

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE
BANQUET IN HONOUR OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE ISLAMIC
REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN, H.E. MR. HAMID KARZAI**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi : 12-11-2012

Your Excellency, President Hamid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to extend to Your Excellency and the distinguished members of your delegation, a warm welcome on your State Visit to India. I am particularly happy to have this opportunity to renew my personal association with you.

Excellency, India and Afghanistan are bound by age-old neighbourly ties of warmth and abiding people-to-people relations. These have been renewed in modern times by our shared experience of nation-building and development. Our common values and our search for peace have brought us together in a strategic partnership to face the common challenges. Our past, present and future bind us together. Our shared and overlapping heritage is our strength. A large number of Indians are familiar with Afghanistan through the tender story of the

'Kabuliwala', immortalised in the writing of Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. Earlier today, you delivered an inspiring speech on Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a towering nationalist leader of India, who is a source of inspiration for both our nations.

The oldest verses of the Rig Veda make references to rivers and towns in the region that is today Afghanistan. Kings, travellers, scholars, and traders in the course of our history have come to India through Afghanistan. Many of the Sufi traditions, which are so popular in India, originated from Afghanistan. The spiritual legacy of poet Jalaluddin Rumi who was born in Balkh, transcends national and ethnic borders. Gandhara sculptures are a part of our rich heritage. Some of the most popular personalities in our film and music world have ancestral linkages to your land.

Excellency, your great nation, which has long epitomised bravery and nobility, has been afflicted in recent decades, with threats to its security and by extremism and terrorism imposed from beyond its borders. Through those difficult years, the people of India have empathised with the pain of their Afghan brethren. We share your sense of grief when we hear of incidents like the suicide attacks against a mosque during the Eid festival recently or during the Ashura last

December in Kabul. We rejoice with you in the significant achievements that have been made under your leadership in the past ten years. We also recognise the challenges that remain, and hope that our shared conviction and faith in peace and progress would help us defeat terrorism and uncertainty. We both agree on the need for greater international cooperation against terrorism, especially cross border terrorism emanating from the terrorist sanctuaries.

Excellency, India firmly believes that sustainable peace can be achieved through sound economic development in an environment of stability. I recall my visit to Afghanistan in January 2009 to inaugurate, together with you, the highway between Zaranj and Delaram. India's other development initiatives in Afghanistan are aimed at assisting the Afghan Government in increasing the capacity of the Afghan government and people to stand on their own feet and to be the makers of their own destiny. We are committed to completing the new Parliament building in Kabul, the Salma Dam in Herat, the two additional sub-stations on the electricity transmission line to Kabul - to name just a few examples. We are pleased at the popularity of the educational scholarships extended to Afghan students. We will continue to partner Afghanistan in its reconstruction and development, based on the needs and requirements of your Government and your people, and, of course,

our own capacities. We are ready to join hands with other countries in making Afghanistan a focal point of cooperation in development.

We have recognized that an active development partnership between our governments is not enough and it needs to be supplemented by nation-building and stronger people-to-people links. In this context the Strategic Partnership Agreement, signed during your historic visit last year, lays stress on developing private trade and investment, regional cooperation, and encouraging linkages between our Parliamentarians, intellectuals, youth, cultural groups, civil-society organizations, and students. In particular, the closer economic integration of Afghanistan with the rest of the region can provide not only a vast and growing market for your goods and services, but can also be a source of capital, technology, best-practices and institutions that are appropriate for Afghan needs. Afghanistan can indeed emerge as a hub of regional cooperation binding us in common endeavors.

India stands beside the Afghan people to strengthen their hands in bringing peace and prosperity to their great country. India would always be there to assist the friendly people of Afghanistan and to further strengthen and deepen our strategic relationship.

With these words, Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen, May I request you to join me in raising a toast:

- to the good health and personal well-being of His Excellency President Hamid Karzai;
- to the progress and prosperity of Afghanistan and its friendly people; and
- to the abiding friendship and co-operation between India and Afghanistan.
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