

President invites information technology firms to Afghanistan

Afghan President Hamid Karzai on April 11 invited Indian information technology (IT) companies to invest in his country, saying they would be offered all necessary facilities in a mutually beneficial environment.

"We welcome Indian companies to come there, work there and sell there. We will give them land and all other necessary facilities," Karzai told reporters after visiting Hitec City, a hub of IT organisations in Hyderabad.

The visiting Afghan president, who reached the Andhra Pradesh capital on April 11 for a two-day visit, said Afghanistan's economic environment was already attractive and the country was offering very good opportunities.

"I hope that you will come to Afghanistan to help us and we will share with you what we have. I hope we will have joint ventures which will benefit both our countries," he said.

Hailing India for its strong position in higher education, Karzai said it was high quality education that had provided the foundation for the country's fast-paced development.

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Karzai spent nearly an hour at the Cyber



Afghan President Hamid Karzai with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Rajashekar Reddy, right, and Governor Rameshwar Thakur, left, in Hyderabad on April 11.

Tower at the IT hub and showed keen interest in a presentation made by R. Sreedharan, chief operating officer of Hitec City, a subsidiary of

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Larsen and Toubro. Karzai punctuated the presentation with questions and also translated the proceedings into Pushto for his delegation. At one juncture, he wanted to know the number of people holding doctorates in India, especially in IT and engineering.

Talking about the purpose of his visit, he said: "We wanted to learn what you have achieved and how we can benefit from these achievements."

Karzai said he and his delegation were very impressed by Hitec City and hoped that such institutions would welcome young Afghans, enabling them to increase their knowledge especially in IT and engineering.

He also visited the Tata Consultancy campus and the National Remote Sensing Agency and interacted with invitees at the Andhra Pradesh Governor's official residence. ■

Karzai keen on India's rural development initiatives

After IT, it was, on April 12, the turn of rural technology and development to catch the attention of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who is keen on adopting similar development initiatives in his country.

Winding up his visit in Hyderabad, Karzai appealed for help to his country in the area of rural development by providing training and know how and sharing its rich experience with Afghanistan. Karzai visited the sprawling National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) at Rajendernagar, on the outskirts of the city, and discussed issues of rural development and *Panchayati Raj* (village self-governance) institutions with the faculty and officials. The President showed keen interest in various models of rural technology, including cheap housing and solar energy at the Rural Technology Park on the NIRD campus.

"We request India to help us in getting acquainted in the way you work with your rural areas so that we can copy the same," Karzai told the media after his visit. He requested assistance in setting up an institute like NIRD in Kabul to help speed up the development process. Responding to Karzai's request, NIRD Director General V.S. Sampath said his institution was ready to help Afghanistan in every manner. "We are all with you," he told Karzai.

"The experience this morning is of immense importance to Afghanistan where too we have a lot of need for rural development and for the empowerment of rural people, empowerment of women," said Karzai.

On April 12 evening, Karzai visited the National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA) and interacted with the scientists involved with the



President of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai at the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) campus in Hyderabad on April 12.

processing and application of data collected through satellites.

K. Radhakrishnan, NRSA director, briefed the Afghan President about the capabilities and functions of the nine Indian satellites and 175 transponders aboard them. Pointing out that children in Afghanistan were suffering acutely because of the lack of health care and education facilities, he said he was deeply interested in how Indian satellites could help Afghanistan in the areas of tele-medicine, tele-education and agriculture. ■