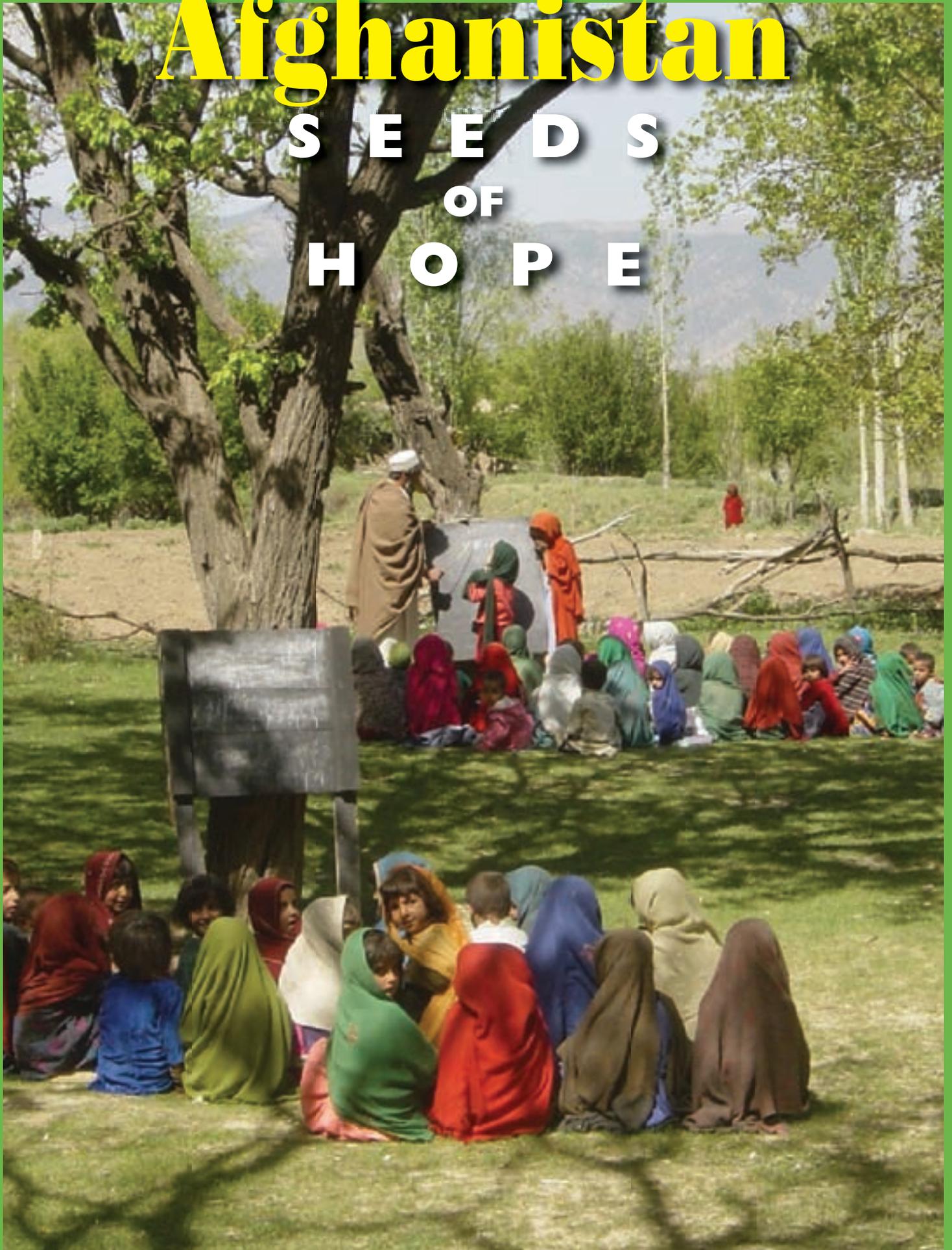


Afghanistan

S E E D S
O F
H O P E



My vision of Afghanistan is of a modern State that builds on our Islamic values promoting justice, rule of law, human rights and freedom of commerce, and forming a bridge between cultures and civilizations; a model of tolerance and prosperity based on the rich heritage of the Islamic civilization.

