

Afghan Band rocks Delhi at SAARC Band Festival



Aryan Band performs at the SAARC Band Festival in New Delhi on December 2.

Fantastic"! In unison the ten members of the Aryan Band respond, when asked about their experience at the SAARC Band Festival, in New Delhi, on December 2.

The SAARC Band Festival, part of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) cultural festival, organised by the Government of India, was held from November 30 to December 2. It attracted 14 music bands from SAARC countries. Afghanistan, the newest SAARC entrant, was represented by Aryan Band at this maiden regional music festival.

When the Aryan Band started out in 2003, the ten members just wanted to share their passion for music and at best thought of performing in front of a responsive audience. What they experienced on December 2, in front of an enthusiastic and young audience was beyond their expectations. The perform-

ance of the band mesmerised Delhiites and evoked memories of the rich diversity and tradition of music in Afghanistan, the land of rubabs and Zerbaghalis.

During the Taliban regime, music was anathema to the ruling elite and pop music a taboo. In the post-Taliban period, forming music bands was an equally uphill task. Defying all odds, these ten youngsters got together to form Aryan Band. "Though the idea of a concert is new in Afghanistan, we are not scared of enjoying music anymore," said Abdul Ghafar Mehdyar, one of the performers. Forming a band has not been an easy task, however. While there are a few solo artistes, only two or three bands have been able to gain recognition. Most of the groups are reduced to performing at weddings, says Mehdyar. However, the four-year-old band faces severe constraints — lack of funds, a

place to practise, and time for rehearsals.

Drawing inspiration from Sufi singers and their country's folklore, the group specialises in Persian and Pashto numbers. Experimenting with foreign tunes, the group composed 'Murg-e Ishq' (Bird of Love). The song, influenced by Latino music, caught the attention of music lovers in Afghanistan.

Familiar with Hindi films and Bollywood music, the band picked the latest hit songs for their SAARC performance. "Our trip to India is very important. It is an experience and a turning point in our professional career. The SAARC event has given us the exposure and opportunity to share our music with the rest of the region," says Siddique, the Aryan spokesman.

Music has no boundaries. The Aryan Band proved it, when their performance ended with thumping claps and shouts of "encore". ■