

AFGHANISTAN

ABDUL SAMAD

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APRIL & MAY 2009

Review: The people of Afghanistan will succeed!" the 91-year-old Zahir Shah told the assembly to applause. The parliamentary and provincial council elections were held on 18 September 2005. Afterwards, the first results were declared on 9 October. Final results were delayed by accusations of fraud, and were announced on 12 November. Former warlords and their followers gained majority of the seats in both the Lower House and provincial councils. Women won around 28% of the seats in the Lower House, six seats more than the 25% guaranteed in the Afghan Constitution which was launched in 2004. Approximately twelve million voters were eligible to vote for the 249 seats of the Wolesi Jirga, the Lower House of Parliament, and the 34 provincial councils.

Parliament: Minister for Information and Culture, Abdul Karim Khoram was summoned to the Lower House on the 18th of April 2009 to provide an explanation as to why he is not implementing the media law which was approved by the Lower House six months ago. Minister Khoram informed that this law has not reached him through proper legal channels; therefore, he can not implement it. After extensive question and answer session, 55 MPs agreed with the Minister's explanation and 71 disagreed. MPs concluded that they want to summon the Minister again in the near future.

Lower House MPs called Minister Khoram for further interpellation on the 20th of April 2009, and from the 123 MPs present in the Lower House on that day, majority MPs voted in favour of Minister Khoram to continue his work as the Minister of Information and Culture.

Majority of the MPs was absent on the 22nd of April 2009, therefore, the Lower House could not continue with its general session on that day. Those MPs who were present in the house said that a large number of MPs are on regular visits to foreign countries. MPs asked that when MPs return from their visits, they should present their reports about the visit to the house.

Lower House MPs demanded from the government to make the status of the foreign forces in Afghanistan legal under the Afghan laws within one week. Lower House MPs were discussing the killing of more than 100 civilians in the Balabool district of Farah province on the 6th of May 2009. MPs considered the coalition forces operation in the mentioned district to be in clear violation of the Afghan constitution.

Majority Lower House MPs called on the government once again to legalize the existence of the foreign forces in Afghanistan. A number of MPs who protested outside the Lower House building said that the continuous killing of Afghan

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civilians can not be tolerated anymore.

Lower House MPs of the Afghan parliament declared on the 20th of May 2009, that this house will not approve any international agreement, convention or treaty signed by Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, since this house had delivered a vote of no confidence in Spanta in 2007. The SAARC agreement and an agreement to exchange prisoners with the United Arab Emirates were mentioned to be included in these agreements.

On this day Lower House MPs also discussed the continued tenure of President Karzai after the 22nd of May 2009, when his term as the President ends. A number of MPs stressed that according to the constitution of Afghanistan, President Karzai is no longer the President of Afghanistan after the 22nd of May 2009; however, there were other MPs who said that it would be better for the President to remain in the office until a new President is elected.

The Judicial Affairs Commission of the Lower House discussed the issues of Afghan prisoners in the Guantanamo prison with the Attorney General on the 24th of May 2009. The Attorney General said that a total of 616 prisoners have been transferred to Kabul and 26 are still remaining in Guantanamo. The dossiers of 292 prisoners have been referred to the courts. The Attorney General added that 397 prisoners are being held at Bagram air base.

The Defence Affairs Commission of the Lower House discussed the flights of the international forces' aircrafts flying and landing at the Bagram airbase with the residents of the area. The residents

complained of the excessive noise of the aircrafts taking off and landing at Bagram Airbase on their children and women. The people of the area would like relevant officials to pay attention to this issue.

On the 26th of May 2009, the complaints hearing commission of the Lower House discussed the cases of a number of Afghans whose lands or houses are grabbed by powerful persons. Mrs. Alia, who lives in the fifth district of Kabul, presented her case to the mentioned commission which was about the part of her home taken by a property developer named Haji Yunus. She tried to set herself on fire; however, security officials prevented her from doing so. Mrs. Alia informed the commission that Haji Yunus is not satisfied with taken part of her house and is now after her entire home and because he is a powerful person relevant institutions are not pursuing her case. Members of the commission decided that Haji Yunus should come before this commission soon.