— Afghan President Hamid Karzai
United Nations General Assembly
September 12, 2002



Afghanistan: Seeds of Hope

We've seen in Afghanistan that the road to freedom can be hard; it's a hard struggle. We've also seen in Afghanistan that the road to freedom is the only one worth traveling. Any nation that sacrifices to build a future of liberty will have the respect, the support, and the friendship of the United States of America.

— President George W. Bush
October 11, 2002

Whether on a busy street in Kabul or at an irrigation dam in rural Pulimattak, the Afghan people are looking forward to a new beginning for their country, after more than two decades of destruction and conflict.

The United States and the rest of the international community joined with the Afghan people in this historic renewal. We are committed to helping the Afghans themselves build their country into a prosperous, democratic, independent and peaceful nation that fully respects human rights.

Since Afghan leaders first came together to plan the future of their country in Bonn in late 2001, significant achievements have been made to help reclaim their country from its recent history of war and oppression. Four million students are now enrolled in school, with a tenfold increase in the enrollment of girls. More than 2.5 million refugees and internally displaced persons have returned home.

With the help of over \$900 million provided annually by the United States over the last two years, Afghanistan has also seen the construction or repair of 550 health clinics and 250 schools. Roads, including the Kabul-Kandahar highway, are being rebuilt, seven new battalions of the Afghan National Army have been trained, and the society has seen both an increase in security, and the return of its women citizens to public life.

This ongoing transformation is a tribute to a broad international partnership for Afghan recovery and to the vision of President Karzai and his team. The images and text in this brochure document the remarkable changes that have been taking place in almost every aspect of daily life since the fall of the Taliban regime. In each aspect — from education to the economy — Afghan men and women tell their own story of how their lives have changed over the past two-and-a-half years.

There is still much that remains to be done, but President Bush has made it clear that the United States will stay the course. We are committed to working with the Afghan government and our international partners in cultivating the seeds of hope that have now been planted in Afghanistan.



Ambassador David Johnson
Coordinator for Afghanistan
U.S. Department of State



(Above) Schoolchildren in rural Kunar province wait to greet the commander of coalition forces in Afghanistan, Lt. Gen. Dan McNeill. Their school was built by U.S. troops and local villagers. (Right) Eighty percent of Afghan schools were left either severely damaged or destroyed by the end of Taliban rule. However, this did not dampen the country's enthusiasm for education. At least 1,000 schools are being rebuilt or rehabilitated over the next three years.



In 2000, an overwhelming 97 percent of Afghan girls did not attend school, and today only about 20 percent are literate. Tens of thousands of Afghan girls are now attending school for the first time in years.



Three million students, 30 percent of whom were girls, returned to the classroom for the 2002 school year. To meet the high demand for education, the international community is providing textbooks, training teachers, and rebuilding damaged schools.



Karima Ghaznawi of Mazar-e-Sharif counts herself as lucky never to have become a refugee from her native land, despite the constant upheaval of the past two decades in Afghanistan.

After finishing high school, she was able to enroll in one year of medical school but had to leave after Taliban authorities began to discourage women from pursuing education and professional careers.

With the Taliban's removal, she is free to pursue her dream of a career in medicine again, and will re-enroll in medical school next year.

Ghaznawi said that now, women have much more freedom of choice.

"They can study, they can work at government offices and non-governmental organization [NGO] offices. Our schools are open and our university is open," she said.

In post-Taliban Afghanistan, education has returned as a high priority for all of its citizens. "In our schools and university, without discrimination, men and women can study." 

Rebuilding



Work has begun near Durani to repair the Kabul-Kandahar highway with the help of an initial \$80 million donation by the United States. The road is the main artery between the two cities, and will connect more rural communities in between, such as Durani.

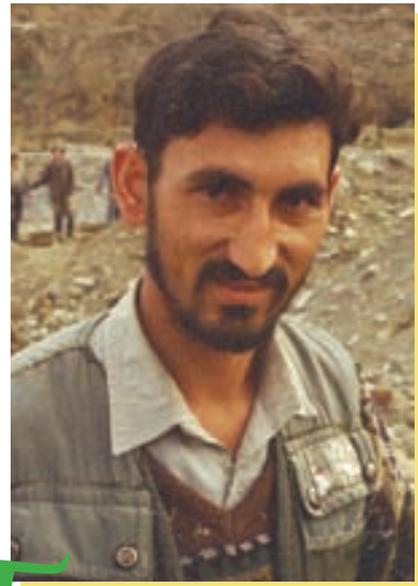


The United States has supported over 225 spot reconstruction projects such as government buildings, schools, roads, bridges, irrigation systems and other community projects that provide local workers with paid jobs. (Right) Workers are restoring the restaurant at one of Kabul's most famous and renowned sites, the Babur Gardens.





