



Dear Reader,

In presenting this issue of the Nyhetsbrev, I am pleased to give you the good news coming from Afghanistan: next elections will be held on 20 August 2009.

Welcome though this announcement by Afghanistan's election commission is, there is no illusion that it sets out a momentous challenge for us Afghans and our friends from other international community.

The second round of elections in any post war society is usually more critical in importance to democratisation than the first round. We are also keenly aware that, aside from the political and logistic preparations that have to be made, security in some parts of the country, notably in the south of the country, is not conducive to the holding of elections.

In this context, we are welcoming the plans by the United States to increase its troops in Afghanistan in the coming months to help secure the elections.

The successful conduct of the elections this year will take Afghanistan to a new phase of our journey to stability and democracy.

Jawed Ludin  
Ambassador



#### Shamsia's Story: A story of courage and heroism of a little girl

Shamsia Husseini and her sister were on their way to school in the southern province of Kandahar some two months ago when a man riding a motorbike pulled over and asked them where they were going. Upon the answer, he sprayed acid on Shamsia's face and fled.

This was done to scare the two sisters and other girls off from going to school. Now Shamsia has discolouring scars all over her face and eyelids. At times, her vision goes blurry making it difficult for her to read and write. But despite all this, she is back to school. Supported by her uneducated mother, Shamsia is determined to pursue her education in the face of the danger to her life. "The people who did this to me don't want women to be educated. They want us to be stupid things," she said in an interview to a New York Times reporter, and added defying the threat: "My parents told me to keep coming to school even if I am killed."

The story of Shamsia depicts the desire of Afghans in general and children in particular for education. After years of ban on education for girls and limited

opportunities of education for boys during Taliban, now Afghans value the opportunity and respond to such attempts with unshakable resolve.

The Embassy of Afghanistan in Oslo is looking for support to sponsor Shamsia's plastic surgery treatment, and would be grateful to hear from those who may be able to help.

#### Inside the Newsletter Stories from Afghanistan:

- President Karzai visits India
- Roads to connect villages with major cities
- The electricity problem in Kabul to be solved
- President Zardari visits Afghanistan
- Afghan Star Documentary wins Sundance Awards
- Afghan Presidential Elections Date Announced
- Clerics Help Curb Maternal Mortality
- 12000 more children to go to school in Baghlan

#### Afghan Nordic Relations:

- Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt visits Afghanistan
- Dr Rubin discusses regional and local approaches to solve Afghanistan issue
- Afghan Ministry of Health Receives \$12.5 m from Norwegian government
- Norwegian PRT Restructured



## President Karzai visits India

The President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan visited India on 12 of January 2009 at the invitation of Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. President Karzai's visit was to express Afghanistan's solidarity with the Government and people of India in the wake of the Mumbai terrorist attack that took the lives of 165 people.

A joint press statement was issued by both leaders calling for compliance with bilateral, multilateral and international obligations of states to prevent terrorism in any manner originating from territories under their control.

Dr. Singh conveyed to President Karzai that, following the completion of the road from Zaranj to Delaram in South-western Afghanistan, a second major infrastructure project, the Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul transmission line and the sub-station at Chimtala in Northern Afghanistan, will be handed over shortly to the Government of Afghanistan. The leaders expressed their satisfaction that the construction of the Afghan Parliament, a symbol of the common commitment of both countries to pluralism and democracy, has also begun.

The two leaders reaffirmed the special relationship between India and Afghanistan, to build a strong, united, and prosperous Afghanistan and to work towards peace, stability and development of the entire region.

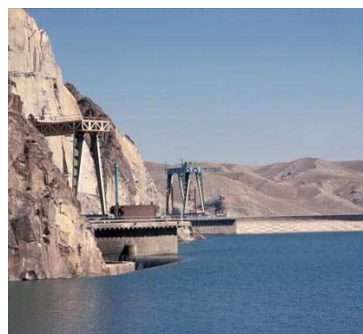


## Roads to connect villages with major cities

Having constructed 10,000km of roads under the project called National Rural Program (NRP), the government of Afghanistan is now constructing 2500 km of new roads all over Afghanistan under the same program. The budget appropriated for this phase of the program is USD 160 million.

Under NRP so far 3900 villages across Afghanistan have been connected to the highways.

An inter-ministerial committee has been developed between the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation, Finance, and Labour and Social Works to ensure the maintenance of the roads constructed. The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development that has the ownership of the program, says that all the roads constructed under this program meet the international norms and standards.



## The electricity problem in Kabul to be solved

The Afghan Ministry of Water and Energy has announced that the project of providing 40 mega

watts of electricity to Kabul has been completed, so the entire city of Kabul will soon have 24 hours electricity.

The ministry has also said that the governments of Afghanistan and Uzbekistan had reached an agreement that the latter will provide Afghanistan with 300 mega watts of electricity which will also reach Afghanistan by the end of this year.



## President Zardari visits Afghanistan

The President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari visited Afghanistan on the invitation of President Hamid Karzai. Both leaders spoke about the issues of mutual and regional concern and vowed to fight more closely against terrorism. "We hope that this friendship, this new relationship achieves what is desired by both nations, which means a strong fight against terrorism," said President Karzai in a joint press conference after a meeting with his Pakistani counterpart.

During the visit, Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Rangin D. Spanta and Pakistani Foreign Minister Mr. Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi agreed to develop a joint comprehensive strategy for combating terrorism and strengthening bilateral cooperation and closely work with each other as well as with the international community to counter and completely eliminate the menaces of militancy, extremism and terrorism from the region. They also pledged to increase cooperation in order to promote bilateral and regional cooperation.