The Lower House approved the counter narcotics law on the 27th of May 2009 after almost one year's deliberation.

Elections: A gathering that was going to support the candidacy of Zalmay Khalilzad for the Presidential election was disturbed by the local people of Ghazni on the 12th of April 2009. According to the local media, some people gathered in one of the local hotels to express their support to Khalilzad. However, a short while later, others entered into that hotel and broke the windows of the hotel disrupting the gathering. One of the protesters said to the media that they will protest against the

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candidacy of Khalilzad wherever people gather to support him.

Sayed Fazil Sancharaki, the Spokesman of the United Front Headed by Burhanudin Rabani, announced on the 15th of April 2009, that Abdullah Abdullah is the Front's candidate for the Presidential election and it will be announced to the media soon. Abdullah served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs during the Interim and Transitional Governments.

On the 5th of May 2009, President Karzai and Richard Holbrook, the US Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan discussed the Afghan Presidential election. According to the government funded Anis daily, the issues of US assistance for the Afghan election, the importance of holding a general and transparent election and the international community helping with the security, as well as Afghans having the right to become candidates and the right to vote in these elections, as well as giving all the candidates a fair opportunity to introduce themselves to the people were discussed.

The Afghan election commission announced the dates for the registration of candidates for the Presidential and provincial councils' elections. The candidates can register with the election commission from the 25th of April to the 8th of May 2009.

According to the local media reports, a total of 44 presidential candidates registered with the IEC by the end of registration date.

Shukria Barakzai, Lower House MP from Kabul and the Head of the third-line Parliamentary group in the Lower House called on the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and the In-

dependent Election Commission (IEC) on the 9th of May 2009, one day after the final date of registration for the Presidential candidates. She said that these commissions should investigate and pay serious attention to the peoples' complaints in relation to the background of the presidential candidates and their deputies. MP Barakzai added that human rights violators and war criminals must not be allowed to participate in the future political life of Afghanistan.

FEFA (Free and Fair Election Foundation) said to the local media on the 11th of May 2009 that a number of presidential and provincial councils' elections candidates violated the registration process. FEFA added that a number of provincial council candidates have been intimidated by powerful persons and a number of presidential candidates have taken advantage of government resources while registering. FEFA said that the current President, Hamid Karzai is one of these violators. When he went to the IEC to register, the roads leading to the IEC were closed for five hours and other candidates were not able to register during this time. FEFA claims that its monitors reported one hundred cases of violation when candidates have used government cars and security staff at the time of registering and this in itself is misusing government and public resources for personal use. FEFA added that it is concerned about the delay in the establishment of the election complaints hearing commission.

A large number of supporters of the former Minister of Interior, Ali Ahmad Jalali gathered in Kabul on the 15th of May 2009 to express their support for Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, who is a candidate for the Presidential election to be held on the 20th of August 2009. Jalali

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himself was reported to be a potential candidate but he did not register as a candidate for upcoming elections.

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) released the preliminary list of the presidential candidates on the 16th of May 2009. The IEC informed that the people have one week to lodge their complaints with the IEC in relation to the candidates' background. The IEC has asked the people to lodge their complaints; however, the Head of the IEC Azizullah Ludin informed the media that there are no legal provisions in the current laws to stop anyone from becoming a candidate.

Following is the preliminary list of the candidates:

