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NEW DELHI HOSTS 2ND RECC ON AFGHANISTAN



Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Hamid Karzai at the inauguration of the 2nd Regional Economic Cooperation Conference (RECC) in New Delhi on November 18. Also seen in the photo are Minister for External Affairs Pranab Mukherjee, right, and Afghan Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta, right.

India has said it is committed to a “stable and prosperous Afghanistan” and has called for accelerated regional economic cooperation to reconstruct the violence-hit country.

“Peace and security of Afghanistan is essential for the stability and prosperity of not only Afghanistan but also for the entire region and the world,” Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said in New Delhi on the opening day of the 2nd Regional Economic Cooperation Conference (RECC) on Afghanistan.

Prime Minister Singh and Afghan President Hamid Karzai jointly inaugurated the two-day conference that was attended by representatives from Turkey, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, China, the U.A.E., Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the U.S., Britain, Finland, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the U.N.

The 2nd RECC was aimed at identifying key projects for revitalising Afghanistan’s war-hit economy and involving its neigh-

bours in the country’s socio-economic reconstruction.

A ‘Delhi Declaration’ was issued at the end of the conference (*See box for highlights*).

“Through increased regional cooperation, we will be able to reinforce the international community’s stake in the development and reconstruction of Afghanistan,” Singh said. India has pledged \$650 million for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

RECC Agenda

- Heads of Delegations discussed strengthening of regional cooperation mechanisms and capacities.
- Recommendations of the Technical Working Group on Electricity Trade and Energy Development were tabled.
- Considered recommendations of the Technical Working Group on Trade Facilitation and Transport.
- Recommendations of the Technical Working Group on Investment, Business Potential and Trade studied.
- Recommendations of the Technical Working Group on Agriculture and Agro Industry Development considered.

Underlining the “tremendous fund of goodwill” between the people of India and Afghanistan, Singh said India, being a close and friendly neighbour, has “particular interest in the success of this conference” in outlining “the template of regional cooperation” to rebuild Afghanistan.

Describing the 2nd RECC — the first was held in Kabul last year — as “a landmark event” for both the people of Afghanistan and the region, President Karzai said “a stable, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan could make an important contribution to the prosperity of the entire region”.

Karzai also underlined the need for a “collective” fight against terrorism and extremism that afflicts not only his country but other regions as well.

Both Singh and Karzai also underlined the threat that the rising level of violence in Afghanistan, engineered by the hard-line militia Taliban, poses to the stability of not only Kabul but to the entire region.

“Dealing with this challenge is a collective responsibility,” Manmohan Singh stressed.

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Highlights of the Delhi Declaration

- Noted that regional cooperation creates possibilities for reducing poverty and achieving the Afghanistan Compact benchmarks.
- Noted that possibilities to trade electricity and accelerating construction of transmission infrastructure have the potential for mutual benefit to several countries.
- Afghanistan’s potential gas, oil and coal natural reserves will be considered for development with private sector participation.
- Countries will work towards collaborative regional management of common resources, especially in border areas.
- The proposed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline has the potential for new opportunities for regional energy cooperation.
- Countries will seek to bring together their regulatory systems and procedures so that the barriers to cross border movements of goods and services are progressively reduced.
- To enhance regional trade, countries will work together to establish efficient and transparent trade practices.
- Decided to undertake stronger credibility and confidence building measures (CCBMs), vital for sustained and interactive regional cooperation.
- Regional countries will intensify efforts to remove obstacles to overland trade and transit between countries and regions.
- Regional countries will work towards aviation liberalisation for greater regional connectivity.