

Afghanistan ready to cash in on its sparkling assets

Robin Pagnamenta Jaipur

A new “made in Afghanistan” jewellery brand backed by New York and London fashion designers is set to be launched next month.

Dozens of Afghan jewellers have travelled to Jaipur, the gem-making city in northern India, to study design and manufacturing techniques for six months under the guidance of top international designers.

Sophia Swire, a former City banker behind the initiative, said that the Aayenda brand — the word means “future” in Dari — would use only 100 per cent Afghan gemstones, gold, silver and materials including lapis lazuli, which have been mined in Afghanistan for 6,000 years. Afghan lapis was used in Tutankhamun’s death mask.

The brand will be launched at NY Now, a fashion expo in New York, in August, and at London Fashion Week in September.

“It’s been set up in a resilient way, so that it could withstand a shift towards radicalisation or a return of the Taleban,” Ms Swire, who has been working on the project since 2008,

said. Aayenda will be run as a co-operative controlled by artisanal Afghan jewellers, with help from designers including the New York-based Annie Fensterstock, Anna Ruth Henriques and London’s Paul Spurgeon, who will also tap into their own distribution networks to market the brand.

Despite the high quality of Afghan emeralds and rubies, the country has enjoyed little benefit from the trade.



Afghan jewellers have learnt new skills