Press Release: Kabul school team wins thrilling Cricket World Cup Celebration Tournament

Date: 4 March 2016

Six teams including the British and Australian Embassies and Afghan school teams competed in a Cricket World Cup celebration tournament on Friday 4 March.

The British Embassy organised the tournament in partnership with the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan and Afghan Connection.

The aim of the event was to celebrate both the successful completion of a British Embassy-funded School Cricket Development project and also Afghanistan's participation in the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup. Afghanistan will play Scotland in their first World Cup game on 8 March.

Two teams from Kabul's Ibrahim Khalilullah High School as well as teams representing the UK, Australia, Pakistan and an international team (including Afghan, Sri Lankan and West Indian cricketers) took part. In the true spirit of cricket, all the games were played with good sportsmanship and mutual respect.

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Kabul Ibrahim Khalilullah High School's "Team Ghorzang" were the Champions, beating the Pakistani team convincingly in the final without losing a wicket. Kabul Ibrahim Khalilullah High School "Team Shaheen" finished third. Inspired by their heroes including Mohammad Nabi and Ashgar Stanikzai, the teams from Ibrahim Khalilullah High School played some excellent cricket. This included a dramatic one run win by "Team Shaheen" against the British Embassy's team in the first round.

Speaking at the event, British Ambassador Dominic Jermey said:

"As Nelson Mandela once said, 'Sport can create hope where once there was only despair.' It also has the power to bring people and communities together. I'm delighted that through this project we and our partners have been able to bring joy to so many school children across Afghanistan and hopefully give them greater confidence in the future. This is just one aspect of our cooperation with Afghanistan. But it's a demonstration of our steadfast commitment to help build a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan. "

The Country Director for the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan Jorgen Holmstrom said:

"It is a joy to see the youth uniting in sports on a day like this. Sports in general, and cricket in particular, have time and again seen the Afghan nation join together, forgetting the conflict prevailing in Afghanistan. The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan is proud, through this British-Swedish cooperation, to ensure that more Afghan youth get the opportunity to practice and build their country through sport."

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The British Embassy-funded School Cricket Development project was jointly implemented by Afghan Connection and the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan. The project resulted in the building of cricket pitches in 20 schools across five provinces (Kabul, Kunduz, Laghman, Nangahar and Wardak). It also involved the donation of cricket equipment to the schools and the organisation of specialist coaching camps for teachers and children, run by the Afghan Youth Cricket Support Organisation.

Through the project the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan also upgraded the teaching facilities in 15 schools in Afghanistan's provinces, to create a better learning environment.

The project will provide a sustainable resource in the 20 participating schools which will benefit thousands of school students over the coming years.

Speaking about the project, the School Principal of Ibrahim Khalilullah High School Mr Mohammad Nabi Noorzai said:

"We are delighted to be here playing. The game of cricket has a spirit of fun and collaboration which we can learn from. We are thankful to Afghan Connection, the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan and the British Embassy in Kabul for building pitches in our school and making it possible for the students to play cricket."

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Dr Sarah Fane, CEO and Founder of Afghan Connection said:

"With support from the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, MCC, British Government and Afghan Youth Cricket Support Organisation, Afghan Connection has brought cricket projects to 22 provinces in Afghanistan since 2009. These have touched the lives of some 100,000 children, bringing skills, joy and hope in a country which has suffered from years of conflict. Some of those children will have the day of their lives today playing in the British Embassy's Tournament and can dream of one day playing on the International stage, like their national heroes. The Afghanistan national team's success on the field has gripped the nation. As the local slogan goes, it's time to 'put down your guns and pick up the bats'!

Sport has long been considered a valuable means to build bridges between communities in conflict areas, because it helps to promote peace, tolerance and understanding.

By learning cricket's values - self-discipline, respect for one's opponent, fair play, teamwork and adherence to mutually agreed upon rules - school children are hopefully better able to build the personal values and communication skills necessary to prevent and resolve conflict in their own lives.

Developing the game of cricket requires investment at both the grassroots' and national level to ensure there is a structured cricket pathway, which should begin with school cricket.

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Afghan Connection has been supporting cricket's development in Afghanistan since 2009. Working in partnership with the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan and the MCC, they have developed grassroots cricket in over 60 schools across 22 provinces.

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