



## **Ariana Chief Hopes To Regain Lost Altitude**

Christophe Vogt, Agence France-Presse

**April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006** - KABUL – Flying on Afghanistan’s Ariana Airlines can be a unique experience, with passengers standing in the aisles at takeoff and greasy mutton served for the in-flight breakfast.

But its president promises that the national carrier will, in a few years, live up to its slogan, ‘The best of Afghan traditional hospitality’. The reality is a long way off. Dr. Mohammad Nadir Atash, 59, president of the company for less than a year, nonetheless has a vision fed by more than 20 years’ experience in business in the United States. “The task of reconstructing Ariana to its standards, to what it was 30 years ago or so, is a huge task,’ he admitted in an interview with AFP.

Ariana flourished in the 1970s, when Kabul was a fashionable destination, but since then it has suffered. It has seen 25 years of war, five crashes, a hijacking, a UN Security Council embargo. The airline’s reputation is so poor that UN employees are officially banned from boarding flights.

Ariana’s recent inclusion on a European Union blacklist for not meeting safety standards has forced the company to subcontract its flights to Frankfurt, its only destination in Europe, to French group Eagle Aviation. And then there is corruption, the main problem, which Atash concedes is ‘an obstacle to reconstruction’. It extends from bribes and theft to nepotism and ‘political’ appointments.

Atash does not have any illusions about his chances of success in the fight against graft. But, ‘The war has started and let’s see where it takes us,’ he says.