



Dear reader,

In the past month or so, much controversy was ignited by media reports about the passing of a new law in Afghanistan – the Shia Personal Status Law. News of the finalisation of the law was met not only with strong protests from governments and human rights organisations from around the world, but also with strong demonstrations within Afghanistan, particularly from Afghan women's groups, women parliamentarians and human rights circles across the country who held that the law was contrary to Afghanistan's Constitution.

Those of you who follow Afghanistan closely will know that it was undoubtedly a very good step for Afghanistan to legislate, for the first time in its history, in the interest of the Shia religious minority. On the other hand, you would be justified to expect that the goal of strengthening pluralism within the Afghan society should be pursued in a manner that is consistent with the values enshrined in the Constitution as well as universally accepted norms.

It was with this principle in mind that President Hamid Karzai halted the gazetting of the law and ordered the relevant legal institution, the Ministry of Justice, to undertake a thorough review of the content of the law. It is expected that, as a result of the review, the revised law will be consistent both with the Constitution and with Afghanistan's treaty obligations in international law.

**Jawed Ludin,
Ambassador**



Afghan oil and gas adventure in making

– **The development of a hydrocarbon industry in Afghanistan will contribute to stability in the country, says Ambassador.**

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan recently launched its first bidding round for contracts to explore and produce oil and gas in the northern regions of the country.

Identifying the utilization of Afghanistan's natural resources, in particular oil and gas, as the best way to ensure lasting economic development for the country, Ambassador Jawed Ludin encourages potential investors from Norway and other Nordic countries to take interest in the bidding process.

– Afghanistan today is among the poorest countries on earth, and this poverty is a factor in its continued instability. But we need not be poor, or unstable. Afghanistan is a big country, and hugely blessed with natural resources, most of which have not yet been accessed or even discovered, says Ambassador Ludin, and adds:

- I think the best way the international community - countries that are concerned about poverty and under-development in Afghanistan - can contribute to lasting development, is to help us utilize our natural resources.

– Despite the relative insecurity in the southern and eastern parts of the country, northern Afghanistan is secure and conducive to investment of any scale. We really hope that credible, international companies will come forward to help us develop our hydrocarbon industry, the Ambassador says.

The bidding round comprises three different blocks in the northern areas of Afghanistan. All three blocks have known hydrocarbon-bearing accumulations: The Jangalikalan block contains a gas field, the Juma-Bashikurd block has two gas fields, and the Kashkari block holds three oil fields. Apart from the Angoat field in Kashkari, none of the fields have previously been in sustained production.

Picture: H. P. Christophersen, Norad

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Afghanistan Wins First One-Day International Match



Picture: Asian Cricket Council

The Afghanistan cricket team, rising from fifth-division non-entities to the verge of World Cup qualification within one year, has adjusted its sights to facing the likes of Australia and Pakistan at one-day level.

The Afghan Cricket Team gained global attention after its 21-run win over Namibia in Krugersdorp, which also earned it official ODI status, although it failed short of sealing a spot at the World Cup as they could not beat Kenya's net run rate.

- When we came into the Super Eight we weren't in a very good position to qualify, but the way the boys played, winning some much tougher matches, showed how much courage and talent they have got. I am sure we will play in a World Cup one day, said Afghanistan's coach, Kabir Khan in a recent interview.

World Bank extends funds for Afghan projects

The government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is to receive USD 6 million from the World Bank to boost development activities in the rural parts of the country.

According to the World Bank officials, the massive budget is designed to implement a part of the National Development Strategy (ANDS), wrapping a

thriving rural development effort, National Solidarity Program (NSP).

The fund is provided to the government of Afghanistan to execute the projects listed in the development plan of the country.

Factory to complete the process of carpet weaving locally



Picture: Afghan Foreign Ministry

Afghan Carpet weavers have gotten their first ever carpet scissoring and washing factory in the eastern province of Nangarhar.

Until the establishment of the factory, the carpets produced in Afghanistan were taken abroad, mostly to the neighboring Pakistan, for the two final steps of the processing. The factory employs around 400 people, and will enable the weavers to finish the process of manufacturing within the country.

