



December 2010



Afghan News

Latest News

H.E. Dr. Sayed M. Amin Fatimie appointed as Ambassador to Japan



(Picture: H.E. Ambassador Dr. Sayed M. Amin Fatimie is escorted by carriage to his official appointment with H.E. the Emperor of Japan at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo.)

H.E. Dr. Sayed M. Amin Fatimie arrived in Tokyo on December 8th in order to serve as the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's Ambassador to Japan. On December 27th, H.E. met with H.M. the Emperor of Japan to present his credentials.

H.E. Ambassador Dr. Fatimie has had a very distinguished career, holding several key positions in government, including the position of Minister of Public Health. His appointment as Ambassador to this nation, therefore, stresses that the highest level of importance is placed by Afghanistan on bilateral relations with Japan.

High Peace Council holds first meeting



The High Peace Council, formed through June's National Consultative Peace Jirga and its unanimously-endorsed peace, reconciliation, and reintegration plan, held its first public conference in Kandahar.

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Select investment facts

- Since 2003, US\$5.6 billion has been invested in Afghanistan's private sector
- 2010 has seen a 6% increase in private sector investment over 2009.
- 4976 companies with an initial capital investment of \$ 1.2 billion have been registered with the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA).

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The two-day conference was attended by Chairman Burhanuddin Rabbani, head of the Secretariat for the High Peace Council; presidential advisor Massom Stanakzai; tribal elders; ulle-mas; and the governors of Zabul, Nimroz, Uruzgan, Kandahar, and Helmand provinces; along with members of civil society and United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) representatives.

Topics of focus were criteria, strategy, and various aspects of the process.

Chairman Rabbani declared that he would like to use the conference as a forum to invite those brothers currently not part of the peace process to give up violence and join the process.

Investment conference attracts potential investors



The Afghanistan International Investment Conference (AIIC), an international conference on investment in Afghanistan, was held in Dubai on November 30th. 500 participants, including investors and ministers from a number of nations, took part. Prospects for development were discussed for key growth sectors: infrastructure, construction and construction materials, agrobusiness and agro-processing, energy and mining, transport and logistics, and IT and telecommunication.

Through the conference, an ad hoc body called the Afghan International Investment Friends was created to act as an informal mechanism to maintain momentum on specific proposals at the conference, with the potential to grow into a more formal body later.

Noorullah Delawari, Advisor to H.E. President Hamid Karzai and CEO of Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA) expects that Afghanistan will attract around \$10 billion in

investment in the next three to four years.

Since 2003, a total of \$5.6 billion has been invested by the private sector in Afghanistan. Through 2009 to October of this year, a total of 4,976 companies with an initial capital investment of US \$1.2 billion have registered with AISA. The total investment in 2010 is a 6% increase over the 2009 period.

Afghanistan is rich in mineral resources with more than 1,400 identified mineral deposits, including energy minerals such as oil, gas, and coal as well as high-quality iron and copper deposits. Great opportunities for investment exist within the hydrocarbons industry and in exploring precious and semi-precious stones.

The Afghan economy has been growing in double digits in real terms for the last eight years, peaking at 22% last year

At the conference, H.E. Foreign Minister Zalmi Rassoul, in his key note speech focused on the link between security and development. Stating firstly that worries about security are not necessary as challenges are regional and not nationwide, H.E. also noted that, Afghanistan's growing security forces, "are fully capable of providing security across Afghanistan for private and public investments, projects and establishments," adding that the transferring of more, and eventually all, security responsibilities from international forces to the Afghan national security is solid proof of the success of domestic security forces. H.E. Dr. Rassoul pointed to the impact that wealth creation and prosperity has on improving security: "Investors who chose to invest in Afghanistan will not only be rewarded with significant returns on their investments, but they will also play a vital role in the restoration of peace and security within the region."

For information on investing in Afghanistan, see the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency's Web site: www.aisa.org.af

Health service access to increase to 95%

The amount of people with access to

basic medical services is set to increase to 95% in five years (in 2003, there was only access available to 9% of the population). This will be made possible through the construction of 400 health centers nationwide through the Ministry of Public Health.

