

**Inaugural Address by Prime Minister at the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia Istanbul Process on Afghanistan**

December 04, 2016

**Your Excellency Dr Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,**

**Your Excellency Salahuddin Rabbani, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,**

**My colleague Minister Arun Jaitley ji,  
Foreign Ministers, Heads of Delegations,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Namaskar. Sat Sri Akal.**

It is an honour to speak at the inaugural session of the 6th Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia- Istanbul Process on Afghanistan.

And, it is a particular pleasure to jointly inaugurate this Conference with our friend and partner, President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan.

I thank Excellency Ghani for accepting my invitation and for gracing this conference. It is also a great privilege for me to welcome all of you in Amritsar, a city blessed with simplicity, beauty and spirituality, and abode to the Golden Temple, the holiest shrines of Sikhs.

It is a place made sacred by Sikh Gurus who meditated here. It embodies peace and humanism, and is open to all people and religions. Its streets and parks tell stories of great valour and immense sacrifice.

It is a city whose character has been shaped by proud patriotism and generous philanthropy of its residents. And, by their spirit of enterprise, creativity and hard work. Amritsar also happens to nurture an old and steadfast connection of warmth and affection with Afghanistan.

Among the earliest disciples of the first Guru of Sikhs, Baba Guru Nanak Dev ji, were Afghans he had preached to in Kabul in the 15th century.

Even today, the shrine of an Afghan-origin sufi saint Baba Hazrat Sheikh in Punjab is revered by all faiths, including visitors from Afghanistan.

The flow of trade, people and ideas through our region has often intersected in Amritsar on one of Asia's oldest and longest surface arteries, the Grand Trunk Road. Amritsar reinforces the value of restoring connectivity which is so crucial for the overall growth, stability and economic prosperity of Afghanistan.

### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Since the turn of this century, the international community has extensively engaged in Afghanistan.

Major powers, regional countries and concerned nations from around the world have cooperated through multiple programmes of political, social, military, economic, and developmental support.

Our gathering today re-affirms the commitment of the international community to durable peace and lasting political stability in Afghanistan. Our words and actions remain focused at advancing a critical unfinished mission of our time.

And, that is to help Afghanistan:

- Build and strengthen its social, political and institutional fabric;
- Secure its territory and citizens from external threats,
- Spur its economic and development activity,
- and Stitch a stable and prosperous future for its people.

Indeed, this is also the intent of this conference, aptly captured in its theme, "Addressing challenges; Achieving prosperity".

We have no doubt about the scale of the challenge. But, we are equally determined to succeed.

The results of our collective efforts thus far have been hard-won, but mixed. There have been important successes. Much more remains to be done.

The need of the hour is to stand our ground and continue with our line of effort. We must protect and build on the gains of the last fifteen years and march ahead.

Because, at stake is not just the future of Afghanistan that has invested in a vision of development, democracy, and pluralism. But, the peace and stability of this entire region, and beyond.

Let us also reflect with urgency on what more must be done and what we must avoid in Afghanistan so that its citizens can self-sustain peace and economic growth. The answers are all there. The question is of resolve and action. And, of putting Afghanistan and its people first.

For this, First, an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled process is key. It is the only guarantor of durability of solutions. Second, we must demonstrate strong collective will to defeat terror networks that cause bloodshed and spread fear.

Terrorism and externally induced instability pose the gravest threat to Afghanistan's peace, stability and prosperity. And, the growing arc of terrorist violence endangers our entire region. As such, support for voices of peace in Afghanistan alone is not enough.

It must be backed by resolute action. Not just against forces of terrorism, but also against those who support, shelter, train and finance them.

Silence and inaction against terrorism in Afghanistan and our region will only embolden terrorists and their masters. Third, our bilateral and regional commitments of material assistance for Afghanistan's development and humanitarian needs must continue and increase.

Our cooperative endeavours in Afghanistan should contribute to its infrastructure and institutional capacity, and self-propelling engines of growth.

