



February 2011



Afghan News

Select Development Indicators

- Domestic producers are now sending Afghan fruits, vegetables, and herbal medicines to 48 countries—up from 7 in 2002
- In total, 1,200 tones of dried fruit, 8,200 tones of fresh fruit, 6,100 tones of vegetables, and 1,100 tones of herbal medicine were exported in 2010
- In Herat, a program to plant one million saplings and trees is now beginning

Inside this issue:

- Latest News Pg. 1-4
- Interview with Mr. Oliver Percovich of Skateistan Pg. 4-6
- Recipe corner Pg. 7

Latest News



President Karzai Receives Outgoing Japanese Ambassador Hiroki

H.E. President Hamid Karzai met with outgoing Japanese ambassador to Afghanistan H.E. Mr. Shigeyuki Hiroki on February 19th. In the meeting H.E. called Japan a trusted friend of the people of Afghanistan and expressed gratitude for Japan's continuous aid. He praised H.E. Ambassador Hiroki for his efforts which strengthened bilateral relations. Ambassador Hiroki recalled his mission in Afghanistan with satisfaction and assured H.E. the President that Japan would continue to stand with Afghanistan, adding that regardless of whatever post he is assigned in the future, he will continue efforts to help Afghanistan.

ary 7th. In his speech, H.E. said that Afghan security forces continue to increase in capacity and number, stating, "We are now agreed on the goal of Afghan responsibility for security across the country by 2014." H.E. President Karzai stated that he would make an announcement of the first phase of the total Afghanization of security "on the Afghan New Year, which is on the 21 of March."

H.E. President Karzai Speaks on the Afghanization of Security at the Munich Security Conference

H.E. President Hamid Karzai addressed the 47th Munich Security Conference on Febru-



(Continued on page 2)

H.E. called for unified efforts towards this area, stating, "Clarity of vision and agreement on a collaborative process of partnership will lead to a tolerant Muslim country firmly anchored in a regional framework of peace and security and bound by enduring ties to the United States, Europe and Japan, which can act as a responsible stakeholder in regional peace and prosperity as well."

Afghanistan security forces have increased in number by 70,000 over the past year; H.E. the President stated that the prestige of the force continues to grow in the eyes of the public.

The full text of H.E. President Karzai's speech can be viewed at: <http://www.securityconference.de/Karzai-Hamid.635.0.html?&L=1>

H.E. Foreign Minister Rassoul addresses the 33rd Session of the SAARC Council of Ministers



H.E. Dr. Zalmay Rassoul, Minister of Foreign Affairs, attended the 33rd session of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Council of Ministers in Thimphu, Kingdom of Bhutan on February 8th and 9th. SAARC is a Council of Ministers of South Asia which seeks regional cooperation. In his speech H.E. F.M. Rassoul described considerable progress for the Association in various areas of cooperation, but said that the enormous economic potential that exists in the region could lead to even greater achievements. Furthermore, H.E. called for greater regional cooperation in, among other areas, regional infrastructure development.

H.E. F.M. Rassoul described the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's efforts at creating "an enabling environment for investment," saying, "as part of these efforts, we held the First International Investment Conference on Afghanistan on November 30th last year in Dubai with the cooperation of the Government of the United Arab Emirates. Participants in this event agreed to establish 'The Afghanistan International Investment Friends' in order to help the Government of Afghanistan to accelerate efforts to promote and protect investment, economic growth and employment generation in Afghanistan." H.E. concluded by touching upon the importance of developing environmentally responsible energy systems, investing in education, and empowering women.

New Schools Opened

A new 16-classroom, one-story school building was inaugurated in Nangarhar province's Khan Darea, Acheean district on February 16th with the support of the United States' Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT).

A new 16-classroom building for Haji Hussein Girl's Middle School in the Aliabad district of Kunduz province has been inaugurated due to the support of the German government. The building also features an administrative room, a surrounding wall, and a well, and is fully furnished.

A total of seven new school buildings were opened this month in Samangan province's Dara-e-Sauf district through the support of the World Bank. Three of the buildings are for primary schools and the other four are for middle schools and each has 8 classrooms and 6 administrative rooms.

A new 13-classroom building for a girl's school was also inaugurated in Kapisa with the support of the Danish government. The building is also furnished with other administrative areas. In Marjah, a school serving 500 children was opened in a ribbon-cutting ceremony with the participation of

Rep. John Kline of Minnesota, chairman of the U.S. House Education Committee.

Higher Education Outlets Growing to Meet Increasing Demand

The national education system continues to grow, increasing quickly the number of boys and girls who will graduate in the coming years. About 600,000 are expected to graduate from high school in 2014 alone. To provide opportunities for higher education, 22 public universities and education institutes are now being operated on a combined \$35 million last year, or about 1.5% of the government's core budget. To support the operation of these, dormitories are being constructed and a variety of other initiatives are being undertaken. Furthermore, teachers are being trained and their education level is being brought up; already, nearly half of Afghan professors have a master's degree or doctorate.