The construction of these health facilities is expected to also have the added effect of helping to decrease the mortality rate of mothers and children by up to 50%.

Japan to build new hospital in Kabul

The Japanese government has pledged to help build a new 80-bed, hospital building in the Darul-Aman neighborhood of Kabul. The hospital will provide treatment for patients of TB, HIV and malaria.

Second mother and child survival committee meeting convened

The second mother and child survival committee meeting was held at the Serena Hotel in Kabul on November 21st, with government officials being joined by delegations from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The twenty committee members, composed of representatives from the WHO, UNICEF, government officials, and NGO representatives, shared their views on how to improve mother and child health and also expressed their preparedness to cooperate.

Acting Minister of Public Health Dr. Suraya Dalil presented the Ministry of Public Health's six strategies: the delivery of quality healthcare to pregnant women, obstetric services, health services to infants, protection and treatment of children against fatal diseases, and improving nutrition and child-spacing.

The committee meets twice yearly and cooperates with the government and development partners to adopt measures towards reduction of mother, children, and infant mortality as part of the

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Ministry of Public Health's (MoPH's) strategy to improve mother and child health. Its first meeting was held earlier this year, with a number of tasks carried out involving design and finalization of an operational plan for children and adolescent health, identification of key indicators for measuring progress towards the implementation of related strategies, and the formulation of terms of reference for provincial based committees, among other tasks.

First national heart clinic opened

The first national heart clinic has opened near Kabul University's medical faculty and sees between 30 and 40 patients a day.

Six doctors (male and female), three surgeons, and four nurses staff the facility, working with state-of-the-art stress machines and echocardiograms, the acquisition of which was supported by hospitals in Toronto, Windsor, and Winnipeg, Canada. The clinic also has also a rehabilitation room with stationary bikes, treadmills and yoga classes.

The clinic looks to start angioplasty within four or five years and hopes to be able to do heart transplants within 10 years.

Japanese supported project to construct 1000 new classrooms in Kabul; inaugurates latest school

On December 11th, in a rural area of Kabul, Minister of Education, Farooq Wardak and Japanese Ambassador Shigeyuki Hiroki inaugurated the newly-constructed Mohamed Mussa Shafiq high school.

The construction of the school, which has 30 classrooms and will accommodate a total of 2,400 students, was sponsored by the Government of Japan and constructed by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with UNICEF.

The school is part of a major project called the 'One Thousand Classrooms Project' under which, with support from Japan and UNICEF, 1000 new classrooms will be built in 58 schools in the Kabul area; in the process, over 3,000 teachers will have been trained in child-

centered, participatory teaching techniques.

Budget transparency tripled

Integrity Watch Afghanistan, an anti-corruption watchdog, has launched the Open Budget Index for Afghanistan in which the national score increased from 8 to 21 points. Great efforts have been made to increase budget transparency to provide citizens the opportunity to hold the government accountable for its management of public funds. Afghanistan leads other nations in the same category by at least 15 points.

TAPI Gas Pipeline contract signed



H.E. President Hamid Karzai, H.E. President Qurban Quli Mohammadov of Turkmenistan, H.E. President Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan, and H.E. Minister Murli Dayra, the Indian Oil and Gas Minister, signed the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) gas pipeline contract into effect in Turkmenistan on December 11th.

Through the TAPI gas pipeline project, 33 billion cubic meters of gas will annually flow through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India.

Once started, Afghanistan will earn up to US \$400 million dollars through transit, as well as 1.8 million cubic meters of gas for a two-year period, before increasing to 5.1 billion cubic meters afterwards. Hundreds of families residing near the pipeline will benefit from the project. The gas provided holds the potential to allow Afghanistan to fulfill its gas needs.

Local agriculture gaining more international attention

As Afghan agriculture continues to expand in demand worldwide, from December 3rd to December 6th, a delegation of Afghan farmers took part in Agro Tech 2010 in India. The event was organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

India has been a large purchaser of Afghan agricultural products. Hedayatullah Omerkhail, the president of Afghanistan-based Abdul Wakil Omerkhail Farmer's Association, said, "Currently, we are exporting walnuts, raisins, apricot, cherries and fruits to many Asian countries."