1. Shanwaz Tanai: First Deputy is Nisar Ahmad Salemi and Second Deputy is Mohammad Jan Pamir.
2. Abdulah Abdulah: First Deputy Humayoun Shah Asefi and Second Deputy Cheragh Ali Cheragh.
3. Mohammad Akbar Bai: First Deputy Habib Khan and Second Deputy Mohammad Anwar Hussaini.
4. Mahboobullah Koshani: First Deputy Mohammad Zaman Atrafi and Second Deputy Mohammad Sharif Tarakhil.
5. Hamid Karzai: First Deputy Mohammad Qasim Fahim and Second Deputy Mohammad Karim Khalili.
6. Abdul Hasib Aryan: First Deputy Abdul Fatah Ghanikhil and Second Deputy Mirza Mohammad Mia.
7. Mohammad Sarwar Ahmaddzai: First Deputy Mohammad Karim Jalili and Second Deputy Sayed Rasool.
8. Bismillah Shir: First Deputy Mohammad Hussain Tawhidi and Second Deputy Sikandar Khan Hussain.
9. Shah Mohmod Popal: First Deputy Alim Rahiq and Second Deputy Shah Jahaan.
10. Abdul Jabar Sabit: First Deputy Mohammad Ali Mohammadi and Second Deputy Abdul Jabar Raufi.
11. Mutasimbillah Mazhabi: First Deputy Mohammad Rawza Baqi and Second Deputy Eftikhar Ahmad Yousofzai.
12. Abdul Salam Racketi: First Deputy Mohammad Ajmal Habib Safi and Second Deputy Mohammad Sadiq.
13. Moeenudin Aulfati: First Deputy Khan Mohammad and Second Deputy Nadia.
14. Shahla Atta: First Deputy Abdul Habib Siar and Second Deputy Gul Mohammad Urozgani.
15. Forozan Fana: Nasimullah Darman and Second Deputy Ghulam Jailani Satari.
16. Bashir Ahmad Bezhan: First Deputy Abdul Ghafar Erfani and Second Deputy Fatema Naeemi.
17. Abdul Ghafoor Zoori: First Deputy Mohammad Zahir Aslami and Second Deputy Abdul Rashid Payman.
18. Mirwais Yaseeni: First Deputy Ammanullah Payman and

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- Second Deputy Abdul Qayoom Sajadi.
19. Sayed Karim Jalal: First Deputy Faizullah Daqiq and Second Deputy Ghulam Abas Waizzada Behsoodi.
20. Ghulam Farooq Nejrab: First Deputy Abdul Wakil and Second Deputy Ghulam Jailani Sediqi.
21. Ramazan Bashardost: First Deputy Mohammad Mousa Barakzai and Second Deputy Afifa Marouf.
22. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai: First Deputy Mohammad Ayoub Rafiqi and Second Deputy Mohammad Ali Nabizada.
23. Mohammad Hashim Tawfiqi: First Deputy Shah Wali Rohani and Second Deputy Ghulam Ali Amin.
24. Zabiullah Ghazi Nooristani: First Deputy Sayed Yousuf Shajan Pacha and Second Deputy Aqa Sayed.
25. Habib Mangal: First Deputy Mohammad Dawood Rawesh and Second Deputy Nafas Jahid.
26. Mohammad Dawood Mirakai: First Deputy Mohammad Kabir and Second Deputy Gulistan Maraj.
27. Hassan Ali Sultani: First Deputy Mesri Khan Mohmmad and Second Deputy Abdul Raqib.
28. Mohammad Nasir Anis: First Deputy Suraya Daqiq and Second Deputy Habibullah Noori.
29. Abdul Majeed Samim: First Deputy Obaidullah and Second Deputy Sayed Shah Aqa.
30. Sayed Jafar Opiani: First Deputy Abdul Qadir and Second Deputy Bismillah Durukhshani.
31. Mohammad Yassin Safi: First Deputy Mohammad Israel and Second Deputy Mohammad Azim Taheir.
32. Gul Ahmad Paima: First Deputy Ahmad Shah Asar and Second Deputy Sulaiman Ali.
33. Abdul Qadir Emami Ghor: First Deputy Mohammad Yasin Katiba and Second Deputy Sultan Ali Murtaza Nikzad.
34. Ziaulhaq Hafizi: First Deputy Sayed Mohammad Baqir Misbahzada and Second Deputy Haji Sayed Ahmad Hamdard.
35. Mohammad Saeed Hashimi: First Deputy Mohammad Masoum and Second Deputy Mohammad Naeem Ansari.
36. Mohammad Akbar Oria: First Deputy Abdul Zahir Mirzakhil and Second Deputy Zulmay Faqiri.
37. Abdul Latif Pedram: First Deputy Noorahmad Barzeen Khatebi and Second Deputy Mohammad Ayoub Qasemi.
38. Hedayat Amin Arsala: First Deputy Mohammad Ismail Qasimyar and Second Deputy Shinkai Karokhil.
39. Sangin Mohammad Rahmani: First Deputy Rajabgul and Second Deputy Ziaudeen.
40. Rahimjan: Mohammad Asar and Second Deputy Malik Shakirullah.