In order to support higher education, financial aid systems have been put in place, with about 70% of students of the American University in Afghanistan, for example, receiving such.

Fourteen Utility Projects Completed in Kunduz

On February 8th, construction of fourteen utility projects through the National Solidarity Program (NSP) in Imam Saheb and Arche districts of Kunduz province was completed. Projects included graveling of twelve-kilometers of road, construction of sixty-five bridges, and digging of forty-four deep wells in villages throughout the districts.

Kabul Park to be Built at Request of Students

A recreational park will be built on a 2,350 square-meter plot in Karta Ariana in Kabul city with the support of USAID. The project is being done at the request of the students of Shereno and Zabullah Shahed

(Continued on page 3)

schools, which now flank the park. The principles of schools and a number of students attended a ceremony to mark the project's opening and expressed their appreciation for the efforts of Kabul city.

Utility Projects Completed in Logar



In Logar province, work on thirty three utility projects has been completed with the assistance of Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) of the Czech Republic. Projects completed include construction of five clinics and seven agricultural research centers; asphaltting of 15 km of road; construction of seventeen dams, five power of them to provide energy; and provision of vocational training. In the next year, to begin in March according to the Afghan calendar, additional projects are planned for education, health, agriculture, and infrastructure.

Afghanistan wins GSMA Government Leadership Award

On February 15th in Barcelona, Spain, H.E. Minister Amirzai Sangin of the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology was awarded with the mobile phone industry's prestigious Government Leadership Award at the annual Government Mobile Forum.

Global Mobile Awards (GSMA), the awarding agency, recognized H.E. Minister Sangin and Afghanistan because of the "immense achievements made by the Afghan government in its commitment to the widespread expansion

of mobile communications ... In just ten years the Afghan government has taken a country with no mobile infrastructure to a point where 80% of the population is now covered by telecommunications networks," also noting other achievements, such as the industry's contribution as the largest source of foreign investment, "bringing more than \$1.2 billion dollars into the national economy."

12 graduate from basic airmen intelligence course

The first female joined eleven men in graduating from a basic airman intelligence course.

Each of the graduates completed 210 hours of classroom instruction covering more than 50 topics, ranging from critical thinking and analysis, mission planning, classified information protection and security, to the creation and delivery of a professional military intelligence brief in support of Afghanistan Air Force flying operations.

Japan Donates \$10m (452.1 million Afghanis) To Demining Projects

Japan will donate \$10 million (452.1 million Afghanis) to demining projects to take place over the next nine months. About 4,032 square meters area of mines will be cleared. About a million people are estimated to be protected as a result of the projects. "Donations from Japan have played a significant role in enabling Afghans to purge their country of landmines," said Mr. Haider Raza, the head of Mine Action Coordination Center of Afghanistan (MACCA).

Japan to increase role in Ghor Province

Dr. Abdullah Hewad, the governor of Ghor, met with then-Japanese Ambassador H.E. Mr. Shigeyuki Hiroki. H.E. Ambassador Hiroki pledged to increase Japan's cooperation in the province, stating that Japan is ready to increase from the current US\$3 million it has provided in support of

Ghor province to US\$6 million in 2012.

Japan will construct an educational center to develop the capacity of the Afghan National Police and a sports stadium in Cheghcheran city. Japan has also offered assistance in paving an asphalt road in Cheghcheran.

Herat Airport runway extension project completed



The governor of Herat, the Honorable Mr. Daoud Saba, along with other officials and NATO representatives, attended a ceremony commemorating the completion of the Herat Airport runway extension on February 17th.

The new runway is approximately 9,840 feet (3,000 meters) long and makes it possible for larger civilian aircraft to take off and land.

Due to the increased ability now to ship cargo to and from Herat, Governor Saba called the extension "a milestone for making Herat one of the hubs of development in the country."

A separate ceremony was also held on the 18th at the airport to mark the start of services of the first international airline, Ariana Afghan Airlines, to Herat airport. The ceremony was attended by, among others, Mr. Sayed Mehdi Sayedi, Technical Deputy of the Civil Aviation and Transportation Ministry.

Religious Scholars Gather in Baghlan

The consultative Jirga (assembly) of Religious Ulema (scholars) began in Baghlan province on February 13th. 90 Ulema have gathered for this 21-day event where they will discuss and exchange views on freedom of faith and speech, national unity, the struggle against violence, and a number of other social and political issues. The Jirga will conclude with a joint statement outlining collective proposals which will be presented to provincial officials.

Women's Vocational Training Underway in Sammangan Province

Earlier this month, ten 50-day vocational training courses began for 330 women-in-need in Sammangan province with the support of Merc Corps Institution. The women are offered the opportunity to learn tailoring, weaving, and quilt-making.

