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RETURN

Information Update

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ADVICE FOR CIRCULATION: This update is intended for Afghans abroad, as well as those displaced inside their country, to help them make an informed choice about returning to their homes. It is a public document and should be circulated as widely as possible.

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1. ANNOUNCEMENTS TO RETURNEES

Afghan refugees are advised to take note of the following:

- UNHCR now gives each returning refugee cash assistance in place of food and material assistance. This amount replaces the items distributed last year, including the wheat ration from WFP. Each returning refugee – regardless of age and family size - will receive US\$8 in addition to transport assistance. The new cash grant will be given to returning refugees at the appropriate encashment centre inside Afghanistan.
- UNHCR encashment centres in Afghanistan are now open in Mohmandara (Jalalabad), Daman (Kandahar), Pul-i-Khumri (Baghlan), Zaranj (Nimroz), Gardez (Paktia), Khost, Herat and Kabul.
- The Ministry of Public Works has announced that the Salang tunnel will be closed during the day from 07:00 hrs to 17:00 hrs until September 2004 because of the reconstruction of the road. (*Page - 9*)

2. VOTER REGISTRATION

Over 2,700,000 Afghans, approximately 1,800,000 men (67.7%) and 800,000 women (%32.3) have registered for the upcoming elections so far. The figure shows that the number of women participating is slowly increasing.

There are now 718 sites with 1,258 teams working across the country. There are still no sites in Daikundi, Paktika and Nuristan. Over the past week, the Ministry of Justice registered two new political parties, bringing the total number of registered parties to sixteen.

On 26 May, the Minister of Women Affairs, Habiba Sorabi, traveled to Farah province, where she attended a ceremony organised by the Department of Women's Affairs. During her visit, the Minister stressed the importance of women participating in the forth-coming election and urged all women to register to vote. Registration sites opened in Farah on 1 May and since then 14,918 Afghans have registered, which 30 percent of them are women.

In Khost on 27 May, the Governor hosted a meeting at Khost University to seek support for the electoral process and to pass on civic education messages. The meeting was attended by university students as well as representatives from the Electoral Secretariat and the local Department of Women's Affairs. And during Friday prayers on 28 May in Herat, Ismail Khan made a speech at the mosque during which he encouraged Afghans to register and to vote.

Mean while the Electoral Law has been signed by President Karzai.

3. TRANSPORTATION IN AFGHANISTAN

(Continued from the previous issue)

Northern Region

(i) Land Transportation:

Government Sector: Three buses are used for transportation of citizens to remote areas of Mazar-i-Sharif charging \$0.04 per person.

Private Sector: There are 13 buses and seven taxi agencies in Mazar-i-Sharif.

Taxi charges in the city range between \$0.40 – 1.00 depending on the distance travelled. Fares from Mazar-i-Sharif to other provinces vary from \$1.00 - \$4.40.

Pul-i-Khumri (PIK): There are 10 taxi agencies functioning in Pul-i-Khumri, and fares from PIK by Taxi, buses and minibuses to other provinces vary from \$2.00 (e.g. to Kunduz) -16.00 (e.g. to Badakhshan).

Kunduz and Takhar: There are three buses plus a number of private taxis and rickshaws available in the city.

Transportation from Kunduz to Dasht-i-Archi, costs about \$2.50 by taxi and \$2.00 by bus.

Maimana: There are two public transport agencies in this city. There is no government transportation agency in Faryab. Transportation by taxis and buses costs between \$0.50 (e.g. to Shirin Tagab district) - \$9.00 (e.g. to Herat) depending on the type of the vehicle and the distance.

Roads: At present, IOM and ACTED are working on rehabilitation of main roads in Maimana.

The main road between Kabul and Pul-i-Khumri (PIK) is asphalted.

The PIK-Mazar-Shibarghan road is asphalted and will be repaired and extended up to Andkhoy district of Faryab by a Korean NGO in the near future. The road between Shibarghan and Andkhoy to Herat is already gravelled. The road from Kunduz to Taluqan in Takhar Province is asphalted and to Faiz Abad in Badakhshan is gravelled. The road from Mazar to Hairatan border is asphalted and from Mazar to Agina border in Faryab Province is gravelled.

UNOPS is implementing several road rehabilitation projects. The main road between Aqcha and Mardian districts of Jawzjan as well as the road between Balkh and Dawlat Abad districts of Balkh province is under reconstruction. About 80 percent of this road is gravelled so far. Another eight road rehabilitation projects, which will connect the district centres in Balkh, Jawzjan, Sar-i-Pul and Samangan Provinces to each other, will start soon. Fifteen more road projects are planned in these four provinces for next year.