## Afghan Star Documentary Wins Sundance Awards

The documentary of Afghan Star won two awards of Sundance. It is the first time an Afghan film made it to Sundance, and has won both the World Cinema Documentary Audience and Directors award. The people of Afghanistan were over the moon hearing the news.

The film is an observational documentary following a local TV series by the same name: Afghan Star. Similar to American Idol, this is a TV music talent search, complete with judges, desperate contestants. Of course this is more than just a TV show: with the background of Taliban repression this is a struggle and a bid for freedom. Singing has become the youth of Afghanistan's weapon of choice.

The film, a British and Afghan co-production, is not a glossy documentary -- you try that in a war zone -- but it captures the spirit and energy of the country and reveals the true desires of the young people who make, watch and contest in Afghan Star.



## Afghan Presidential Election Date Announced

The Independent Elections Commission of Afghanistan announced on 29 January 2009

that it had decided to convene the country's presidential election on 20 August.

Azizullah Ludin, the chairman of the Independent Election Commission, said that the decision would give election workers enough time to register candidates and set up voting machinery. He added that the date would allow the presidential election to take place under more favourable summer weather.



## Clerics Help Curb Maternal Mortality

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that Afghan religious scholars using their influence play a significant role in curbing maternal mortality among people in rural communities where high rates of illiteracy and lack of awareness about health issues contribute to the deaths of thousands of mothers and children every year.

Mohammad Tawasoli, an imam at a mosque in Wardak Province, central Afghanistan, tells the local community to maintain at least a two-year gap between pregnancies and avoid child marriage - to help mother and infant remain healthy.

"Islam does not allow the killing of the foetus but it also does not want mothers to face health risks because of... constant pregnancies," Tawasoli said.

"Islam does not oppose delayed pregnancies if this helps the

health and well-being of mothers," he told IRIN in Kabul, adding that those who think otherwise believe in superstition rather than true Islamic principles.

"Child marriage and forced marriage are in contradiction with Islam," said Abdul Karim, an imam in Kabul.

The ministries of women's affairs and religious affairs, backed by a few aid agencies, have been working to involve religious leaders in a strategy to reduce pregnancy-related maternal mortality.

## 12,000 more children to go to school in Baghlan

The Ministry of Education of the Afghanistan in collaboration with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has completed the construction of twelve new schools in the Baghlan province in the north of Afghanistan. The schools will be opening up educational facilities for more than 12,000 students.



The schools will be ready for use in time for Afghan New Year and the official start of the school year in the end of March. "We are very happy and pleased with UNICEF for supporting education in Baghlan province. With the completion of these schools 12,044 students (6,075 boys and 5,969 girls) will be educated by 444 teachers," said Mr. Ali Shah, the Deputy Head of the Education Department in Baghlan province.



## **Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt visits Afghanistan**

Swedish Prime Minister Mr. Fredrik Reinfeldt visited Swedish troops stationed in the North of Afghanistan in the City of Mazar-e Sharif on 20 January. Mr. Reinfeldt visit was aimed to learn about the realities on the ground. His several meetings during the visit, he emphasized the importance of open dialogue with the local population. Shortly after arriving, the prime minister spoke via a video link to the Society and defence Annual National Conference in Sälen, Sweden. During the conference he said: "The soldiers told me about the success, about the good contact with local population, and coordination about civil and military efforts."

In a recent decision, the Swedish government decided to increase its troop level from 389 to 500 soldiers. The Swedish Armed Forces have also decided to send three Stridsfordon 90 combat vehicles to Afghanistan, which are scheduled to arrive there in March this year.

## **Dr Rubin in Oslo discussing regional and local approaches to solve Afghanistan issue**

In a recent article published in Foreign Affairs, "From Great Game to Grand Bargain", Barnett R. Rubin and Ahmed Rashid

argued that to reverse the collapse of security in Afghanistan, there was a need for a "major diplomatic initiative involving all the regional stakeholders in problem-solving talks and setting out road maps for local stabilization efforts". Dr Rubin spoke about this article at an event in the Afghanistan seminar series arranged by the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) and the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO). During his presentation in Oslo Dr Rubin sketched several regional challenges that have an effect on the situation in Afghanistan. He also suggested ways to deal with these challenges which involved states such as Pakistan, China, India, Russia, and Iran.



However, he emphasized that he did not see the article as a recipe on how to "fix" all of Afghanistan and the region's problems. He also emphasized that focusing on the regional issues did not mean that the internal challenges can be ignored; both of these dimensions need to be addressed.

## **Afghan Ministry of Public Health receives \$12.5 million from Norwegian government**

Afghan Ministry of Public Health Received USD 12.5 million from Norwegian Government for the



implementation of Results Based Financing (RBF) project in 10 provinces for 3 years.

The pilot RBF project in Afghanistan would offer non-government organizations a performance-based bonus for achieving improved coverage of essential maternal and child health (MCH) services such as use of skilled family planning, care during pregnancy, use of skilled health workers during childbirth, care to mother and baby etc.

## **Norwegian PRT restructured to become more efficient**

The Norwegian PRT in the Faryab Province of Afghanistan has started the process of restructuring its organization. A working group has developed a new strategy for the PRT, with the over-arching objective of providing help more efficiently to the Afghan people.

The first step of this reorganizing is to have the civilian personnel in the PRT move out of the military environment. The civilians will then set up facilities in the city from which they will run their activities.

"Moving the civilians is just one out of many implications of this new strategy," State Secretary in the Defence Ministry Espen Barth Eide stated. He emphasized that since the PRTs were meant as a temporary solution when they were designed, it is important to keep developing them to best suit the needs of Afghanistan.

**NYHETSREVY - January 2009**  
Monthly Newsletter of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in Oslo, accredited to Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland

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

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