

Afghan delegation takes part in IITF 2007



The Ambassador of Afghanistan to India, Dr. Makdoom Raheen, with the Afghan business delegation at the Afghan Pavilion at IITF 2007.

Pragati Maidan in New Delhi is a familiar landmark, particularly for those interested in trade fairs and exhibitions. Come November, India Trade Promotion Organisation's (ITPO) flagship event, formally known as 'India International Trade Fair' (IITF) attracts thousands of visitors to Pragati Maidan. For a second successive year, the Afghan business delegation at IITF became the cynosure for many.

The 27th edition of IITF, held from November 14-27, saw more than 40 Afghan businesspersons, representing different sectors of Afghan industry. The Afghan pavilion, built artfully and adorned with a variety of goods ranging from carpets, dry and fresh fruits, traditional handicraft items, herbal medicines to precious stones, turned out to be a "grand success" at IITF.

Formally inaugurated jointly by the Afghan Ambassador to India, Dr. Makdoom Raheen, and the president and CEO of Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA), Dr. Omar Zakilwal, the Afghan stalls proved to be a major draw at IITF.

For the Afghan participants, IITF 2007

became a valuable experience and source of inspiration.

Bibi Fawzia, director of the Community of Afghan Women Handicrafts (CAWH) and one of the exhibitors herself at the Afghan pavilion, said: "This is a great experience that we can use for our participation in future exhibitions. I may have a contract in the near future with an Indian trade organisation as they chose one of our samples at the stall."

Dr. Zakhilwal said, "Our exports to India have declined since over a decade, due to the disturbed situation in our country. From the existing level of \$30 to \$40 million per year, we want to increase our exports to India. Participation in such trade events would be very important for us."

Mohammad Hadi Farzam, director of Farzam Carpet Manufacturing Company, added, "Exhibition of Afghan products at such fairs is the first step in raising our profile and visibility." AISA's Investment Promotion Department director, Walid Tamim, agrees: "To see so many people standing in queue to buy Afghan dry and fresh fruits explains that Afghan agro prod-

ucts have a very significant place in the Indian market."

With ITPO declaring 'Agro Industries and Processed Food' as this year's special theme at IITF, the Afghan businesspersons felt a special affinity with the theme, as Afghanistan is traditionally known for varieties of dry fruits like almond, fig, raisins, apricot, pistachio, and fresh fruits like grapes, pomegranates, melons, apples, and medicinal herbs.

The Afghan delegation also participated in a discussion titled "Doing Business with Afghanistan", hosted by Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industries. Delivering the key note address, India's Minister of State for Commerce Jairam Ramesh said that India would offer zero import duty on 4,536 tariff lines to Afghanistan, as a new member of South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) with effect from February 2008.

Tamim, reflecting the spirit of the Afghan delegation, said, "We are already looking forward eagerly for next year's IITF, may be in larger numbers." ■