Workers from Pulimattak on the Shomali Plains build the Mattak water division dam on the Ghorband River. The United States gave \$2.7 million to be used for the project, which will facilitate the region's agricultural industry, the residents' primary means of livelihood.



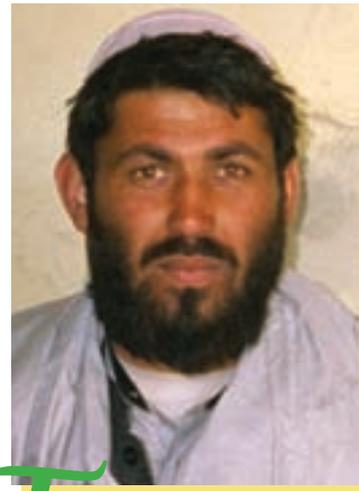
The employment of Afghan civilians in development projects funded by international donors has helped to ease high unemployment rates in Afghanistan, exacerbated by more than two decades of armed conflict and civil upheaval. **Khanullah**, from the Shomali Plains, north of Kabul, described life under the Taliban as “very harsh because there was absolutely no work.”

He now is employed by the Reconstruction Agency for Afghanistan, a local NGO, as a day laborer to help build an irrigation dam at Pulimattak. The dam, besides providing labor and salaries, will also benefit local farmers.

“I am very optimistic for the future because we are free now. We are free and things are plentiful. And one can find work.” 



Teams of mine detection dogs and handlers practice their skills at Bagram Air Base, the headquarters of coalition military forces in Afghanistan, before deployment to the Kandahar area. The dog handlers and minesweeping personnel were brought from Bosnia by the RONCO Company. According to the United Nations, 2.8 million explosive devices were cleared from 320 million square meters of Afghan land. However, a further 815 million square meters have yet to be cleared.



The prevalence of land mines in Afghanistan continues to be a regular source of death and injury throughout the country, and an international effort is underway to clear minefields and increase mine awareness among the population.

Demining activities represent one of the country's largest sources of employment, recruiting Afghans like **Abdel Kamaal**, who journeyed to Kabul to receive training in identifying and deactivating mines before seeking employment with an Italian demining team.

"The older mine clearing equipment did not work very well," said Kamaal. "There has been new mine clearing equipment that arrived here from Italy, and I am being trained on that, and then I am being tested in Qargha."

Abdel Kamaal's course on the newer demining equipment will last 40 days. Some individuals are also trained to work with mine detection dogs.

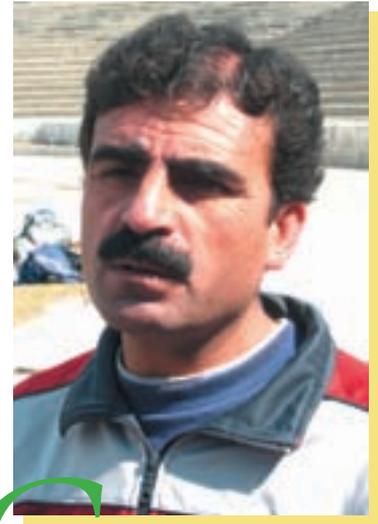
"I had attended the mine clearing course three years ago and waited to land a job but I was unsuccessful," he said. "This time, this particular company asked me to attend this course on the new equipment [so] the prospect of having a job is good!" 



Afghanistan's national football team played its first official matches since 1984 in Busan, South Korea in late 2002. In Ghazi Stadium, the team practices for the preliminary rounds of the 2004 Asian Cup. The national team is both a symbol of pride, and a sign that life is returning to normal after decades of conflict.