Kabul will host 'International Agfair 2011' next year, which will attract interested parties from around the world, ready to purchase low-cost produce that is found only in Afghanistan, including seedless Pomegranates.

For information on the availability of Afghan pomegranates in Japan, go to the Friends of Afghanistan page: www.afghanblogjapan.blogspot.com/2010/12/afghan-pomegranates-in-japan.html www.ameblo.jp/entry-10744199178.html

Third international airport to be completed in January 2012



The third of a planned five international airports, Mazar-e Sharif International Airport, is scheduled to be completed in January 2012, expecting to serve more than 400,000 people a year. The new airport will work in conjunction with a new rail system located nearby to enhance trade and transportation capabilities.

The airport project provides hundreds of jobs in such roles as laying founda-

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tion, constructing the more-than-five buildings, and maintaining those structures already serving the existing domestic terminal.

Already the growth in transport capabilities is enticing growth in the area with trade centers being built up around the airport.

Currently Kabul and Kandahar already host international airports. There are also a number of domestic airports around the country.

New school buildings opening nationwide

A number of new school buildings opened this month across the nation. These schools include a 4-classroom building for Tajekhaa Primary School in the Muqur district of Badghis province, with the assistance of the Spanish government; a 10-classroom building equipped with basketball and volleyball courts for Bandabad Middle School in the Pashtun Zarghun district of Herat province, with the support of the Italian government; a 5-classroom building for Rasalat Shahedan Girl's Middle School in Bamyan province, supported by the Arghosha Association; and an 8-classroom building equipped with a football field, and a volleyball court for Shaharak Mahajareen Primary School in Ghazni, with support from the Polish government. All schools are equipped with administrative facilities and furnishings as well.

In Takhar province, an agreement has been signed to construct a new 8-classroom building for Bibi Hajira Girl's High School, with the support of Germany's GTZ organization.

Projects such as these continue to increase the amount of children receiving education (approaching 8 million) as well as the ratio of girls in those classes (around 40%).

Education excellence graduates honored

Paktika provincial government leaders honored 15 graduates of the Sharana Center for Education Excellence in Paktika province this month.

The Sharana center provides workshops for such skills as carpentry, masonry, and plumbing.

This was the fourth education excellence graduation in Paktika this year.

Each student received a graduation certificate, with the provincial government pledging to support them in finding jobs if necessary.

Faryab benefits from 148 development projects

A number of projects have been completed by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and handed over to local administrations in Faryab Province. Included in these projects are the construction of 52 kilometers of road, 111 culverts, 123 wells, 19 water reservoirs, 3,680 meters of retaining walls, 13 community centers, 3 hydropower mills and 6 microhydro power plants, four eight-classroom school buildings, the cleaning of 27,688 meters of fountain network, the extension of 25,145 meters of urban electricity, the digging of 572 meters of irrigation canals, instillation of 25 solar panels, and the establishment of tailoring, literacy, embroidery, and carpet weaving courses for women, along with various other projects.

The implementation of these projects benefits 28,377 rural families in the villages of Qaisar, Pashtonkot, Khwaja Sabz Posh, Sherin Tagab, Balcharagh, Garziwan, Khan Chahar Bagh and Qaramqol districts.

Cricket team wins first I Cup title



The national cricket team earlier this month beat Scotland by seven wickets to win its first ICC Intercontinental Cup

Afghanistan fast bowler Hamid Hassan, who ended as the top wicket-taker of the tournament with 43 scalps from six games at an average of 19.8, was named the Man of the Match for his match haul of 8-84.

Mohammad Shahzad, the highest run-getter of the ICC Intercontinental Cup, scored an unbeaten 56 off 62 balls with seven boundaries. Shahzad ended with 802 runs from seven games.

In other cricket news:

The Afghanistan Cricket Board also has plans to send a national women's team to the Asian Elite Cup tournament in February 2011.

Work began on the first domestic-based international cricket stadium on November 23rd with cooperation from by United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The stadium will serve as the main hub for hosting both domestic and international events and will accommodate more than 6,000 fans. It is estimated to be completion in July of 2011.