The main road from Mazar-i-Sharif airport to the east part of the Blue Mosque located behind the Rawza-i-Sharif will also be repaired by JICA, a Japanese NGO in near future.

(ii) Air Transportation:

Airports: There is one airport in Mazar-i-Sharif City having four aeroplanes for both military and civil aviation purposes. In addition, there are three airports in the region, which is located in Kunduz, Faiz Abad and Maimana.

Government Sector: Ariana Afghan Airline is the government airline with two domestic flights per week from Mazar-i-Sharif to Kabul on Sundays and Fridays, and to Herat once a week on Wednesdays. One way ticket to Kabul costs \$30.00 and to Herat \$32.00. In addition, Ariana Afghan Airline has international flights to different countries.

Private Sector:

Kam Air: It has established a sub office in Mazar-i-Sharif seven months ago and has domestic flights from Mazar-i-Sharif to Kabul, Herat, Jalalabad, Kunduz and Maimana six days a week

(there is no flight on Fridays). The ticket price ranges between \$10.00 – 50.00 to the mentioned cities.

Aseman Iranian Airline: It has flights to Mashad and Tehran and has established a sub office in Mazar-i-Sharif for ticket reservation.

Sources of Information: UNOPS, Public Health Department, Transportation Department, Airport Management Authorities, Kam Air and Ariana Airlines.

Southern Region

(i) Land Transportation

Government Sector: There are 32 buses in Kandahar City. The average fare inside the city is between \$0.06-0.12. Approximately 8,500 customers use these buses on daily basis. According to Kandahar Transportation Department (KTD), Kandahar City needs additional 30 buses to cover transportation needs in the city. Kandahar is the only city in the south to have city bus transport.

Private Sector:

Taxis: Kandahar is the only provincial city in the south where one can find taxis. There are 350 taxis in Kandahar City. The fare varies between \$0.10-0.20.

Buses: With the reconstruction of Kabul-Kandahar highway more than 100 private buses facilitate transportation between the mentioned cities. It costs \$4.00 from Kandahar to Kabul while travelling by private vehicles costs \$12.00. Currently there are no bus services between the five provinces in the region. Only small vehicles like Corolla are used to travel between the provinces. Average fare between the south eastern provinces varies between \$1.00-13.00.

(ii) Air Transport:

There is only one airport in the south which is located in the eastern part of Kandahar City. Ariana Afghan Airline does not have flights to this airport except during Hajj prayer time. However, the airport does receive UNHAS, UNAMA, PACTEC and ICRC flights.

Roads: Since last year nearly 30 km road in Kandahar City has been asphalted. The provincial government plans to implement its Master Plan by widening city streets. According to the Governor of Kandahar, 50 km roads inside the city will be asphalted in 2004. To further prevent traffic jams inside the city, the government is planning to construct a ring road around Kandahar City for trucks.

Sources of Information: Kandahar Governor, Kandahar Municipality, KDT, Kandahar Radio, Public Transport Companies, Ariana Afghan Airline and UNHCR logistic.

South eastern Region:

(i) Land Transportation:

Government Sector: According to Gardez Municipality, there are only three buses operating between cities in Paktia Province; two of them working between Gardez and Kabul and the third one between Gardez and Sayed Karam. There are no city buses and taxis in Gardez City.

Private Sector: Inside Gardez City, there is no regular transportation system; however, taxis and other types of vehicles are used for transportation between the provinces.

According to the Public Bus Station officials, fare from Gardez to Kabul is \$1.80 by taxi, \$1.60 by other cars and \$0.80 by buses. Fare from Gardez to Khost by different types of vehicles varies between \$1.50 - 2.60. Fare from Gardez to Ghazni varies from \$2.40-3.60 depending on the types of the vehicles.

There is no regular transport between Gardez-Sharan, and it costs \$29.00 per person by taxi and \$44.00 by private cars.

In Khost, according to the public transportation agencies, regular bus transport inside the city and from the city to the near villages does not exist, but taxis and other private cars are available at reasonable fares.

Taxis and other kinds of private cars are operating between Khost to Kabul and Gardez during the day time.