A gymnastics team practices on the grounds of Habibiyya High School in Kabul prior to the start of the 2003 school year. After years of neglect, sports teams are returning, including basketball, martial arts, and women's volleyball. Afghanistan and the International Olympic Committee are also working to enable the country's participation in the 2004 Olympic Games to be held in Athens.



Ghazi stadium in downtown Kabul achieved a dark notoriety during the Taliban era as a site for public executions. Afghanistan's national football program also suffered, noted the team's trainer, **Habib Ullahniazi**.

"It was very difficult. When we would train them and they would be ripe for football, they would go and become refugees. More than fifty of my football students are now in the West — in Germany, and the United States," he said.

Now, with players of all ages practicing for national and regional matches, Coach Ullahniazi is "extremely hopeful" for the future of Afghan sports.

However, he sees many needs for the country that require support from the international community, as well as input from Afghans as to what their priorities should be.

"I hope those who promised us assistance, according to our needs, will keep their word and deliver to us what we badly need," he said. 

A National Army

Afghan National Army (ANA) recruits practice guarding a perimeter, while Afghan and U.S. trainers look on. With its integrated battalions, the ANA is not only enhancing security, but is also helping to break down ethnic barriers within the country.



Afghanistan's new national army is being trained at the Kabul Military Training Center in Pul-E Charkhi. The Coalition Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force, which has been rebuilding and refurbishing schools, clinics, wells, and bridges across the country, restored the facility.



(Left) Members of the ANA's 5th battalion listen to their general during their graduation ceremony. By mid-2004, the ANA will consist of 10,000 troops. As they gain more experience and proficiency in military skills, Afghan non-commissioned officers are gradually taking over the training, which has been performed by French, British and U.S. soldiers.



The Afghan National Army is beginning to deploy all around the country to increase stability and support the national agenda set by the central government under President Karzai, elected by the country's Loya Jirga in June, 2002.

It also serves as a force to help integrate the country's various ethnic groups, where, by design, each new battalion is integrated as much as possible with recruits from the Tajik, Pashtun, Hazara, Uzbek and other communities.

First Sergeant **Rahim Ullah**, an ethnic Pashtun, is one of the Afghan trainers for the new battalions. He remembers life growing up under Taliban rule as a "very harsh" period.

"Every day there were beatings because someone did not have a long enough beard, if they had a haircut, or if they were walking with a woman of their household. [The Taliban authorities] would stop and question what they were doing with them. But any answer that one would give was unsatisfactory, so life was very difficult," said Ullah.

But he expressed his hopes for a better future, doing his part to help ensure "that our children will once again be educated to serve this country."

"I am very hopeful for the future — that it will be a peaceful future that all Afghans from North and South, East and West, will work together as one nation for the rebuilding of this devastated land," he said. "Enough of this darkness." 🌿



Today in Afghanistan, a window of opportunity is opening.... For the first time in many years, the international community is united around a vision of the country's future.

The people of Afghanistan, battered yet resilient, are looking to us for assistance. We must not and we cannot turn our backs on them.

— Kofi Annan, U.N. Secretary General
Tokyo Donor's Conference
January 21, 2002

As the eyes of the world focus elsewhere, we should not forget that the experience of Afghanistan is a proving ground for whether the international community can stay the course beside a fragile country as it builds itself up from the aftermath of conflict.

— James Wolfensohn
World Bank President
February 27, 2003



We will continue to work with the Transitional Authority to create a secure and prosperous future regardless of events elsewhere in the world. And it is essential that the wider international community does the same.

— Rt. Hon. Chris Patten
European Union Commissioner
for External Relations
*Brussels Afghanistan
Development Forum
March 17, 2003*

Pakistan has given its commitment to the Karzai government as well as to the Bonn process, and would continue to support that process and work with our Afghan brothers for the restoration and promotion of peace, and for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan.