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41. Mohammad Hakim Torsan: First Deputy Nasrullah Ziarmal and Second Deputy Sayed Mohammad Yasin Alawai.

42. Baz Mohammad Koofi: First Deputy Zarmina Sahar and Second Deputy Sayed Mohammad Baqir Ameri.

43. Ghulam Mohammad Regi: First Deputy Wali Mohammad Aksir and Second Deputy Baz Mohammad Yaftali.

44. Nasrullah Baryali Arsalai: First Deputy Abdul Baqi Turkistani and Second Deputy Sayed Mohammad Alam.

Presidential candidate, Ahsraf Ghani Ahmadzai, held a press conference on the 16th of May 2009, and said to the media that the incumbent President, Hamid Karzai, has asked him to withdraw from the presidential election contest. He reiterated that he will not withdraw and will contest the presidential election.

Presidential candidate, Sayed Karim Jalal, said to a local news agency that to end the fighting, talks with the Taliban is needed. Mr. Jalal whom Afghans remember as a child genius and lived most of his adult life in Saudi Arabia says that if he is elected he will bring security to the Afghan people, campaign against poverty and corruption, work for the development of the education sector and finally implement the rule of law.

The Afghan Millat Party, headed by the former Minister of Finance, Anwarul Haq Ahadi, said on the 23rd of May 2009 that he supports the candidacy of President Karzai.

Presidential candidate, Ahsraf Ghani Ahmadzai, held a press conference on the 23rd of May 2009,

and said that some of his supporters were harassed in Kandahar province by local government officials when they were trying to distribute his biography to the people gathered at a poetry function.

Eleven Lower House MPs including Noorulhaq Olumi, Mohammad Dawood Sultanzoy, Basir Behzad and others went to the IEC and officially lodged their complaints against the candidacy of President Karzai for the August Presidential elections. These MPs accused Mr. Karzai for misuse of government resources, corruption in the government institutions and lack of justice and rule of law in the country. The President's office reacted that these are just allegations made by the MPs and the election complaint commission has the job to investigate such claims.

On the 23rd of May 2009, the election complaint commission informed that more than 200 complaints have been registered against the presidential provincial councils' candidates.

The election complaint commission announced to the media on the 27th of May 2009, that the final list of the Presidential candidates will be announced in two weeks time. The election complaint Commission said that most of the complaints about the candidates have been about their links with illegal militia groups and their work record in the government posts.

Presidential candidate Sayed Karim Jalal informed the media that the Minister for Interior was not trying enough to provide security for him. He added that if anything happened to him, he will hold the Minister for Interior and the President responsible.

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The Ministry of Interior announced that after the final list of Presidential candidates is announced, each candidate will be given 20 policemen for their security.

The IEC announced on the 29th of May 2009, that the potential candidates should refrain from continuing with their unscheduled campaigning. The IEC added that the final list has not been released and if any candidate continues with campaigning, the IEC will take legal action against him/her.

On the 30th of May 2009 General Dostum's Party (Junbish) and Mohaqiq's Party (Hezb-e-Wahdat-e-Mardum) announced their support for the candidacy of President Karzai.

Security and Governance: Local media reported the killing of Gul Ahmad Ahmadi, the Deputy of the Petroleum Directorate in the border town of Hairatan in the northern province of Balkh on the 11th of April 2009. Mr. Ahmadi served as the Deputy Governor of Balkh during the early 1990's. Local police believe the motive behind the killing of this person might be personal.

Mohammad Hanif Atmar, the Minister for Interior was reporting to the journalists about his work in the Ministry of Interior, which is also called by the government 'the accountability of government officials to the nation'. Mr. Atmar said Afghan police are under resourced and under staffed. He added that the police suffered 1400 casualties last year and in the near future 5,000 more policemen/women will join the police force. In response to a question of a journalist about the private use of police vehicles by the police, Mr. Atmar said that if a policeman is dying for his country, he should also be able to use the

police vehicle for his private use. He also said that from the 2,000 illegal armed groups, 500 have been disarmed and 7,000 various types of weapons have been collected.

