



Dear Reader,

This issue of the Nyhetsbrev comes to you at the end of an eventful month for Afghanistan, which saw the proud moment of the Afghan National Cricket team reaching qualification rounds for the 2011 Cricket World Cup and, the appointments of several high profile special envoys to Afghanistan by the United States, Britain, France, Japan, Germany and, of course, Sweden. These appointments have been an affirmation of the commitment of the international community to Afghanistan.

The American envoy, Richard Holbrooke's visit to Afghanistan and the region was a positive beginning of President Barack Obama's administration's renewed engagement in Afghanistan and the wider region. In this issue, you can read about President Karzai's meeting with Ambassador Holbrooke in Kabul.

The challenge of terrorism was highlighted once again during February by an organised, 'Mumbai style' attack by a group of terrorists on three government buildings in Kabul. However, the timely and effective handling of the terrorist attack by the Afghan security forces was a very positive sign of the increasing capability and professionalism of our security institutions. This bodes well for the long-term stabilisation of Afghanistan.

While the news in the security area, and the high profile visits to Afghanistan, were well covered by media this month, much of the developments in the country took place largely unnoticed. In this newsletter you will read about one such progress story concerning Afghanistan's rural development. The other good news is the successful progression of the voter registration process throughout Afghanistan, including the areas affected by insecurity. Four million new voters have been registered, paving the way for the next elections in the country later this year.

And finally, the New Year 1388 is just around the corner, and I wish all Afghans, wherever they are, a Happy Nawroz. I hope that the coming year brings more opportunities for a better, more peaceful, more prosperous life for our people.

**Jawed Ludin**  
Ambassador



### President Karzai Welcomes Ambassador Holbrooke in Kabul

The President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke met in Kabul on 15 February.

Addressing a joint press event Ambassador Holbrooke said that the purpose of his visit was to reaffirm, on behalf of President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton, and the new administration, America's commitment to the efforts in Afghanistan against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. He said that he had come to Afghanistan to listen and to learn the Afghan point of view. He said that he carried a personal message from President Obama: a message of support for the people of Afghanistan and for the democratically elected government of Afghanistan.

Holbrooke also said that President Obama welcomed the suggestions President Karzai had made in a letter that President Karzai had sent to President Obama just a few days ago, in which he had proposed that Afghanistan should be a part of the strategic review of the fight against terrorism.

He also expressed the support of the US for the decision made by the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan to conduct elections on August 20<sup>th</sup>.

President Hamid Karzai expressed gratefulness for Ambassador Holbrooke to visit Afghanistan. President Karzai also thanked him for carrying a personal message from President Obama, welcoming the proposal of Afghanistan joining the strategic review of the war against terrorism and announced that accordingly an Afghan delegation headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Spanta, will visit the United States shortly.

Picture: Associated Press

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# Stories from Afghanistan

## President Karzai and Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon meet in Kabul



Picture: Irish Times

Wednesday, February 4, 2009

The United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon paid an unannounced visit to Kabul during the first week of February. While in Kabul he held talks with the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Mr. Hamid Karzai. The Secretary-General stated that his visit was to show Afghanistan that the country is a priority for the United Nations.

Mr. Ban-Ki Moon called on the International Forces in Afghanistan to prevent civilian casualties when conducting military operations, echoing the concerns of President Hamid Karzai. The Secretary-General also called for closer civilian-military cooperation in Afghanistan, and more coordination between the different international donors in the country.

During his visit he also met with the leadership of the NATO-led troops and other high-ranking officials.

## Afghan Cricket Team Manages to Get into the Final Qualifying Round for the World Cup

Afghans cheered and danced at Kabul airport on 3 February as they welcomed back the national cricket team after a victory that brought Afghanistan one step away from the 2011 World Cup.

Afghanistan won the World Cricket League Division 3 tournament in Buenos Aires on Saturday, earning the team a spot in the final qualifying tournament in South Africa in April. Canada is also bidding for a World Cup berth.

