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K-2 golden jubilee celebrations

Italy to back Pakistan in terror war

■ Italy will help Pakistan fight poverty: minister ■ Rais says delegation asked to start flights between Rome and Islamabad

Staff Report

ISLAMABAD: Giovanni Alemanno, Italian minister for agriculture and forestry, has expressed solidarity with the government of Pakistan in the fight against terrorism.

Mr Alemanno was addressing a press conference along with Federal Tourism Minister Rais Munir Ahmed on Wednesday after his tour to the Northern Areas (NAs) of Pakistan. Mr Alemanno also met President Pervez Musharraf.

The Italian minister was in Pakistan for the golden jubilee celebrations of the first ascent of K-2 and the 51st anniversary of the Nanga Parbat ascent.

"Italy and Pakistan are already in the alliance against terrorism and now we want to be allies in the fight against poverty. It is my government's policy to help South Asian countries reduce poverty by contributing in the social sector," said Mr Alemanno.

Mr Alemanno said that he along with Mr Arnoldi, another member of the Italian parliament, had met President Musharraf and officials of the agriculture, sports, culture and environment ministries and identified different areas of cooperation between the two countries.

He said that the ministries of both countries were working out details through their foreign offices and

agreements would be signed during President Musharraf's visit to Italy. "We (officials from both sides) also underlined enhanced cooperation in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) regime besides potential areas of cooperation in agriculture with special focus on dairy, poultry and oil produces," said Mr Alemanno.

Mr Alemanno said that he had proposed development projects, including the K-2 Museum, the National Karakoram Park and establishment of different monuments in the NAs during his meeting with President Musharraf.

Mr Arnoldi said that he had worked on these projects and the Italian government was in process of approving these projects which would be carried out by two non-government organisations — one each from Italy and Pakistan — with special focus on tourism development in the NAs.

"We want to be partners with the government of Pakistan for the development of the NAs with the consultation of international tourist agencies," he said.

He said that he had urged President Musharraf for the early solution of the Ghazi Barotha issue because it could hinder other projects. He thanked the government of Pakistan and the Italy embassy for organising the golden jubilee celebrations and issuing a commemorative

postal stamp with the image of Lacidille, the first man to ascent K-2 on July 31, 1954.

Earlier, Tourism Minister Rais Munir Ahmed said the Tourism Ministry earned \$425,000 as royalty fee. He said the royalty had been reduced to 50 percent for the golden jubilee celebrations. "We plan to spend this money for the development of the NAs," he added.

Mr Ahmed said his ministry had also requested the Italian delegation to start flights between Rome and Islamabad to attract and facilitate tourists.

He said the Interior Ministry was taking steps to control terrorism. "I have asked all hotels and motel owners in the NAs to take steps to ensure security. The police department has also been directed to depute guards at the hotels hosting foreigners," said Mr Ahmed. He said this while referring to a shooting incident on a tourist bus in the NAs.

Mr Ahmed said the government was considering discounts at hotel and on air tickets for mountaineers and trekkers, building more hotels in the NAs and pursuing European airlines to start operations in Pakistan for promoting tourism. "British Airline has already started its operations in Pakistan," he said.

He said the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC)



was targeting Central Asia, Far East Asia and Europe as its tourism market.

He added that the celebration were organised on the directives of President Musharraf to promote Pakistan's image. Mr Ahmed thanked the Italian government,

mountaineers and trekkers who came to Pakistan to honour the first conqueror of K-2.

He also thanked the Italian government for initiating some development projects in NAs and enhancing cooperation with Pakistan in different fields.