A film entitled *Out of the Ashes*, which tells the story of the national cricket team's efforts to qualify for the World Cup, has been awarded the special jury prize by the Peace and Sport Organisation, a Monaco-based organization working towards sustainable peace throughout the world through the promotion of the practice of structured sport and sporting values.

(pictured: Captain Nawroz Mangal receives the ICC Intercontinental Cup trophy from Richard Done, ICC High Performance Manager.)

Interview with Khaled Hosseini, author of "The Kite Runner" and "A Thousand Splendid Suns"

What type of message do you want to tell of Afghanistan in your works?

I am first and foremost a novelist, and purely as a writer, I hope that readers discover in my novels the same things

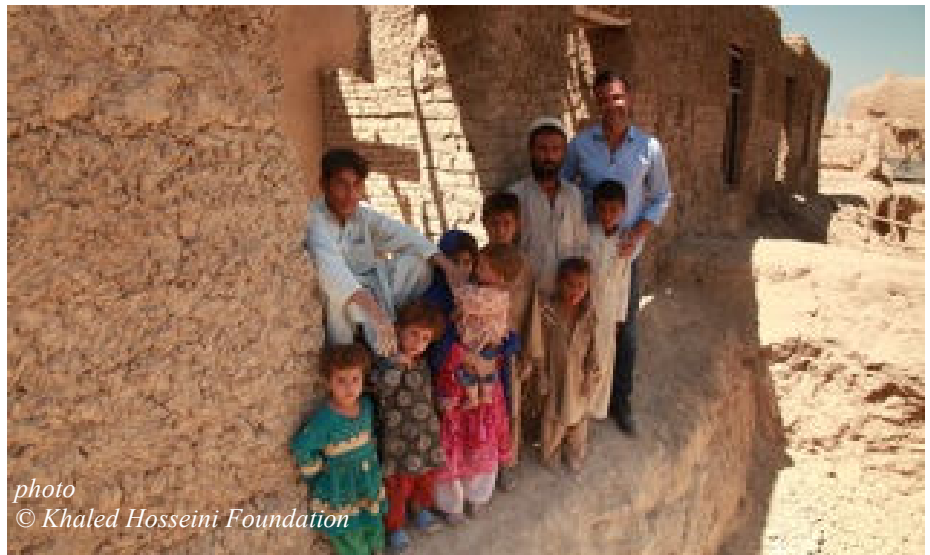
story that transports, characters who engage, and hopefully a sense of illumination, of having been transformed somehow by the experiences of the characters. I hope that readers respond to the emotions of these stories, that despite vast cultural differences, they identify with the characters and their dreams and ordinary hopes and day to day struggle to survive.

As an Afghan, I hope that readers walk away with a sense of empathy for Afghans and a fresh perspective on Afghanistan. Too often stories about Afghanistan center around the various wars, the opium trade, the war on terrorism. Precious little is said about the Afghan people themselves, their culture, their traditions, how they lived in their country and how they manage abroad as exiles. I hope my books give readers some insight into and a sense of the identity of Afghan people that they may not get from mainstream news media. Fiction is a powerful medium to convey such things.

Are there any different points that you wanted to convey from the outset between *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*?

Obviously the biggest difference is that *The Kite Runner* focused on men and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a story about women in Afghanistan. So much has happened to Afghan women in the last thirty years, particularly after the Soviets withdrew and factional fighting broke out. The wars in Afghanistan have taken a severe toll on women. Besides being the victims of landmines, shellings, and arbitrary killings, women in Afghanistan have also subjected to gender based human rights abuses, such as rape and forced marriage. When the Taliban came, they imposed inhumane restrictions on women, limiting their freedom of movement, expression, barring them from work and education, harassing them, humiliating them, beating them.

When I began writing *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, I found myself thinking about those resilient women over and over, and their incredible stories of survival were always with me, and a good part of my inspiration for *A Thousand Splendid Suns* came from their collective spirit.



Ultimately, I think there are more similarities between the books than differences. In both novels, characters are caught in a crossfire and overwhelmed by external forces. Their inner lives are impacted by an often brutal and unforfeiting outside world, and the decisions they make about their own lives are impacted by things over which they have no control: revolutions, wars, extremism, oppression.