Still, the crowd reveled in the trophy held high by the players. Turbaned men played traditional drums and flutes, and some exultant fans opened up their winter coats to dance.

Players have described the victory as their chance to give some much-needed joy to the people of Afghanistan, where the Taliban insurgency is more likely to command headlines than sports.

"We want to get through to the second stage of the competition and try and get in the top four, as that would be a real gift for the Afghan people," wicketkeeper Karim Khan said in a statement released by the International Cricket Council.

For the final qualifiers in South Africa, which run from April 1-19, Afghanistan will be in Group B along with Kenya, Netherlands, Bermuda, UAE and Denmark. Canada is in Group A with Uganda, Ireland, Scotland, Oman and Namibia.

The top four teams from the competition advance to the World Cup.



Picture: Mag the Weekly

## 220,000 Afghans benefit from development projects



On the 11 of February the Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development Mr. Ehsan Zia announced the launch of 3555 new development projects across the country in Afghanistan. The projects are administered by MRRD and cost 3.31 billion Afghanis and will be implemented in all provinces. They are estimated to provide employment opportunity for 220,000 ordinary people and will indirectly benefit over one million individuals.

MRRD implemented over 700 projects last year, which included construction of roads, bridges, retaining walls, hospitals, schools and educational centers as well as water projects and small hydro-power projects.

The Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development said that the ministry is also undertaking the responsibility of supplying food for the country's vulnerable areas and opening the snow-blocked roads in the farthest regions.



Picture: National Defence and the Canadian Forces

## Norwegian Government Supports Presidential Elections in Afghanistan



Picture: NRK News

The presidential elections in Afghanistan are scheduled to take place on August 20 this year. Norway will contribute 70 million NOK to support the preparations and execution of the elections.

This includes among other things strengthening the Independent Election Commission, establishing an independent complaint commission to quality-proof the nomination process, establishing an independent media commission to supervise the media coverage of the elections, supporting independent Afghan observation of the elections and the production of election materiel.

In a press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway, Minister Jonas Gahr Støre said: "It is a pleasure that the election date now has been decided upon. With this the Afghan side has taken a large step further in the planning of the upcoming elections."

"This is an important decision which will enable the international community to provide the necessary support in terms of security and international election observers to the Afghans," he added.

With this support Norway will become one of the most important contributors to the elections. The Norwegian support will be coordinated by the UN.

## Afghan Minister of Public Health Meets Norwegian Minister Counselor



Minister of Public Health Dr Amin Fatimie met with Ms Mari Skåre, Minister Counselor at the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Kabul on February 19.

Dr. Fatimie and Ms Skåre discussed the efforts of the Ministry of Public Health in expanding the Basic Package of Health Services and Essential Package of Hospital Services in Faryab province, where the Norwegian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) is based.

Ms Skåre mentioned that she recently visited the province and learned about the situation in Faryab from people who worked there. She said that the Norwegian PRT was working with the local shuras, district governors and the provincial governor, His Excellency Mr. Shafaq, on identifying priorities in the province, especially in Ghormach.

Based on the findings, the PRT will be supporting the local priorities, and health is definitely one of them. She promised to discuss with higher officials the expansion of Norwegian support to the Ministry of Public Health in that province.

Ms Skåre emphasized that health work is a major part of the Norwegian efforts of rural development in Faryab province, and that the Norwegian government will consider working directly with the Ministry of Public Health in the near future.

Norway has been proactively involved in supporting Afghans in their countries rehabilitation. Currently the Norwegian government supports Faryab province through working for development, stability and peace in the province.

## Memorial to Fallen Soldiers



Picture: Denmark Facts

On Monday February 9, the Danish troops stationed at Camp Bastion in the Helmand province of Afghanistan erected a memorial to their comrades who lost their lives in the course of duty.

Head of the staff and logistics company on the sixth deployment of troops, Major Mikkel Soelberg, is quoted in the Copenhagen Post saying: "It means a lot, it really does. I was very moved when I had to stand out there and read their names aloud."