Media reported the death of the Mayor of the Eastern Province of Laghman on the 4th of May 2009. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack on the Mayor's convoy.

Abdul Basir Salangi, was appointed as the new governor of Parwan Province on the 6th of May 2009.

Media reported about the continued confrontation between the members of the Ghazni provincial council and the governor. This confrontation started three months ago when the provincial council members accused governor Osmani for corruption and insecurity. Mr. Osmani denies these accusations and members of the provincial council have said that they are in Kabul to speak with the members of the Parliament about this issue.

International Affairs: On the 4th of April 2009 the government funded Anis daily on its front page had these headlines from the speech of President Karzai delivered to the delegates of the Netherlands Conference on Afghanistan: In the past years, 5 million refugees returned to the country and GDP per-capita increased from 188 USD to 450 USD. Every effort will be made to bring back those members of the Taliban who have no link with Al-Qaida and accept the constitution. We assure the neighbors that the Afghan people want to live a peaceful life next to their neighbors.

Anis daily also reported on this day that the appointment of General Karl Eikenberry as the US Ambas-

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sador to Afghanistan has been approved by the US Senate.

The Polish President visited Afghanistan on the 8th of April 2009, and met with President Karzai. The Polish President said that Poland will send more soldiers to Afghanistan. President Karzai traveled to the United States for a tripartite meeting with the US and Pakistani President.

On the 16th of May 2009, Rangin Dadfar Spanta, the Minister for Foreign Affairs who was reporting to the media the result of the latest visit by President Karzai to the US and Europe, said that the visits were 'constructive. Mr. Spanta added that there was a need to review all the agreements signed by the Afghan government with NATO and the US which were signed a few years ago when the Afghan government was just being established.

The US Embassy announced on the 21st of May 2009, that it will soon establish consulates in the western province of Herat and in the eastern province of Nangarhar.

Hamid Karzai attended the trilateral summit of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, hosted by Iran on the 24th of May 2009. The Afghan government funded newspaper run these headlines the next day: President Karzai: If Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan cooperate with one another, there will be security in the region. Iranian President: We brothers have gathered to consult and with joint thinking investigate the ways for regional cooperation. Asif Ali Zardari: We have sufficient human resources, natural resources and talents.

Human Rights: Media reported on the 14th of April 2009, about the never ending problems of the Sikh

and Hindu community in Afghanistan. The Sikhs and Hindus said that their problems are increasing in the society rather than being solved. Anarkali Honaryar, a member of the Sikh community says that the members of the Sikh and Hindu community continue their struggle for this reason. She also said that thousands of Afghan Sikh and Hindu families still live in India, Pakistan, the UAE and other countries and have not been able to return to Afghanistan.

Local media reported about the death of 45 Afghans inside a shipping container in the city of Quetta in Pakistan. These 45 Afghans died from lack of oxygen inside the container, which was destined for the Iranian borders. As income generating activities are very scarce inside Afghanistan, these Afghans like thousands of other Afghans were Iran for work. Afghans resort to these illegal human trafficking measures for the reasons that they do not have access to passports and even when they have a passport, the issue of visa is another obstacle.

Local media has been reporting about the continuing lack of employment in the capital city of Kabul and the increasing numbers of beggars in this city for a number of years, however, a large number of beggars and especially very young children are seen everyday roaming the streets, shopping centers and local parks of Kabul city. As prices of food and other basic commodities increase, families are sending their children as young as 4 years old to the streets to beg for money and help the family. On the 18th of April 2009, a local television channel filmed a 12 year old girl who was helping her father to make raw bricks. Making bricks is a very physical and tiring work even for well built adults, however, this

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fragile girl said that her father alone can not provide for the family and this is the reason that she is helping her father and her family. To earn 150 Afghanis (\$3), this 12 year old girl has to fill, lift and carry a brick frame of almost 20kg about 200 times to make 1,000 bricks.

Media reported the killing of more than 100 civilians in the Balabolook district of Farah province on the 5th of May 2009. Local people informed media that women and children were among the dead. The Governor of Farah, Rohul Amin said the area was bombed by the coalition forces after they were fired on by the Taliban. Belqis Roshan a member of the provincial council said to the media that she does not know the exact details of the incident but local people have told her that the level of civilian casualties are considerable.

