

Afghan team participates in South Asia CEO Roundtable



Afghan Delegation attending the South Asia CEO Roundtable (from left to right): Haifizi, Chairman, AICC; Dr. Farooqi, CEO, AICC; Ms. Kamela Sediqi, CEO, KBDS; Subodh Bhargava, Chairman of South Asia CEO Roundtable; Mahmood Kazrai, CEO, AIC and Sumeer Bhasin, Advisor, AISA.

The conference is first of its kind in some respects. It is the first time a roundtable of CEOs of South Asian region was held, bringing top business leaders of South Asia together.

It is first time a delegation of CEOs and business honchos from Afghanistan participated in such a conference.

The conference is regarded as a prequel to the historic 14th SAARC Summit, which witnessed Afghanistan formally joining SAARC as its 8th member.

The Roundtable of CEOs of South Asia, organised by Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), New Delhi, on April 2, was a new experience to the Afghan business leaders.

A five member delegation comprising Hamidullah Farooqi, CEO, Afghanistan International Chamber of Commerce (AICC), Azarakhsh Hafizi, Chairman AICC, Mahmood Karzai, CEO, Afghanistan Investment Company (AIC), Sumeer Bhasin,

Advisor, Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA) and Ms Kamela Sediqi, CEO, Kawayan Development Service (KBDS) attended the one-day conference, rubbing their shoulders with business leaders of the other SAARC member countries.

CII organised this South Asia CEO's Roundtable to discuss the prospects and impediments in taking forward the process of South Asian co-operation and integration among the member countries.

The business leaders took up a host of issues ranging from trade, infrastructure, services, investment, tourism, agriculture, energy, education, healthcare and development of small and medium industries (SMEs) with a view to increase the employment generation opportunities.

Participating enthusiastically in the proceedings, the delegates from Afghanistan raised issues such as importance of economic development for the region, zero tariff access for Afghanistan by SAARC countries

similar to that given by E.U. and U.S., lack of access for Afghanistan including land transit from India as well as problems being faced by Afghanistan at sea ports and evinced keen interest in obtaining help and co-operation amongst the SAARC countries for capacity building.

In rounding up their discussions, the South Asia CEOs' Business Forum made 14 specific recommendations for consideration to SAARC summit on themes ranging from enhancement of intra regional trade to investment and co-operation in agriculture.

The roundtable also supported establishment of a South Asia Development Fund (SDF), issue of a single visa for region patterned on the model of Schengen visa in Europe, setting up SAARC hospitals in each country and establishment of South Asia Hospital Society and South Asia Institute for Skills Development and Technical Manpower.

The conference also came up with the idea of setting up a South Asia Alliance for Responsible Business (SARB). The SARB will have a mandate and mission to promote corporate social responsibility (CSR) and explore mechanisms to further a regional approach towards promotion of CSR.

The Afghan delegation found the roundtable to be an enriching experience and also helpful in establishing the peer network with the counterparts of other SAARC Countries.

CEO of AICC Farooqi felt that participation in such conferences, with ample scope to interact with top rung of business executives from other countries of the region, offered a great learning experience and networking opportunity both on one to one basis and at the institutional level.

Reflecting on her experience in this conference, Ms. Sediqi, a delegate from Afghanistan, said, "The roundtable is extremely useful, as it provided exposure to us within the region and an opportunity to trade ideas and establish contacts in the business world of South Asia".

Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board meet

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The main focus needed to be maintained on building trust and confidence amongst all regional partners through practical cooperation directed at specific projects that could yield positive gains so that all members felt encouraged to take part in

Afghanistan's reconstruction from a win-win perspective. India was willing to take on any appropriate supportive role in the regional integration process in the context of Afghanistan's reconstruction.

Ultimately, it was India's belief that all the different political and developmental

processes in place in Afghanistan would have to be Afghanised, with Afghan-led identification of projects, implementation, ownership and management. On its part, India remained fully committed to help Afghanistan realise this, through the very valuable JCMB platform.