After the unveiling of the memorial and reading out of the names of the fallen, a minute's silence was taken to remember them.

A statement released by the Danish Armed Forces stated that the area surrounding the memorial is set to function as a place where the soldiers can find some peace away from the hard toil of everyday duties in Afghanistan. A similar memorial will be put up at Camp Price at a later date.

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## Dr Zalmay Rassoul Visits Norway and Finland



Dr. Zalmay Rassoul, National Security Advisor of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan arrived in Oslo on an official visit to Norway and Finland on 29 January.

During the visit, he met with high-ranking Norwegian authorities including Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, Minister of Foreign Affairs Jonas Gahr Støre, and Minister of Defense Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen.

He also held talks with Chief of Defense General Sverre Diesen, and Mr Jan Petersen, Chairman of the Defense Committee of the Norwegian Parliament.

Dr Rassoul traveled to Stavanger on Saturday, 31 January to visit the Norwegian National Joint Head Quarter, and to meet with Major General Roar Sundseth.

There Dr Zalmay Rassoul expressed gratitude for Norway's longstanding assistance to the people of Afghanistan and spoke via video conference with the commander of Norwegian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan and said that he wanted to thank the Norwegian soldiers from their own country for their valuable contribution to the peace process in Afghanistan.

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On February 2, Dr Rassoul traveled to Helsinki, Finland to meet with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexander Stubb, Minister of Defense Jyri Hakamies, and Mr Juha Korkeaoja, Chairman of the Defense Committee of the Finnish Parliament among others.

At the meetings, Dr Rassoul thanked the Finnish people and government for their support for the people of Afghanistan provided over the past years. Elaborating on the developments in Afghanistan he said, even though the security situation was challenging, the reality on the ground was better than what is widely portrayed in the media.

He welcomed Finland's announcement of doubling troops in Afghanistan to better contribute to the process of providing security for the upcoming presidential elections this year.

Dr Zalmay Rassoul addressed a seminar titled "The Challenge of Bringing Peace in Afghanistan and the Role of NATO," organized by the Atlantic Council of Finland at the end of his visit on February 5.

## Ambassador Ludin Speaks at the Swedish Institute for International Affairs

Ambassador Jawed Ludin addressed a seminar arranged by the Swedish Institute for International Affairs focusing on the International Mission in Afghanistan titled 'Beginning of the End, or End of the Beginning'. In his opening remarks Mr. Ludin said the event symbolized the truly international effort in Afghanistan. He said that Afghanistan's interest today is linked in more than one dimension to the whole world, and is connected to it by both negative and positive forces.

He emphasized that this is definitely not the End, or the Beginning of the End. The end is still very distant and difficult, but a very good beginning has been made. Today we have reached a new phase – The End of the Beginning. Great achievements have been made in Afghanistan on health, education, and the development of democracy. However, there are still challenges remaining, especially when considering the regional dimension and the security situation.

In conclusion, Ambassador Ludin said there are great opportunities in 2009 with the upcoming elections, the renewed commitment of the Obama Administration, the rethinking connected with NATO's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the EU's response, and the still continuing optimism of the Afghan people. But all of these also amount to a great challenge, perhaps the greatest challenge so far. The beginning has been made, and we are definitely entering a new phase. The opportunities that arise have to be taken and used well. Otherwise, nothing guarantees failure more than the repetition of our own mistakes.

## Nawroz Holiday on March 20

On March 20 the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan will be closed due to the holiday of Nawroz. The Embassy wishes all Afghans a Happy New Year.

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Public Relations Department  
Embassy of Afghanistan, Oslo  
Kronprinsens gate 17  
0244 OSLO

Website: [www.afghanistanembassy.no](http://www.afghanistanembassy.no)  
For contact or submission:  
[nyhetsbrev@afghanistanembassy.no](mailto:nyhetsbrev@afghanistanembassy.no)