Fare per person from Khost to Gardez varies from \$3.00-4.00 by taxi, and it is \$1.50 by other cars. The fare from Khost to Kabul varies from \$6.00-7.00 by taxi and it is \$4.00 by other private cars, and from Khost to Jaji Maidan, Ghulam Khan and Babrak Tana border points from \$1.00-3.00.

Roads: So far, Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (DoRRD) and UNOPS repaired the following un-asphalted roads in Paktia Province.

- Gardez-Sayed Karam road (20 km) is gravelled and rehabilitation work on the culverts is going on.
- Gardez-Wazi Jadran road (40 km) is gravelled and work on culverts and bridges are continuing. 95% rehabilitation work of the Laka Tega Bridge (on the way to Khost) is completed.
- Most of the Gardez-Zurmat road (26 km) is gravelled.

According to the DoRR, 19 roads from Khost to Alisher, Tani, Jaji Maidan, Baak, Gorbuz, Qalandara, Musakhel districts were repaired last year.

Air Transportation: There is no government or private air transportation facilities for the public in the south eastern region.

Sources of Information: DoRRD, UNOPS and the Public.

Eastern Region:

(i) Land Transportation

Government Sector: At present, there are four buses available to provide transportation services between Jalalabad City and the suburbs of Behsud and Farm-i-Hada charging passengers \$0.08.

Private Sector: The public transport facilities in Jalalabad City is facilitated by different types of private cars, and fares from Jalalabad to Kabul vary between \$1.30-6.00, to Laghman \$0.60-1.00, to Kunar \$1.20-1.60 and to Torkham \$1.20-3.00.

Roads: Majority of asphalted streets in the centre of Jalalabad City need to be repaired. Jalalabad-Asmar road (122 km) will be rehabilitated and asphalted under Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) this year. In addition, a number of bridges will also be constructed and rehabilitated in near future.

Highways: A part of the Jalalabad-Kabul Highway is asphalted and some other parts of this road was repaired and gravelled over the last two years. Jalalabad-Tourkham and Jalalabad-Surkhrod roads are the only asphalted roads in the eastern region.

(ii) Air Transportation:

Government Sector: There are two airports in the eastern region, one in Jalalabad and the other in Kunar. The airport of Kunar is used only for Military Helicopters, as there is no Runway. There used to be Ariana flights between Kabul and Jalalabad, but it was stopped on December 2003, and it has not been resumed yet.

Private Sector: Kam Air recently has announced the start of its flights from Jalalabad to Kunduz and Mazar-i-Sharif on Sundays and to Herat on Thursdays. Fares from Jalalabad to Herat is \$54.00, to Kunduz \$16.00 and to Mazar-i-Sharif \$36.00.

Sources of Information: Private Transport Department, Government Bus Transport Department, the Public.

Western Region

(i) Land Transportation:

Government Sector: There is government city bus transport in Herat which charges \$0.06 per person.

Private Sector: There are 955 vehicles providing transportation services for the citizens around the city. Maximum fare within the Herat City is \$0.60 by taxi and \$0.06 by buses. However, fare for those travelling from Herat to surrounding villages varies between \$0.60-2.00, and to other provinces between \$6.00-20.00.

The average fare from Herat to Cheghcharan City in Ghor is \$10.00 per person. People are travelling by different kind of private cars between provincial cities. There are around 80 vehicles in Ghor, which are not sufficient to cover all transportation needs of the province.

There are three private transport agencies working in Farah province, operating with minibuses and small Toyota cars both with the same fares. Fares from Farah to Herat and other cities including Kabul vary from \$6.00-23.00.

There are three private transportation agencies in Badghis Province. There is no taxi transport system within the Badghis City. The fares from Badghis to other provinces range between \$6.00-13.00 and between the districts are between \$1.00-6.00.

In Nimroz Province, transportation facilities are available to serve travellers between Iran and Afghanistan. In Zaranj, the capital city of Nimroz, there are no taxi and city buses, but a special type of motorbikes. The fare between Nimroz and other provinces ranges between \$7.00-18.00 and to the districts between \$1.00-3.00 depending on the distance.

Roads: So far few roads are either asphalted or gravelled under the government and international NGOs construction and rehabilitation projects. Construction of Herat-Delaram road will start in near future. UNMACA reported that so far 80 km road between Herat and Adreskan district and road sides were cleared of mines. The mine clearance programme for this road will be completed in September 2005. In the western provinces, poor condition of roads and shortage of transportation facilities to the districts and villages, especially during the nights, are the main transportation problems in the region.