— Spokesman
Pakistani Foreign Office
July 9, 2002

Reclaiming Afghan Culture



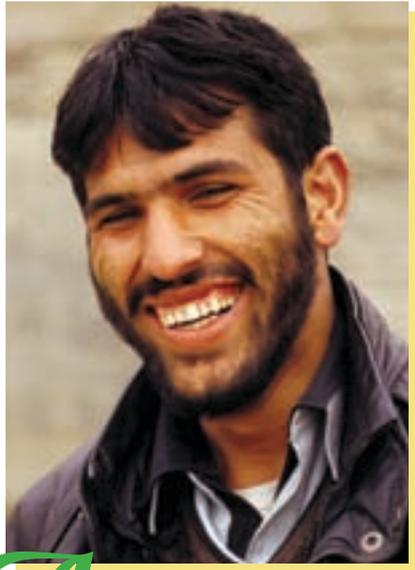
The Taliban's religious council banned most music and dancing. In November 2001, residents of Herat celebrated the demise of the regime with traditional percussion instruments.



(Left) Mazar-e-Sharif's Blue Mosque is a magnificent and sacred structure of cobalt blue and turquoise minarets, attracting visitors and pilgrims throughout the world. It escaped much of the damage that befell other cherished sites, such as the Babur Gardens in Kabul (above). A local Afghan NGO is restoring the gardens and the tomb of Moghul Emperor Babur Shah with funding from donors such as the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.



Twenty-two thousand Afghan Muslims were able to make the hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca in 2003 with the help of the central government. In March, cars were decorated throughout the country and driven to airports to welcome the pilgrims home.



Ahmad Kabir described his days as an engineering student in Kabul under the Taliban:

“When the Taliban came to Kabul, they attacked our district. They came to our district; they burned our houses, gardens, etcetera. It was really bad for us.”

He has now found work as a civil engineer, restoring the restaurant in Kabul's Babur Gardens, sharing a dream with other city residents to return this historic landmark to its once renowned beauty. The gardens and its surrounding neighborhoods were almost completely destroyed during the country's civil war in the 1990's.

“Now I am very happy because the American soldiers came and they brought peace to Kabul. ... When peace comes to our country, we will be finished with all the problems.”

With his new job adding to his sense of financial security, Kabir said he is hoping to get married and start a family in the near future. 



Women refugees from Bamian Province sign up for coal distribution from the non-governmental organization Community Habitat Finance (CHF) in a Kabul suburb. The women and their families stayed in Kabul through the winter because food and shelter were more available than in their home districts.



CHF and other NGOs helped refugees survive by providing blankets, stoves and coal. One CHF worker said that despite the poignant scenes, the deplorable conditions for the returning refugees in the city were still better than what they would face in their rural homes during the winter.



Most of the women waiting for coal distribution in the Dasht-i-Barchi area of Kabul are widows, and members of Afghanistan's Hazara minority. CHF organized a school nearby for their children.



In the former Russian Cultural Center in central Kabul, returning refugees from Pakistani camps sought shelter for the winter before returning to their homes in the Shomali Plains.



During the years of civil war and Taliban rule, Afghans fled their homes for many reasons, including a lack of health care and educational opportunities, as well as strict behavioral codes and inhumane acts perpetrated by the regime.

Yaqoot, from Kabul, found herself confined to the house as a young girl after the Taliban took control of the capital, and her family found few economic prospects under the new regime.

"I basically stayed at home, and when it became almost impossible to live, my family moved to Pakistan," she said.

Although Yaqoot's family was able to find good work opportunities outside Afghanistan, they decided to return home after Afghan and coalition forces drove the Taliban out in November 2001.

No longer prohibited from being educated, she now studies computers and English back home in Kabul. Here, she holds flowers she received at a ceremony marking International Women's Day.

"I am extremely optimistic about the future, especially the future of women, who can be a productive part of the society towards progress and prosperity for this country," said Yaqoot. "I am hopeful." 



Housed in a former prison and interrogation center, the Afghan Media and Cultural Center, run by the French NGO AINA, is dedicated to training and supporting independent media in the country.



(Above) The center provides space and resources to produce independent newspapers, magazines, children's publications, and radio programs. (Left) Members of the photography staff are teaching the first photojournalism classes ever to be offered in Afghanistan.



The media center and AINA only assist independent media, an integral component of any democratic society. Its print, film and photography students are trained by AINA to be objective and productive journalists.



Fifty children, once beggars from needy families, are being trained at AINA, and are also employed to sell copies of the "Kabul Weekly," the only independent newspaper in the country. It is printed in Dari, Pashtu and English.



Independent Afghan media have returned to Kabul, following the era when all newspapers and other information sources in the capital were controlled by the government.