Fourth, we should all work to build stronger positive connectivity between Afghanistan and other countries of the region.

Afghanistan should be at the centre of our connectivity networks, not peripheral to them. On our part, we see Afghanistan as the hub for strengthening links of connectivity between South Asia and Central Asia.

We cannot deny that the more connected Afghanistan is with the regional arteries of trade, capital and markets, the more assured would be its economic growth and progress. President Ghani and I have converged on the priority of strengthening trade and transport linkages with other partners in the region.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On India's part, our commitment to our brave Afghan brothers and sisters is absolute and unwavering. The welfare of Afghanistan and its people is close to our hearts and minds.

The successful record of our partnership in projects, big and small, in Afghanistan speaks for itself. The principal dimension of our cooperation has always been its people centric nature.

Our joint efforts:

- educate Afghanistan's young and nurture their skills;
- provide health care and improve agriculture;
- build infrastructure and institutions; and
- allow traders and small businesses in Afghanistan to connect with immense commercial and economic opportunities in India.

And, the reach and benefit of such efforts extends to all corners of Afghanistan. Herat's India-Afghanistan Friendship Dam, also called the Salma Dam, that was

launched a few months ago, will help revive economic activity for the people there.

The Parliament Building in Kabul represents our strong commitment to Afghanistan's democratic future. Zeranj-Deleram highway and India-Afghanistan-Iran cooperation on Chahbahar would enable Afghanistan to link its economy with centres of strong economic growth in South Asia and beyond.

We also plan to connect Afghanistan with India through an air transport corridor. President Ghani and I have discussed additional measures for deepening our bilateral cooperation. We are making progress in developing plans for utilization of the additional 1 billion US Dollar earmarked by India for capacity and capability building in Afghanistan.

It will extend to areas like water management, health, infrastructure, energy and skill development. As India implements its additional commitments, we are open to work with other like-minded partners for the development of Afghanistan.

We are also happy to note the international commitments at the Brussels Conference in October and NATO's Warsaw Summit in July this year. We will continue efforts to scale up our ambition and dedication to assist Afghanistan. In this, we draw upon lessons learned and best practices derived from our shared experience in working on projects.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

Let us remember that every passing day we help Afghanistan to achieve successful political, security and economic transitions, we are also helping ourselves create a more peaceful region and world.

I hope that your deliberations will produce constructive and forward looking pathways for action that:

- promote cooperation in place of conflict,
- development in place of need, and
- security in place of terrorism.

Let us re-dedicate ourselves to making Afghanistan a Geography of Peace. A place where reason and peace succeeds; progress and prosperity prevails and democracy and plurality wins.

**Thank you.**

**Thank you very much.**

**Statement by Finance Minister at the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the  
Heart of Asia Istanbul Process (December 04, 2016)**

December 04, 2016

**Distinguished Colleagues, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am happy to deliver India's country statement.

Earlier this morning, the Prime Minister of India shared India's vision and commitment to a united, stable, prosperous, peaceful and democratic Afghanistan. This Conference today is geared to international cooperation to see the emergence of such an Afghanistan.

India takes pride in being an active participant in the Heart of Asia Process. This unique platform brings together the countries and organisations of the region and beyond in their efforts to consolidate Afghanistan as a modern and growing democracy. It has been India's endeavor to promote political consultations and regional cooperation through this platform for a strong, independent and prosperous Afghanistan. Our co-hosting the Heart of Asia Process this year is a reflection of this commitment.

The theme for the Heart of Asia Process this year is 'Addressing Challenges, Achieving Prosperity.' As Afghanistan faces the challenges related to its multiple transitions, focused and sustained support will be required from all friends of Afghanistan in the international community for overcoming these challenges and achieving durable peace and prosperity.



A key focus during India's co-chairmanship of this Process has been to centre-stage the importance of connectivity for Afghanistan. Promoting it remains at the very core of India's cooperation with Afghanistan and also in the region.

