

سفارتکبرای
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کنبرا-آسٹریا



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کانبرا- آسٹریا

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PRESS RELEASE

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SCRIPT OF HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT KARZAI'S SPEECH

Canberra – Attached, please find a copy of His Excellency, President Hamid Karzai's speech script delivered at second regional economic cooperation conference on Afghanistan in New Delhi – 18 & 19 November 2006.

The conference was organized following the cooperation conference hosted in Kabul on December 4 – 5, 2005 wherein 11 regional countries along with G-8 countries and International Organizations got together and discussed Afghanistan situations.

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Statement by His Excellency Hamid Karzai
President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Presented To
Second Regional Economic Cooperation
Conference on Afghanistan
New Delhi, India
18 - 19 November 2006

Honourable Prime Minister Manmohan Singh;
Excellencies heads of delegations;
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me and the Afghan delegation to see many friends and partners of Afghanistan gathered in the historic city of Delhi. On behalf of Afghanistan, I welcome our neighbours, countries of the region, member countries of the G8 and the various international and inter-governmental organizations for attending today's conference. It was almost a year ago in Kabul that we first came together to discuss the opportunity that Afghanistan's re-emergence as a peaceful country presented for the strengthening of economic cooperation and integration in our region.

I am grateful to my honourable friend, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for pushing the initiative forward by organizing this Conference.

We the countries of this region are co-habitants of a shared geography and are linked by deep historical and cultural ties. Together, we have great assets for economic development, from our hugely untapped natural resources to our people who are young, dynamic and eager to learn and prosper. Together, we must utilize our assets to grow. Afghanistan, lying at the heart of this region, is proud to be your partner in this collective effort to achieve regional prosperity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

From Kabul in December 2005 to Delhi today, we have come a considerable distance. Much has been achieved that bodes well for economic cooperation and partnership between Afghanistan and countries of the region. Over this period, I have had the honour of visiting several countries who are represented here today, including China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. Each of these visits has opened a new chapter in Afghanistan's endeavour to build bridges of economic cooperation.

During the past year, Afghanistan's membership of SAARC has been approved; we look forward to our full membership early next year. We have continued to play an active role in regional organizations such as ECO, CAREC and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). During the period since the first conference, Afghanistan has explored avenues of increased cooperation with its neighbours and regional partners in a number of specific areas, including improved border management, strengthening trade and transit agreements, new power purchase agreements, expanding opportunities for cross-border employment, and so on.

We have continued to improve our infrastructure and legal framework to enhance Afghanistan's potential as an economic asset to the future prosperity of the region. We have continued to build our road networks in order to facilitate transit across the region and connect countries of Central Asia, through the quickest possible routes to the sea ports of Karachi and Gawadar in Pakistan and Chah Bahar and Bandar-e-Abbas in Iran. We are resuming work on the long-aspired project of Afghanistan's railways, beginning with the Dugharoon-Herat and the Chaman-Spin Boldak routes linking us to Iran and Pakistan respectively.

Similarly, we have upgraded our customs and improved our tax and regulatory regimes to help cross border trade. Our trade with the neighbouring countries has continued to grow by leaps and bounds, increasing from approximately 100 million dollars a year five years ago to around 2.5 billion dollars a year today – a 25 fold increase and still growing.

Our trade with countries beyond the immediate region has also continued to show a significant upward trend.

As an example of how Afghanistan's location can be exploited to the region's economic benefit,

the trans-Afghan natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan (TAPI) has featured prominently in our projections. I welcome India's recent entry into this project as a positive impetus to move the project closer to realization.

There are several other major regional projects in fields of power trading, energy, rail ways and so on, which, we believe, will shape future economic interdependence in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Economic integration in our region, where each and all of our nations would have a part to play, is a lofty but achievable vision. The next step is to take careful stock of where we are, and to move our effort to a higher level by focusing on practical objectives.

We in Afghanistan firmly believe in such a vision and we will work with you towards achieving it. We will spare no effort to restore Afghanistan's historical role as a land-bridge connecting the surrounding regions. We also recognise that Afghanistan's stability is an asset for the region, whereas an unstable Afghanistan will undoubtedly put the vision of a peaceful and prosperous region in jeopardy.

Today there are a host of other factors – from the fragility of security, to inadequate physical infrastructure, to inconsistent policies – which play to the detriment of regional economic cooperation. Many of us are plagued by poverty and environmental degradation; for some of us, trafficking in illegal drugs, corruption and red-tape are among significant obstacles to development and upholding the rule of law.

Perhaps by far the most fearsome challenge to the region's prosperity today is the menaces of extremism and terrorism which threaten our people's lives and livelihoods. Over the past five years, in our endeavour to rebuild Afghanistan into a healthy member of the community of nations, we have fought against extremism and terrorism in our region.

In this context, I wish to highlight the presence of the international military forces in Afghanistan, which has been critical not only to the fight against terrorism and the rebuilding of security institutions in Afghanistan, but has also contributed to the security of the whole region. To all of our international partners who have given much critical support to Afghanistan over the past five years and continue to do so today, I say today thank you for your valuable support.

To those of our partners who may be pondering their continued involvement in Afghanistan, I say the job is not over and the stakes are still very high. The security of the region and the world at large are not yet fully safeguarded. The war we are collectively fighting against international terrorism cannot be won with hesitation and uncertainty. To win this war, we need the enduring partnership of solid and unwavering allies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today's conference must serve, above all, as an impetus to define a vision that reflects the shared interests of all of us, and agree on working together towards achieving it. For our region to really succeed, we must embrace the new reality of an interdependent world; we must envision a new, shared future for our region, a future of peace and prosperity, and we must work together towards that vision.

Today, we are here in Delhi to recommit ourselves to a stable, secure, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan, built on the principles of the rule of law, respect for human rights and friendly co-existence with the outside world – an Afghanistan that would be an important contributor to the economic integration and prosperity of the region. With this commitment in mind, today's conference is a landmark event both for Afghanistan and the peoples of this region who share our vision of security, progress and prosperity. Therefore, for the sake of the legitimate aspirations of our peoples, let us resolve to make our common vision a reality.

Thank you.

End.