The factory is built up with international standards and modern equipment, and will enhance the quality of the product while preserving the traditional essence of the renowned Afghan carpets,

The factory is a unit of the new factory parks set up in various regions of Afghanistan intended to promote Afghan products in the local, regional and international markets. Zia Rahmanzai, the head of the factory, hopes that the factory will have a huge positive impact on the famous Afghan product.

The Minister of Commerce of Afghanistan together with a private investment company has opened a market for Afghan carpets in Dubai (United Arab Emirates) which is intended to channel the Afghan carpets to the international markets.

The first-ever national park in Afghanistan announced

The Afghan Environmental Agency announced the spectacular sight of Lake Band-e Amir in the central Bamyan province as the country's first-ever national park in a celebration to mark International Earth Day. The Afghanistan National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) expects the new park to have an economic stimulus on the country by improving the tourism industry.

- The first Afghan national park will be inaugurated in the next one month or two, NEPA Director, Mostafa Zahir said in a recent interview.

Lake Band-e Amir is a place where thousands of tourists, mostly Afghans, pay visits each year, especially in spring and summer seasons. Local entrepreneurs have built up a number of restaurants, shops and hotels, but NEPA is planning to construct a campground to officially turn it into an exciting entertainment location.

Band-e-Amir is a series of six lakes in central Bamyan Province, and the National Park covers 560,000 hectares of land.



Picture: Carl Montgomery (Creative Commons)



Nordic perspectives on the Afghanistan Conference

More than 70 countries were represented at the International Conference on Afghanistan in the Hague on March 31.

Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre described the conference as a "broad demonstration of commitment for Afghanistan among the international community", and emphasized that it was particularly positive that Iran attended.

According to NTB, Foreign Minister Støre welcomed the change in rhetoric coming from Washington, saying that he was pleased to hear a more precise use of language compared to the previous focus on the "war on terror".

The EU's Foreign Ministers also welcomed the new American policy for Afghanistan. Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt stated after the conference that "what Obama is saying is necessary. Afghanistan needs economic, civil and political development." The Nordic foreign ministers had arranged a private meeting with President Hamid Karzai, which focused on the building up of an Afghan police force. The preparations for the upcoming presidential elections were also an important topic for the meeting with the Afghan president.

Danish Prime Minister new NATO Secretary-General



Picture: NATO

The NATO summit 2009 marking the 60th anniversary of the alliance was held on April 3-4 in Strasbourg and Kehl. One of the issues decided upon, was who would be the new Secretary-General of the alliance.

After rounds of discussion, and Turkish protests, the NATO countries in the end decided on Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen for the top position. He will replace current Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, whose traditional four year term was extended to encompass the 60th anniversary celebrations.

A press conference was held in Strasbourg, where Fogh Rasmussen stated that he was deeply honoured to take on the role, both on behalf of Denmark and himself.

Rasmussen highlighted the challenges facing NATO, mentioning among other issues "the fight against terrorism and our important mission in Afghanistan."

Lars Løkke Rasmussen (no relation to Fogh Rasmussen) officially became Denmark's newest prime minister on Monday, April 6, as Fogh Rasmussen resigned to take on the NATO post. Previous to being Prime Minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen was Denmark's Finance Minister. He is also the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party. Prime Minister Løkke Rasmussen received the unconditional support of the

Conservative Party and the Danish People's Party, which together with the Liberal Party constitute a majority in parliament.

Norway lost an officer in Afghanistan



Picture: Forsvaret

Trond Petter Kolset, a Norwegian military intelligence officer serving in Afghanistan was killed when the vehicle he was travelling in was targeted by a suicide car bomber on Friday, April 17. He was brought back to Norway on Tuesday, April 21, for a closed memorial service on Gardermoen Airport.