(ii) Air Transportation:

Government Sector: The Ariana Afghan Airline flies from Kabul to Herat every day, except Fridays, and sometimes twice a day. It also flies to Zaranj once a week. Ariana Afghan Airline flies from Herat to Mazar and Kabul directly. One way ticket to Mazar-i-Sharif costs \$30.00 and to Kabul \$50.00. It also flies from Zaranj to Herat and Kabul. One way ticket from Zaranj to Herat is \$32.00 and to Kabul is \$60.00.

Private Sector: Kam Air flies to Herat every day except Friday and Saturday. PacTech flies to Herat, Badghis, Farah, Nimroz and Ghor provinces serving the humanitarian organisations only. The Kam Air one way ticket from Herat to Mazar costs between \$30.00-40.00 and to Kabul \$46.00.

Aseman Airline (Iranian) is preparing to serve people between Kabul and Herat in Afghanistan and Mashad in Iran from June 2004. A return ticket from Herat to Mashad by Aseman Airline will cost \$148.00.

Sources of Information: Ariana, KamAire, UNMACA, Transport Dept, and Admin Section of Sub Office Herat.

4. SECURITY

Central Region:

Kabul: A man was arrested in the Qala-i-Wahed village square on charges of kidnapping a seven year old and 1st grade student of Khoshhal Meena School. On 19 May 2004, a taxi driver was arrested on 20 May 2004 accused of having tried to abduct two pupils from the Sitara School located in Joy-sheer of Kabul.

Northern, North Western Regions:

Faryab: About six people have been killed in armed clashes between supporters of General Dostum, leader of Junbish and General Hashem Habibi (commander of Army Division No 200 in Faryab) in Gurziwan District of Faryab Province on 10 May 2004.

In Gurziwan district, the situation remains uncertain with reports of clashes between the forces of General Hashim Habibi and militias loyal to General Dostum. In early April 2004, forces loyal to General Dostum and headed by Fatihullah, the military commander of Qaisar district, invaded Gurziwan and Belgirach districts forcing General Habibi to flee and seek refuge in the neighbouring Ghor Province.

South and South Eastern Regions:

Paktika: A group of armed men attacked a customs check post in Urgun district of Paktika Province on 11 May 2004. During the clashes between the two sides, five officials from the check post and three attackers were killed.

Kandahar: In Arghandab district, a newly laid mine killed two civilians on first week of May 2004. Taliban claimed responsibility for this incident.

Road Robberies: Several road robberies have been reported on the high way of Herat-Kandahar and Herat-Qala-i-Naw (QIN) during which several returnee families have been also affected twice during the first two weeks of May 2004. In the incidents, valuables and money have been taken from the passengers but no casualties have been reported. Afghan National Army (ANA) based in QIN deployed several troops in the area to investigate the robberies. So far, no one has been arrested.

5. ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Kabul Encashment Centre is open from Monday to Friday, 8:00-14:00h.
- Returnees have the free choice of either returning to their village (location of origin) or to any other place in Afghanistan – but not to the IDP camps.
- Returnees are advised to have their VRFs with them while travelling in the host country and Afghanistan. Anyone who is discovered to have received assistance before will not receive assistance. The entire family will be checked against the VRFs at the encashment centre. Returnees should not approach just any Encashment Centre (EC), but only the one marked on their VRFs; otherwise they will not receive assistance.
- Returnees are advised to ensure that their VRFs are correctly filled out in the country of asylum, as VRFs will not be issued or changed in Afghanistan.
- Returnees are also advised to have their vaccination and health records and those of their children with them for medical uses in clinics on the way to return and in Afghanistan. Children under age five will be vaccinated.
- The returnees' personal belongings are exempt from all customs duties. But please note that returnees can take neither commercial amounts of any item nor can they export government-proscribed items. Returnees should also advise their truck drivers not to carry business goods on returnee trucks in order to avoid delay at the border and undesired consequences at the customs. Returnees are advised to ensure the truck is empty when they begin loading their belongings.

Note: All returnees are advised NOT to travel during the night hours, and should seek shelter in a major settlement. Several robberies of returnees have recently been reported in Herat Province.

Note on Religion: In response to queries received from prospective returnees, UNHCR reminds that Afghanistan is a Muslim State and the Constitution states that “The religion of Afghanistan is the sacred religion of Islam” and “In Afghanistan, no law can be contrary to the sacred religion of Islam and the values of this constitution.” But the constitution also adds that “followers of other religions are free to perform their religion ceremonies within the limits of the provisions of law”.