\$3trillion in natural resources reported

\$3 trillion in iron, copper, gold and other prized minerals have been shown to exist in 27 prospective mining sites.

Highlights of the sites include: nearly \$90 billion worth of rare earth minerals in southwest Helmand province; \$30 billion in gold and copper deposits in Zana Khan, Ghazni province; and up to \$60 billion in lithium deposits in Herat, Ghazni, Nimroz, and Farah provinces.

A U.S. Defense Department task force projects that small-scale lithium production could begin within one year and large-scale production 2-4 years later.

In addition to the above, a massive copper deposit in the Balkhab district of Balkh province is said to have the potential to become a significant mining operation in fewer than five years.

Marble Mining Underway in Samangan

Extraction of 2nd and 3rd grade marble has just begun at a mine east of Aibak, Samangan.

This mine is noted for its marble's light green hue with accentuating flecks; the marble will be used in the construction of the local parliament building.

Two companies have signed six-month extraction deals and officials of the province plan to build a factory in this province in the near future. Investment is open to more marble companies as the continuing assessment of the area points to even larger quantities than already known.

National Under-19 team win Asian Cricket Council Tournament



Afghanistan's youth team defeated Nepal on February 9th by 61 runs in the final match of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) Under 19 Elite Cup tournament at Terdthai Cricket Ground, in Bangkok, Thailand to win the 2011 ACC U-19 Elite Cup. The ACC U-19 Elite Cup tournament is part of the qualifying process for International Cricket Council's U-19 World Cup 2012.

Interview with Skateistan's Director Oliver Percovich

How do the parents of the children react to the program?

Parent response has been really positive. The fact that Skateistan is not just a place to learn skateboarding but also a free educational facility is valued in the eyes of parents. Many young people in Kabul pay to take courses in computers and English, and these are the sorts of things that kids at Skateistan are exposed to. We don't directly teach these skills, but rather have a creative arts and multimedia based curriculum where all kinds of skills are built upon at once. One of our students told us how he goes to a regular school that doesn't even have chairs, which I don't think is uncommon, so Skateistan is really opening up a whole new world for a lot of the kids.

We have events celebrating the end of each semester (every four months or so), which shares student work and accomplishments. There are usually a couple hundred kids that come and we always invite parents, but I think there aren't really public events like this in Afghanistan so it's been a challenge getting them to come. With each event though the number of parents in attendance grows and they always come up to speak with the different teachers and say how impressed they are with everything we are doing, which is really rewarding.

On the flip side there will always be obstacles when it comes to our female students having permission to come, especially as they get older, so we have to stay constantly flexible and do whatever we can to assure parents that the facility is a safe and culturally appropriate place for girls to come.

How do the neighbors of the area react to the program?

Our neighbours are essentially various sporting federations that are also on the Afghan National Olympic Committee (ANOC) grounds. We are considered a Skateboarding sports federation and the Olympic President has told me that he considers the Skateboarding Federation to be the most successful sporting federation in Afghanistan. The ANOC donated us the land to build our facility, and I work closely with ANOC's president as an advisor on developing sporting opportunities in Afghanistan, particularly for females. We have a really good relationship with the Olympic committee, the athletes have attended our events and done demos, and a lot of our disabled students are also part of other sporting organizations on the ANOC grounds. In Kabul Skateistan is pretty well known as we've received a fair amount of media coverage within Afghanistan.

Tell us about the initial reaction to the concept and how you were able to get the initial students? Does word of mouth keep the new applicants coming, or do you use similar steps to how you began to get children?



Skateistan started out sort of by accident. I didn't know how much appeal it was going to have for the kids, but when I started to go skate outside there would always be a crowd of children and I would encourage them to try skateboarding. A couple older Afghan boys picked it up right away and we then found this old Russian fountain that was actually perfect for skateboarding. It was next to some middle class apartment blocks, but facing a busy street where lots of children were working, washing cars or

begging. We started going there in the afternoons, every day or second day, and kids from both worlds, rich and poor, would always come watch and try it out, so it was actually not a problem finding the first students. The girls were more reluctant, and at first they were too shy to come inside the fountain and skate, instead testing out skateboards beside it, but it was only a matter of days before they were fully involved and telling their friends.

When the facility first opened most of the students that had started skateboarding at the fountain began to attend classes here. In the first few months we also sent out some staff to recruit more kids in the streets of Kabul and at schools. Since then it's just been word of mouth and the occasional visit to a school or orphanage. We've found that the best way to get new students, especially girls, is through word of mouth and girls bringing their friends along to check out the facility.

How have you been so successful in integrating the sexes?