Afghanistan has the potential to be the land bridge between various parts of the vast and dynamic Eurasian landmass. There are many promising projects like the TAPI gas pipeline, TAT railway line, CASA 1000. They will bring prosperity to Afghanistan and also bring the Central Asian and South Asian regions closer together.

### **Excellencies,**

For India, the issue of connectivity for Afghanistan is not a mere talking-point. We strongly believe that the lack of connectivity directly impacts the economic, security and political situation in Afghanistan. A well connected Afghanistan will be economically vibrant and prosperous and also politically stable. It will be able to engage the energies of its youth and attract its talents back from the foreign lands.

Earlier this year, we achieved a milestone by signing the trilateral transit and transport agreement among India, Iran and Afghanistan for provision of year-round and reliable connectivity to Afghanistan via Chahbahar in Iran. This endeavour will overcome the lack of direct overland access for Afghanistan through Indian markets. Afghanistan will further benefit from the zero duty available to Afghanistan's exports to India. Benefits to Afghanistan will accrue if Afghan trucks could carry Indian products to markets in Afghanistan, Central Asia and

beyond and indeed visa-versa. In this regard, India is willing to receive Afghan trucks on its territory, at Attari. We will be happy to create necessary facilities for Afghan products at Attari.

To fully achieve these benefits it is essential that trade and transit agreements that Afghanistan enters into need to be fully inclusive, comprehensive and are most importantly fully activated. Particular mention may be made of the International North South Corridor and the Ashgabat Agreement which can provide the catalyst for greater integration at the regional level.

India's engagement in the Trade, Commerce and Investment (TCI) CBM within the Heart of Asia process as the lead country complements our bilateral development cooperation with Afghanistan, including in the spheres of infrastructure, connectivity and capacity building.

In the run-up to this Ministerial Conference, the Ministry of External Affairs of India has also supported a number of events aimed at promoting the ideals and objectives of the Heart of Asia Process. Noteworthy among them are the international seminar organized by the Indian Council of World Affairs in Delhi on 10 to 11 November 2016, the international conference on "Addressing the challenges of international terrorism and radicalization" in Delhi on 23 November 2016 and the seminar that was held yesterday here in Amritsar by RIS & FICCI on Heart of Asia and Connectivity. We are very happy to note that all these events had enthusiastic participation from several Heart of Asia countries.

Excellencies,

Afghanistan has faced gruesome violence for decades. In the last few months, terrorism in Afghanistan has grown in both intensity and scope. Terrorist groups have made concerted efforts to capture and hold territory. Taliban have tried to expand its influence to territories in North and North East along with South West where they traditionally were not so strong. These developments only underline the fact that these groups have changed neither their ideology nor objectives. The evil of terrorism, which threatens not merely one or two countries but our entire region, has made the current year the worst in a very long time.

We salute the Afghan National Security Forces and the Afghan people for countering the forces of terrorism and extremism with courage and resilience. Their role was also critical in safeguarding the diplomatic community's presence in Afghanistan. India saw two of its Consulates in Mazar-e-Sharif and Jalalabad attacked in this year alone. It was only the courage and dedication of the Afghan security forces that ensured the safety of our personnel. Clearly, it is not merely in Afghanistan's interests if its unity and integrity are safeguarded.

For its part, India is happy to work with Afghanistan to strengthen its capabilities to fight terrorism and violence directed at it.

It is also our collective duty to ensure that resurgent forces of terrorism and extremism do not find sanctuaries and safe havens in any name, form or manifestation. Neighbours of Afghanistan have a particular responsibility in this regard. There is also a need to neither differentiate between good and bad terrorists, nor to play one group against the other. Taliban, Haqqani Network, Al-Qaeda, Daesh, Lashkar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, etc. are all terror organizations and should be treated as such.

End to terrorism and extremism, and adherence to internationally accepted redlines including renouncing of violence, severing ties with Al Qaeda and other terrorist outfits and commitment to democracy and human rights are essential for successful reconciliation and lasting peace in Afghanistan.

**I thank you, Excellencies, for this opportunity, and for your attention.**