Nauroz with Sufi qawwalis of Amir Khusro at India House were Parliament Speaker Yunus Qanooni, Finance Minister Dr. Anwarulhaq Ahady, Communication Minister Amirzai Sangin, Information Minister Syed Makhdoom Raheen, Urban Development Minister Yusuf Pashtun, Industry Minister Mir Sediq, Central Bank Governor Noorullah Delawari, Pir Gailani and members of the royal family, including Prince Mustafa and Princess Wana. The members of the diplomatic corps and the Indian community clapped along with the beat. Everybody joined in the rousing finale of *dama dum mast kalandar*. ■



PHOTO ABOVE, Ustad Ghulam Qadir Niazi along with his group performing at the India House in Kabul on March 24. PHOTO RIGHT, A cross section of the audience at the India House. At the back rows are Information Minister Raheen, Speaker Qanooni, Senator Hamid Gailani, Pir Gailani, Industry Minister Mir Sediq and Parliamentary Secretary General Ludin.

Huge response to scholarship offer to Afghan students

Prim Minister Manmohan Singh's offer of 500 scholarships to Afghan students, announced during his visit to Kabul last year, has received an overwhelming response, with nearly 12,000 students competing for this prized opportunity to pursue university education in India. "The response to the Indian offer has been overwhelming," a press release issued by the Ministry of External Affairs said.

"Around 12,000 candidates are reported to have registered themselves for the pre-selection English language proficiency test, including 6,500 candidates in Kabul, 2,500 in Jalalabad, 1,500 in Mazar-e-Sharif, 650 in Herat and 420 in Kandahar," the release added.

The response has been "revolutionary, never witnessed before in Afghanistan," according to the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education, with whom the Indian Embassy in Kabul has been coordinating the selection of candidates. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) is administering the scheme of scholarship for Afghan students. ■