Under the Taliban, television was also banned, and women such as **Nadira Ayoubi** were prohibited from working outside the home, in journalism or other professions. She related that women could not guarantee their safety simply by wearing full-length veils or burkas, as demanded by the authorities.

"The Taliban would come to women who had burkas and would ask religious questions and if they could not answer those, they would be in trouble," said Ayoubi.

Now, with the Taliban removed from power, the new Afghan central government has passed laws encouraging the return of a free media, and international donors have lent their support to AINA, a French NGO, to help train a new generation of independent journalists.

AINA is helping Ayoubi to realize her dream of becoming a photographer, and she has been studying photojournalism for the past five months at the Afghan Media and Cultural Center in Kabul.

"I am very hopeful and optimistic about the future," she said. "For example today I went to three functions and took photos of those functions. I cannot predict the future, but as of this moment, I am optimistic and very hopeful." 



Flower Street in downtown Kabul has become one of the main shopping areas for various gems, jewelry, carpets, handicrafts, and of course, flowers.



The United States is helping the Afghan government gain better control over the new national currency by providing \$50 million to promote fiscal and banking reform, trade policy, legal and regulatory framework, and the privatization of state-owned banks and public sector enterprises.





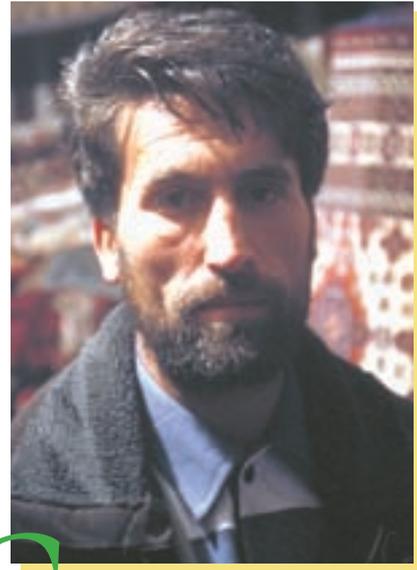
Afghanistan replaced its old currency, which had lost much of its value, in 2001. Business owners say the new currency has improved the economy, since shoppers are more confident of its value.



Afghanistan is slowly recovering from a dysfunctional economy based upon war and illicit drugs. Afghans and international donors are making a concerted effort to reestablish the traditional agriculture-based economy.



The United States and other international donors have provided more than \$25 million for cash-for-work or food-for-work projects. Afghans receive cash or food for providing services that benefit the community, such as transporting heating oil.



Chicken Street in central Kabul has become the central bazaar for items such as Afghan carpets, lapis jewelry, and silver boxes. As the capital has become more peaceful and stable following the end of the Taliban regime in late 2001, business has steadily increased for merchants like **Ahmad Shah**.

Shah remembers the challenging business climates of both the civil war years and the Taliban era, when “we could only take care of our daily problems and we could only find daily food.”

“I wanted to leave Afghanistan when the Taliban was here, but unfortunately I did not have enough money to get someone to take me to another country.”

Khan said he was twice jailed by the authorities simply because he was from northern Afghanistan and spoke Persian as his mother tongue. He was released only after his brother paid the Taliban 50,000 rupees in ransom.

He credits the new government and its reform of the Afghan currency with helping to revive the local economy. “Day by day, our businesses improve,” he said.

“Last year our business was not so very good, but this year the business is about fifty percent better. And I hope next year it will become better and better!”



Representatives from the town of Durani talk to U.S. officials about their high expectations for the Kabul-Kandahar road.



In contrast to recent years, an almost tangible sense of hope and expectation is now becoming prevalent throughout the country.



Afghan women, who have suffered both terrible oppression and neglect, are seeing new doors open.



Afghanistan is only in the beginning stages of its recovery, but its people have placed a priority upon educating their children and allowing them to live their lives free of war.



A nationwide program of U.S.-supported immunization has led to the vaccination of 4.26 million children against measles and polio.

FRONT COVER: Members of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan are visiting schools and talking to the teachers and elders to evaluate the need for and possible locations of schools. Most of the classes they visited in Paktia, including this one, are being held outdoors. **BACK COVER:** Blue Mosque, Mazar-e-Sharif.

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