Kolset was described by his superior, Major General Torgeir Hagen, as a courageous and happy idealist who had deep respect for others. Field minister Major Sverre Stai emphasized during the memorial service the love Kolset showed for both Norway and Afghanistan. Norwegian Defence Minister Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen was deeply saddened to learn about the tragic loss of Trond Petter Kolset, and stated in a press conference that for her, losing soldiers is the worst thing that can happen. Ambassador of Afghanistan to Norway, Mr. Jawed Ludin, stated that "the loss of this precious life is tragic, and I condemn this despicable act, perpetrated by the enemies of peace in Afghanistan, in the strongest possible terms. My thoughts and sympathies are with the families and friends of this soldier.

Chairperson of Afghan Parliament Arrives in Oslo



Picture: Afghanistan National Assembly

Oslo, Norway – Mohammad Younis Qanouni, Chairperson of the Parliament of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, heading a parliamentary delegation, arrived in Oslo, 31 March 2009.

During the visit, Mr. Qanouni and his delegation had meetings with His Majesty King Harald V, Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, and President of Stortinget, Thorbjørn Jagland; attended the opening session of the parliament from the guest gallery; and received a briefing on constitutional and administrative matters by Mr. Hans Brattestå, Secretary General of Stortinget.

He also had a meeting with the members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Parliament, met with Defense Minister Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen, and held talks with Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre. Mr. Qanouni concluded his stay in Norway by delivering a speech at a seminar organized by the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) on April 2, 2009.

At the various meetings and visits during his stay in Oslo, Mr. Qanouni addressed several issues. He expressed gratitude for Norway's support to Afghanistan, and for the contribution of about 650 Norwegian soldiers for maintaining security in Afghanistan and particularly in the Faryab Province. He also thanked Norway for hosting a considerable number of Afghan immigrants hospitably, and expressed hope that the small number of Afghans, about 200, that are waiting for a response

from Norway, will be treated favourably.

He briefed his hosts about the current situation in Afghanistan and noted that the time has come for the Afghanistan strategy to be changed based on the lessons learned thus far.

He welcomed the new US strategy for Afghanistan and said that the regional dimension is important in solving the issue of Afghanistan. He stressed that Afghans are still hopeful and believe that together with the international community they will succeed in restoring peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Mr. Qanouni especially thanked the Norwegian government and people for their support for the upcoming elections in Afghanistan. He also expressed satisfaction over the selection of His Excellency Kåre R. Aas as the Norwegian Ambassador to Afghanistan and said that he is playing a great role in strengthening the relations between the two countries.

Regarding the reconciliation process of the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan with Taliban, he emphasized that it is important and needed, however it has to be done within the framework of the constitution of Afghanistan and not from a position of weakness. Regarding the irreconcilable elements of Taliban, the only way to succeed is to fight them.

Ambassador Ludin addresses seminar about NATO and its role in Afghanistan

Oslo, Norway – The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Mr. Jawed Ludin addressed a seminar focusing on the 'New Challenges for NATO Members and Its Partners' in Riga, 21 April 2009.

At the beginning, focusing on NATO, he said, despite its 60 years of age, NATO is a young organization and evolving rapidly.

It was created to do containment and acted as a deterrent, now its role is changing.

He added that even though the mission in Afghanistan may be outside NATO's traditional geographical scope, it is not outside its strategic scope. He also stated that NATO is not only relevant today; it is immensely useful and actually, to a great extent, has proven to be effective. However, he underlined, pointing to some cumbersome decision-making processes and operational incoherence, that there had also been some drawbacks.

Regarding the current situation in Afghanistan he noted that the real situation on the ground in Afghanistan is not as hopeless as depicted in the media. He outlined the shift of focus to the regional dimension and the rapid deterioration of Pakistan. He regarded the American President's new strategy as useful, noting however that benchmarking is useful, but downgrading of aims is not. At last, he underlined three key directions: 1) Afghanisation of the security sector, 2) Elections and the political solution, and 3) reconstruction.

In connection to NATO's current role in Afghanistan, he said that the American scale-up is not matched by all of the other NATO members, and that NATO must come even closer to the US in improving its operation capacity. Lastly, he stressed that NATO must de-territorialise itself and become an alliance of values - not of geography.

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