Both novels are multi-generational, and so the relationship between parent and child, with all of its manifest complexities and contradictions, is a prominent theme. In fact, in one way, the two novels are corollaries, in that *The Kite Runner* was a father-son story, and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* can be seen as a mother-daughter story.

Ultimately, I think, both novels are love stories. In both books, characters are in the end redeemed by love and human connection. In the first novel, it was mainly the love between men. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, love manifests itself in even more various shapes, be it romantic love between a man and a woman, woman, parental love, love for family, home, country, God, or love between women. I think in both novels, it is ultimately love that draws characters out of their isolation, that gives them the strength to transcend their own limitations, to expose their vulnerabilities, and to perform acts of heroism and self-sacrifice.

Are you working on or planning any new projects?

I am currently working on a new book of fiction partially set in Afghanistan. I have no more updates on that at the present time.

There seems to be in you a call to help people. First through your work as a doctor, now through your involvement in the Khaled Hosseini Foundation in Afghanistan – can you tell us about what you hope to accomplish?

I've been a very lucky guy. I lived a happy and productive life. I grew up in semi-privileged surroundings in Kabul, I had a charmed childhood. I was fortunate enough to be in Paris, France when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, so I was at a safe remove from the displacement and massive human suffering that came with the war and in the aftermath of it. In the US, I was fortunate enough to get an education and go to medical school and have a fulfilling and productive career as a physician. All this, before my books were published, and before they found success well beyond my wildest hopes.

But there came a point, especially once the extent of my unexpected literary success became evident to me, that I began to grow restless and became anxious for a way to parlay my personal good fortunes into something that was hopefully more enduring and meaningful—especially given where I had come from. I dabbled in a small project or two, until 2006 when UNHCR invited me to speak at World Refugee Day and then asked me to serve as a goodwill envoy. It was a perfect match for me. I would never

dare compare my situation with that of the millions of Afghan refugees, but I had come to the States as a political refugee seeking asylum, and so I had always felt connected to the plight of Afghan refugees. And I felt a personal kinship with the mission of the organization, which is to safeguard the rights and well being of the world's most beleaguered people.

So it has been my honor and privilege the last three years to work with UNHCR, an organization that has protected and assisted over 50 million refugees since its formation in 1951, an organization that is, as we speak, providing food, shelter, medical aid, education and repatriation assistance to over 25 million people: refugees, displaced people, and asylum seekers.

In September of 2007, I had the opportunity to travel with UNHCR to northern Afghanistan to visit with some of the nearly 5 million refugees who have come home since 2002 with assistance from UNHCR. We went to settlements and villages around Mazar Sharif, Kunduz, etc, and sat down with returnees and learned through their own words the challenges they are facing since returning home. And those challenges are enormous and a part of their daily struggle to make ends meet. These returnees came home in the hopes that international re-engagement in Afghanistan will allow for restoration of peace and justice and economic opportunity. What they found upon returning is a country still reeling from a three decade catastrophe that saw political, social and economic structures collapse, where livelihood is precarious, resources few ... The returnees I met face lack of food, lack of clean water, lack of access to health and educational facilities, lack of jobs, and for many that I spoke to, most importantly, lack of shelter and home. Their attempt at reintegrating has been very difficult for most. It's an overused phrase, but for me, this trip really was a life altering experience.

When I came home, I worried that the memory of the trip would recede and that with the passage of time, the sense of urgency I had felt in Afghanistan would begin to fade. So I sat down with my wife and had long discussions about how to capitalize on the experience and my newly formed 501c3, The Khaled

Hosseini Foundation, was the outcome of those discussions. My aim with this foundation is to fund projects that help refugees, that provide opportunity, relief, shelter and education for Afghan women and children.

You come from a long history of literary mastership in Afghanistan – from such figures as Rumi and the court of Mahmud of Ghazni. However, with the coming of the Taliban regime, the arts were devastated. Now, only a fraction of the population is even literate. Do you see signs of hope for a reemergence of literature's place and artistry within Afghanistan?