A large number of Kabul University Students demonstrated on the 10th of May 2009, and condemned the recent killings of more than 100 civilians in the western province of Farah. The students also issued a statement in this regard and considered the continuous killing of civilians as abhorrent.

The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) said to the media that it is investigating the possible use of phosphorus bombs when the coalition planes bombed a village in the Balablook district of Farah on the 5th of May 2009. The AIHRC said that doctors have reported to them unusual cases of burns on the bodies of the victims, and similar burns were also seen in Kapisa province earlier. Coalition spokesman denied the use of such bombs in the mentioned district.

Local media reported on the 13th of May 2009, about the shortage of basic food commodities in the central province of Daikundi. Lower House MP from Daikundi said that people are eating grass and other wild vegetables for the reasons that they can not afford to buy food. The MP added that this issue has been discussed with the central government but the government has not taken any effective steps in this regard. Media reported early this month about the death of five family members in Herat province, who had nothing to eat and instead went out to pick wild mushrooms, which were poisons and after eating these mushrooms all five members of the same family died.

Media reported on the 15th of May 2009, that the foreign forces continuously block highways which cause considerable problems for the people traveling on these highways. A long column of vehicles was seen on the Kabul-Jalalabad highway, with its passengers complaining to the media that they were standing under the hot sun for hours and did not know the reasons for not being allowed to continue with their journey. The people were calling on the government to put an end to these practices.

Media reported about a large demonstration in the Northern Province of Balkh on the 20th of May 2009. This demonstration was in protest against the release of commander Kamal from Pul-e-Charkhi prison. The Ishaqzai tribes in Balkh said to the media that commander Kamal has killed more than 70 members of their family and if he is not arrested and put back in jail, they will not participate in the upcoming elections. The demonstrators said that this commander belonged to the Junbish party headed by General Dostum.

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To find out the reasons behind the increased level of family violence in the western province of Herat, a number of human rights' activist held a meeting there on the 26th of May 2009. A human rights activist, Malik Setez, said that the deteriorating human rights' situation is a concern and there is a need to increase public awareness about human rights and women's rights. He believes that if the people know about the outcomes of the family violence, it will help to decrease it. Media has been reporting about family violence and especially self immolation by women in that province for the past few years.

Environment: President Karzai issued a decree to protect the fish stock in the rivers and lakes of Afghanistan from exploitation. Here are the articles of this decree:

1. The Ministry of Interior and Provincial Governors are assigned to prevent unknown persons from catching the fish with generators, bombs, use of poisonous bates, which destroys the eggs and young fish and other animals living in the waters. Those who carry these illegal acts should be investigated.

2. The implementation/monitoring of this decree is the job of the General Administrative Directorate and the Secretariat for the Ministers' Council. This decree was issued on the 16th of April 2009.

On the 5th of May 2005 the Deputy President of the National Environment Protection Agency (NEPA) Daad Mohammad Baheer, said to the media that Afghanistan has lost all its rain forests and this is the reasons for the warming of weather in Afghanistan, and the recent floods in the northern province of Afghanistan. Mr. Baheer said that only 2% of the rain forests remain in Afghanistan.

The National Environment Protection Agency (NEPA) reported to the media on the 25th of May 2009, that Afghanistan has lost 75% of its rainforest. Sayed Sulaiman Shah, a representative of NEPA said that 26 species of animals are in danger of becoming extinct. The most endangered species according to Mr. Shah are the snow leopard and the Marco Polo mountain sheep, which are being killed by the hunters. The other issue that NEPA is trying to make progress with is, the high level of pollution caused by an increase in number of the used cars, using lower quality fuel, bakeries using rubber and wood and brick kilns using rubber and coal. Kabul is considered the most polluted city compared to the neighboring countries.

The Minister of Public Health, Sayed Mohammad Amin Fatemi, who heads the government's environment commission, informed the media on the 27th of May 2009, that the weather quality of Kabul has improved and there is less air pollution now. The Minister also said that there was less use of private generators since the imported electricity from Uzbekistan has reached Kabul.