

# New Delhi to host second RECC on Afghanistan

India will be hosting the 2nd Regional Economic Cooperation Conference (RECC) on Afghanistan in New Delhi on November 18 and 19. The Conference will be a follow-up to the first RECC held in Kabul on December 4-5, 2005. The Kabul Conference was organised in cognisance of the fact that regional cooperation is increasingly being seen as an important instrument to further economic development and security in Afghanistan and the region.

The Afghanistan Compact, adopted at the London Conference on Afghanistan in January 2006, also identified promotion of regional cooperation as one of the key principles. Among the benchmarks it is stated that, by the end of 2010, Afghanistan and its neighbours will achieve lower transit time through Afghanistan by means of cooperative border management and other trade and transit agreements; increase the amount of power available through power purchase agreements; and reach agreements that will enable Afghanistan to import skilled labour while enabling Afghans to seek work in the region and sent remittances home.

At the end of the first RECC, a Kabul Declaration was issued, incorporating decisions on 10 issues that were identified as potential areas of cooperation. It was decided to have another meeting at the Ministerial level in 2006 to review the progress made.

The New Delhi Conference will be inaugurated jointly by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Afghan President Hamid Karzai at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi, on November 18.



Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Afghan President Hamid Karzai will jointly inaugurate the conference

The countries that have been invited are: Canada, China, Finland, France, Germany, Iran, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, the U.A.E, the U.K., the U.S. and Uzbekistan.

It will have Ministerial-level participation of regional and G-8 countries, as well as top-level participation of international organisations and international financial institutions.

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In recognition of the importance of regional business linkages, back-to-back business meetings will also be held, which

will be organised by three apex Indian business chambers, namely Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM), in association with Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA).

A number of practical, commercial projects of regional relevance, which can act as a vehicle for private sector investment, will be presented. It is anticipated that the business meeting will encourage possibility of commercial advantage as well as strengthening of contacts with the private sector organisations of the region. In the past, it has been felt that regional countries have not shown sufficient interest in this initiative.

The Conference will build on the progress made at the first RECC. It will also draw upon the important work of regional gatherings in recent years, including the Good Neighbourly Relations Declaration (2002), Berlin Agreement (2003), Dubai Declaration (2003), Bishkek Conference (2004), London Conference (2006), ECO Summit (2006), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit (2006) and SAARC Ministerial Meeting (2006).

The themes of the Conference will be: Trade facilitation and transport; investment, trade and business potential; electricity and energy development, including prospects for TAPI pipeline and renewable sources of energy; and agriculture and agro-development. Capacity building will be taken up as a cross-cutting issue in all the themes. ■

## India, European Union announce path-breaking trade pact

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A Joint Statement issued by India and EU said "strengthening cooperation to combat terrorism continues to be one of the priority areas".

In earlier remarks, Prime Minister Singh demanded "zero tolerance" against terror so as to "send the right signal to those countries directly engaged in terrorism or which are allowing their territories to be used for terrorist purposes".

Later, at the joint press conference, Manmohan Singh returned to the theme, saying India and EU had agreed to step up cooperation in exchange of information on terrorist groups. "We have an obligation," he said.

Manmohan Singh said U.N. reforms, including expansion of the permanent membership of the Security Council in which India is seeking a permanent seat, also came up for discussion. "There was

common agreement that a rule based multilateral trading order is in the interest of both India and EU. "We, therefore, are supportive of continuing efforts to bridge the gaps in positions of various countries to enable resumption of the Doha Round of negotiations."

He also asked the European Union to take a forward looking approach "to enhance international cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. This will enable countries like India to expand the share of nuclear energy in their national energy baskets".

India has demanded that Europe should liberalise its visa regime so that the Indian workforce gets easy access to job markets in the 25-nation bloc. Kamal Nath said EU should treat Indian lawyers as well as accountants on par with their European counterparts.

Asked if an India-EU trade pact would affect WTO talks, Kamal Nath said: "This sends a message to world community that India and EU can engage on their own." ■