We don't integrate the sexes so much as we ensure that there are equal opportunities for and representation of both boys and girls - actually Skateistan even goes so far as to give females preference simply because they are so excluded in society. While the sessions at the fountain before we had the skatepark were mixed (boys and girls), we currently have girls and boys attending Skateistan on different days. This was at the request of the girls, who feel more comfortable like this, as do their families. Culturally it's much more acceptable, but I think even in a Western country girls are less likely to be intimidated and shy about learning if there are no boys around. One of the big reasons for building the indoor facility was so that girls above the age of 12 could practice skateboarding with privacy and in a female-only environment.

But Skateistan also holds regular activities and events where girls and boys both attend, such as celebrations at the end of each semester, Peace Day events, or International Go Skateboarding Day, which was an organized 3KM skate through Kabul with approximately 80 boys and 60 girls taking part. There are also male and female Afghan staff that

regularly skateboard and work together and we sometimes do special projects like mural painting where both genders work on it together. It's just about being aware of the cultural concerns and keeping good communication with the kids and their families about what they are comfortable with.

What are Skateistan's future goals?

Skateistan is now developing a working model and educational/sports curriculum that we believe could benefit youth in many countries, particularly those with a history of conflict or a weak civil society. Using what we have learned and continue to learn each day, I see Skateistan expanding to open facilities in other parts of Afghanistan, and perhaps even other parts of the world. We are actually currently seeking funding for a second facility, in Mazar-e-Sharif, Northern Afghanistan.

Aside from expansion we also want to build an outdoor component to the Kabul facility, which would allow us more space for new students and open up opportunities for our sports and educational programming. It will have green areas, an outdoor skatepark and classroom, and fencing to ensure the privacy of our students.

The ultimate goal of Skateistan as an NGO is self-sustainability, both financially and in terms of human resources. We have been developing our social branding throughout the past two years, and have our own Skateistan merchandise, as well as co-branded skateboard products with industry leaders. The profits go towards our operations. We also pursue sponsorships with skateboarding, communications and other companies to keep our running costs at a minimum. Ideally Skateistan will be able to operate on the money raised by our social brand and worldwide fundraising, but this will take a few more years. The sustainability of Skateistan also relies on the Afghan staff having a sense of ownership and gaining the skills required to continue operations in the long run.

Has there been any connection to Japan yet?

So far we have hosted staff from the Japanese embassy in Kabul at Skateistan and they also visited the ANOC. We have been featured in the Japanese media and there has been interest in helping us from Japan. Ultimately we would like to have an arm of our organization in Japan for fundraising and awareness building, like what we have in Germany, Denmark and the US. If anyone in Japan would like to help us with this please get in touch with us at info@skateistan.org. Also we are very interested in connecting our Afghan students with students in Japan so if there are any teachers that are interested in an exchange please contact our exchange coordinator Frauke Meyn by sending an email to frauке@skateistan.org

We would be honored if you could give a message to our Japanese readers.

Greetings from the happy children at Skateistan in Kabul. Children all over the world are very similar. When we concentrate on our similarities and not our differences the world will be a better place.



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 that is a traditional dish for Afghan families, Chicken Kabuli.



Ingredients (Serves eight)

- 4 large garlic cloves, peeled
- 3 tablespoons fresh ginger, chopped
- 3 medium tomatoes, quartered (about 375 g)
- 250 g plain yogurt (8 ounces)
- 180 ml vegetable oil (6 ounces)
- 1 1/2 kg chicken breasts, boned, skinned, and cubed
- 1/2 teaspoon mace
- 1 teaspoon nutmeg
- 2 tablespoons blanched almonds, ground
- 1 teaspoon cardamom, ground
- 1 teaspoon cumin, ground
- 1 teaspoon coriander, ground
- 1/2 teaspoon fennel, ground
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 125 ml double cream
- 2 -3 teaspoons black peppercorns, coarsely ground
- 4 -5 tablespoons cilantro, finely chopped (coriander)



Preparation

1. Process the garlic, ginger, tomatoes and yogurt in a food processor until they are a fine purée.
2. Combine the oil and the puréed mixture in a large heavy-bottomed pan, preferably one with a non-stick surface. Place the pan over medium-high heat, and cook -- stirring constantly to prevent sticking and burning - until the mixture reduces to a thick sauce and the fat begins to separate (about 15 minutes).
3. Add the chicken pieces and stir the mixture until it loses its pink color. Sear for 5 minutes, but do not let its color turn brown.
4. Add the mace, nutmeg, almonds, cardamom, cumin, coriander, fennel and salt, and mix well.
5. Reduce heat and cover the pan. Let it simmer for 15 minutes.
6. Uncover and continue cooking for another 15 minutes (or until the chicken is tender).
7. Stir in the cream, black pepper and cilantro/coriander leaves, and turn off heat.
8. Leave the dish covered for at least 1 hour. Reheat thoroughly when ready to be served.



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