The Taliban's acts of cultural vandalism -the most infamous being the destruction of the giant Buddhas- had a devastating effect on Afghan culture and its artistic scene. The Taliban burned countless films, VCRs, music tapes, books, and paintings. They jailed filmmakers, musicians, painters, and sculptors. The Taliban's puritanical stance on virtually any art form stifled artists and amounted to, I believe, a sick and twisted social experiment. These restrictions forced some artists to abandon their craft, and many to continue practicing in covert fashion. Some built cellars where they painted or played musical instruments. Others gathered to write fiction in the guise of a sewing circle -as depicted in Christina Lamb's *The Sewing Circles of Herat*. And still others found ingenious ways to trick the Taliban -one famous example being a painter who, at the order of the Taliban, painted over all human faces on his oil paintings, except he did with it watercolor, which he washed off after the Taliban were ousted. These were the desperate ways in which artists tried to escape the Taliban's firm grip on virtually every form of artistic expression. Afghans have a deep and rich artistic history and I have little doubt that we will see -we are seeing already- works of art in all forms, film, books, music, produced in Afghanistan by Afghans.

Do you have a message for the Japanese people?

First and foremost, I thank the Japanese people and the Japanese government for the assistance that they have provided to Afghanistan. Afghanistan is still dependent on the help and the goodwill of

industrialized nations like Japan and the help that Japan has provided has made great differences in the lives of many Afghans. For that we, speaking for Afghans, are deeply grateful.

Next I would offer an alternate way of looking at the conflict in Afghanistan. I would frame the war in Afghanistan not only as a war against the insurgents but also against poverty. After all, the number one killer in Afghanistan isn't airstrikes or suicide bombs, or IEDs. It's poverty. 25,000 plus women die yearly during child birth. Average life expectancy of 42 years. 1/5 chance for a child to die prior to the age of 5. Nearly half the country without access to potable water, and living in extreme poverty, on less than \$10 a month. I believe that a very big slice of the solution pie in

Afghanistan is to fight poverty. When people have a roof over their head, when they have jobs, when they see their living conditions improving, when they see their kids going off to school, when they have access to a doctor if they get sick, they are much less likely to be influenced or persuaded by extremists. Historically Afghanistan has never had a tradition of extremism. This is out of character for the country. What has brought this about is the huge tragedy of war and the brutalization of a society by successive civil conflict. At the end of the day, Afghans are the same as any other people. Their expectations for themselves, their children, are the same as anyone else's. They've had the misfortune of suffering through one of the worst and longest conflicts that we have seen in the last century, now ongoing into this century. Any society is going to be bruised by that.

So what I understand, what is a trend and a realization among western capitals and prominent people, is that this is not a war that we can win via military means only. We have to offer opportunity and better alternatives than the gun to Afghanistan's young people. They deserve better options in life. And it is up to us, the international community, in partnership with the Afghan government to provide better options. We have done it for some, but clearly we need to do more.

Omar's Kitchen

For each of our newsletters, Omar offers an authentic Afghan recipe from his kitchen to yours. This month, we feature a food inspired by the great menu of PAO Afghan restaurant in Higashi Nakano (near Shinjuku, Tokyo).

Chicken Karahi

Ingredients

- 1 kg. chicken cut into bite sized pieces
- 1 tbsp. chopped ginger
- 2.5cm piece ginger, peeled and cut into small sticks
- 4-5 green chilies cut in half
- 2 green chilies, chopped
- 3 tomatoes, finely chopped
- 2 tsp. black pepper, ground
- Salt, garam masala, and coriander leaves to taste, water as needed



Preparation

1. Heat oil in a shallow frying pan.
2. Add the chopped ginger and green chili, stirring frequently. Fry for 2 minutes.
3. Add the chicken and salt. Stirring frequently, fry until the meat is well-browned
4. Add the chopped tomatoes. Stirring the mix frequently, fry the meat mixture for about 10 minutes until the tomatoes are reduced to a pulp. Add a little water if necessary to prevent the mixture from sticking to the bottom of the pan. Keep frying until the oil begins to separate.
5. Add the ginger sticks, chopped green chili, black pepper, the garam masala, and a little water. Reduce the heat to low, cover with a tight-fitting lid and cook for 15 minutes until the chicken is tender. Sprinkle with finely chopped coriander leaves.
6. Serve hot with Nan or Chapati.