

Afghan team's journey to 'Incredible India'



The Afghanistan delegation at the time of their departure to India. From left: Ahmad Ashgari, Fariba Moradi, Maniza Bakhtary, Ahmad Farhad and Muqim Jamshady.

Ashgari, Farhad, Jamshady, Bakhtary and Moradi are very different people, with very different jobs. Ahmad Ashgari is the Manager (Public Relations) at the Afghan Tourist Organisation; Ahmad Farhad is the Sales Officer at the Royal Limited Travel & Tours; Muqim Jamshady is the CEO of the Afghan Logistics & Tours; Maniza Bakhtary is a teacher in the Journalism Faculty of Kabul University; and Fariba Moradi is a news reporter at the

National Radio TV. However, they all share a common thread. They have just returned from a familiarisation trip to India from November 13 to 23, 2006, sponsored by the Indian Ministry of Tourism. This was as part of the implementation of one of the provisions of the bilateral Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the field of tourism signed in December 2005 between India and Afghanistan during the visit of the India's then Minister of Tourism Renuka

Chowdhury to Kabul. The tour comprised visits to the Golden Triangle of New Delhi, Jaipur and Agra, as well as the hi-tech cities of Hyderabad and Bangalore. In all these places, sight-seeing tours as well as interactions with the tourism officials were organised. Briefings were also given on the polity, economy, social and cultural aspects of India.

The visit had a profound impact on the lives of the young tour operators and journalists. It broadened their horizons and exposed them to new learning and experiences. Moreover, it gave them a new understanding of India, in all its diverse forms. As Jamshady mused in the de-briefing session at the Indian Embassy after the visit, he had heard of the 'Incredible India' campaign and even seen the advertisements on TV, but the visit itself made him comprehend why India was truly incredible.

Farhad gushed that the trip gave him valuable lessons in marketing and sales techniques for tourism promotion. Ashgari maintained that he would now be in a better position to restructure tourism policies at the Afghan Tourist Organisation. Bakhtary and Moradi plan on doing news and feature stories on their experiences in India.

Enthused by the success of the trip, the Indian Embassy is already planning another such trip to India for a second batch of tour operators and journalists some time soon. ■

Gift of 1,500 picture books for school children

Manorama Jafa, founder of the India-based Khaas Kitab Foundation, presented 1,500 picture books in Dari language for primary school children to the Minister of Education, Mohammed Haneef Atmar, on November 29, 2006.

The illustrated books comprise three sets of stories — 'Madam Billo', 'Chinu, Minu & Gogo' and 'The Talking Tortoise' — representing traditional folktales.

Minister Atmar expressed great appreciation for the gift of school books, which, he said, were very useful teaching aids, and had the potential of contributing significantly to moulding the character of young children. The Ministry of Education was looking at ways to document the rich folk lore of Afghanistan which risked being lost,



Manorama Jafa, founder of the Khaas Kitab Foundation, handing over the picture books to Minister of Education Mohammed Haneef Atmar, left, in the presence of Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood, centre, and Minister, Indian Embassy, Sandeep Kumar.

as they had never been penned down, but were passed on orally.

Minister Atmar invited Jafa to assist the Ministry of Education in the compilation of Afghan folk tales and traditional stories,

which would also contribute to the building of a national identity as well as nurturing the principles of peace, tolerance and integration. Given Jafa's experience in training of writers, Atmar also proposed that she conduct a training workshop in Kabul for artists and writers for children.

India has been working towards the reconstruction of the education sector in Afghanistan through various projects under its vast assistance programme. One of the major projects has been the rehabilitation of the Habibia High School, which currently has around 18,000 students.

Supply of desk-cum-benches to schools in outlying provinces has been another initiative. There are also plans to build schools in the border provinces. ■