

CANADA'S 'MR INDIA'

Hemant Shah, the first Asian director in the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, has been doing more than his bit to promote Indo-Canadian business ventures

By A Staff Reporter

FROM the sweltering 30 degrees plus heat to the freezing 30 degrees minus cold is how businessman Hemant Shah describes his migration from Mumbai to Winnipeg in Canada's Manitoba province.

But for Shah, the first Asian Director in the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, the warmth of Winnipeg's multi-cultural people offers comfort in Winnipeg's severe winters.

Passing through

After all, Manitoba has to live up to its reputation - its state slogan is 'Friendly Manitoba'. Scion of an old Gujarati trading firm, Shah migrated to Canada in 1978 to join his brothers who were already there.

But like all good Gujarati businessmen, he wanted to strike out on his own.

A meeting with an old business contact of his father in Canada set him on course and he was soon exporting mining equipment to India.

He went on to start an Indo-Canadian joint venture in Hyderabad to manufacture underground and surface mining machines.

A prototype of the machine is

ready. "It is not a very large investment," Shah says about the joint venture, which has brought him to India this time. "But if it succeeds, the project will bring in other investors," he adds. He is also into aeronautics and in India, he represents Standard Aero, a company that provides aircraft maintenance support.

"I have exported equipment to Canada. And I thought it would be nice if I could give something back to my country," says Shah. Shah's endeavour in promoting

Indo-Canadian trade soon earned him the nickname 'Mr India'.

He recently won the 'Hind Ratan' award instituted by the Non-Resident Indian Welfare Society.

Many companies in Manitoba have been seeking Shah's help to explore the Indian market.

When these companies approach Shah, the first thing they get from him is a run down on the Indian market.

"It is not easy to work here. Small things that one is used to in Canada, like getting a quick phone connection, could make life miserable in India. They should be prepared," says Shah.

The small miseries apart, Shah



PROMOTING INDIA: Hemant Shah

thinks India is a market that cannot be ignored.

"India has its negative side with the scandals and chaos. But the world does not have a choice but to come here. Our educational institutions and our skilled, cheap labour holds the key to our future. By 2020, India will be the Asian tiger," Shah predicts.

Shah lives in suburban St Norbert with his wife - a nurse at a Senior Home Care centre and two sons. He dreams of setting up similar homes in India where the rapidly ageing Indian population can enjoy world class medical care.

And for most Indians for whom Canada meant either Toronto or Vancouver, the two largest English speaking cities in Canada, Shah has news.

"Winnipeg has 22,000 Indians. There are seven gurudwaras, several mosques and a temple in the city. Two of the more popular restaurants in the city are Indian," says Shah.

Like many Canadians now, Shah straddles two cultural worlds.

"I may be part of the Canadian mainstream. But I am also part of the Indian community. You have to be multicultural if you have to survive," he says. And how does he survive the long, cold Canadian winters? "I play ice hockey with my sons," he says.