Note on Land: UNHCR has learned about the existence of fraudulent schemes which extract money from refugees in return for a promise to get them government land for housing. As far as UNHCR is aware there is at present no legitimate government programme to distribute land. The general freeze on land distribution ordered by the President’s decree is still enforced. UNHCR would like to advise refugees not to pay any money for fraudulent land schemes and to check the

authenticity of any land scheme with the Representatives of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation in Pakistan and Iran or with UNHCR offices.

6. RADIO PROGRAMMES

UNHCR/BBC Radio Programme: There is a joint BBC/UNHCR radio programme specifically aimed at Afghan refugees, IDPs and returnees. The programme deals with the situation in Afghanistan, including security, development activities of the Afghan government, United Nations and other aid agencies, and the challenges that the Afghans, especially returnees, are facing.

The BBC radio programme is part of UNHCR's efforts to provide an accurate account of the situation in Afghanistan to those wishing to return home, and to offer a forum for a wider debate on all aspects of repatriation and reintegration. The programme is broadcast from Saturday to Thursday (6 days a week) on short wave frequencies of 13,605 kHz, and 9,795 kHz and on FM frequency of 89 MHz in Kabul.

Language	Days	GMT	Afghanistan Time
Pashto 1 st edition	Saturday to Monday	0916	1346
Pashto 2 nd edition	Tuesday to Thursday	1603	2033
Dari 1 st edition	Saturday to Monday	1616	2046
Dari 2 nd edition	Tuesday to Thursday	0846	1316

It has a section for listeners' letters. If you have any comments or questions please write to the following addresses. The BBC will include them in the programme as time permits.

Afghanistan: BBC, Post Box No. 1, Central Post Office, Kabul, Afghanistan.
 Pakistan: BBC, Post Box 255, University Town, Peshawar, Pakistan.
 Iran: UNHCR (BBC) – P.O.Box No. 91775 – 1876, Mashad, Iran.

BBC FM transmitters in different provinces of Afghanistan are as follows:

City	Kabul	Mazar	Jalalabad	Bamyan	Kunduz	Faizabad	Pul-i-Khumri	Herat
FM Trans. MHz	89.0	89.0	89.0	89.0	88.1	88.4	99.6	89.2

City	Gardez	Kandahar	Jabulsaraj	Shibirghan	Maimana	Khost	Taloqan
FM Trans. (MHz)	87.9	88.0	89.1	91.0	92.1	90.1	88.3

UNHCR/ERTV Radio Programme:

UNHCR has also a joint radio programme with Afghanistan Radio and TV, "Coming Home", as part of its efforts to provide information for refugees. The programme is broadcast on Sundays and Fridays (two days a week) at 2100 hrs for 30 minutes in Dari and Pashto languages.

7. PRICES OF ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES IN THE MARKET PLACE (WFP 3rd Week of May 2004)

Cities	Wheat (Kg)		W/Flour (Kg)		Bread (Kg)		Diesel/Litre	
	AFS	US\$	AFS	US\$	AFS	US\$	AFS	US\$
Kabul	8.0	0.16	11.0	0.22	15.0	0.30	15.0	0.30
Kandahar	9.0	0.18	11.0	0.22	12.0	0.24	17.5	0.35
Jalalabad	10.5	0.21	12.3	0.25	17.6	0.35	18.5	0.37
Herat	8.3	0.16	12.0	0.24	15.0	0.30	15.0	0.30
Mazar	8.0	0.16	9.0	0.18	15.0	0.30	18.0	0.36
Faizabad	8.0	0.16	11.4	0.23	17.6	0.35	22.0	0.44
Bamyan	8.5	0.17	12.9	0.26	18.0	0.36	19.0	0.38

Cities	One year old Live Sheep		Casual Labour/day		Exchange Rate		Wheat / Labour Day
	AFS	US\$	AFS	US\$	AFS	US\$	Kg
Kabul	4,400	87.82	130.0	2.59	50.10	1	16.3
Kandahar	3,600	72.29	120.0	2.41	59.80	1	13.3
Jalalabad	4,050	81.00	116.0	2.31	50.20	1	11.0
Herat	4,000	79.21	125.0	2.48	50.50	1	15.1
Mazar	3,600	71.57	165.0	2.28	50.30	1	20.6
Faizabad	3,700	74.15	150.0	3.01	49.90	1	18.8
Bamyan	3,700	73.71	100	1.99	50.20	1	11.8

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