

Afghan roundup Sept 2011
Rare Earth elements herald bright future for Afghanistan
by Chris Graham
A study by the United States Geological Survey shows that Afghanistan's Helmand province, scene of some of the heaviest fighting between UK and US forces and the Taliban, holds at least one million metric tons of rare-earth elements such as lanthanum, cerium and neodymium, as well as significant concentrations of barium, strontium, phosphorus and uranium. The deposits in the geological formation known as the Khanneshin carbonatite are comparable in quality to commercially exploited deposits in Bayan Obo, China, and Mountain Pass, California. "This is just one more piece of evidence that Afghanistan's mineral sector has a bright future," said Regina Dubey, acting director of the US Department of Defense Task Force for Business and Stability Operations, which funded the study.
Rare-earth-based magnets and materials are used in BlackBerrys, Toyota Prius cars, and military radar. Lanthanum is used in hybrid engines and metal alloys, and cerium is used in petroleum refining. A preliminary USGS resource assessment, published in 2007, estimated there are about 1.5 million metric tons of potential rare-earth element resources in southern Afghanistan. In addition to high concentrations of rare-earth elements, the deposit has significant concentrations of barium, strontium, phosphorus, and uranium. China holds a total of 36 million metric tons of rare-earths reserves, or 36 per cent of world resources, followed by Russia with 19 million metric tons and the US with 13 million metric tons. More than 95 percent of global production of rare-earth elements now comes from China, which in 2010 exported approximately 30,000 metric tons of such products, according to the USGS. New mines are being developed in Australia, and projects exploring the feasibility of economic production of other deposits are under way in the United States, Australia, and Canada, the agency said. (Terry Atlas, Bloomberg)
Russia eyes on Central Asia's mass energy projects
Russia is showing interest in joining a project to build a gas pipeline linking Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. The presidents of the four countries have signed a joint statement, confirming that they attach great importance to promoting and strengthening trade, business and security ties between their countries. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said that Russia is ready to take part in the CASA-1000 electricity transmission project, which could help to transfer electricity from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Pakistan and Afghanistan. (Xinhua)
Afghan Troops to get armoured personnel carriers
The Afghan army will have armoured personnel carriers that no other countries have except the United States by the end of this year, said Major General Michael Day, Deputy Commander of the Nato training mission. Nato was on track to build a 195,000 Afghan national army before the full withdrawal of foreign combat forces by the end of 2014, he said. (Tolo News)
Afghanistan ratifies Convention on Cluster Munitions
The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has welcomed Afghanistan's ratification of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The instrument of ratification was deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon in New York on September 8. The Convention prohibits the use, development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention or transfer of cluster munitions. (Irna)
Stepping up the fight against polio
Afghanistan is intensifying efforts to eradicate polio by the end of next year, but security remains a major challenge especially in the southern provinces. Polio remains endemic in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Chad, according to WHO. So far this year, 13 cases have been reported in seven districts in Kandahar, Helmand and Farah provinces. Most were children under two. (Irin)
Taliban claim new

missiles downing aircraft
The Taliban say new missile consignments are allowing them to down increasing numbers of NATO aircraft. However, military officials and defence experts cast doubt on the claim, saying some helicopters have made forced landings after suffering technical problems, and any direct hits probably came from existing weapons. An estimated 20 helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft belonging to both NATO and Afghan forces have either crashed or been forced to make emergency landings in the six months to August this year. In the deadliest incident of its kind since international forces entered Afghanistan 10 years ago, a Chinook helicopter carrying 30 US soldiers and eight Afghan colleagues crashed in Wardak province on August 6. NATO officials said the aircraft was probably hit by a rocket-propelled grenade, or RPG. (Asia Times)
August was the deadliest month for the US military so far in the decade-long war in Afghanistan. A total of 66 US troops died, the death toll including the 30 US troops killed in the downing of a Chinook helicopter by insurgents in eastern Afghanistan, the worst loss of life for the United States in a single incident during the Afghan war. (VOA News)
Afghans want US forces to stay indefinitely
Most Afghans want a binding security pact with the United States that would keep American troops in Afghanistan indefinitely, according to a senior adviser to Afghan President Hamid Karzai. Negotiations for such a pact have lagged in part because "some in the Afghan government are trying to sabotage it," said Taj Ayubi, minister-counsellor to Karzai. (Washington Post)
Counterfeit dollars "flooding" Afghanistan
Money-exchange dealers in Kabul say they are concerned by the large amounts of counterfeit foreign money that they say is entering Afghanistan from neighbouring countries. (Radio Liberty)
US defence contractors "waste" \$12m a day
Defence contractors have wasted or lost to fraud as much as \$60bn over the past 10 years, according to a report by the US Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan. The report found that at least \$31bn had been wasted through poor planning and management, the equivalent of \$12m a day since the invasion of Afghanistan. In another report, trucking contractors who pay off the Taliban, warlords and government officials to ensure safe passage for US military goods in Afghanistan say they do so because they believe they have no choice if they want to avoid attack. (Financial Times)
More insurgents killed in Afghanistan
Afghan and NATO-led forces during operations eliminated 27 insurgents and detained 14 in different parts of the country in 24 hours, September 23/24, according to an Afghan Interior Ministry report. "Afghan National Police (ANP), backed by army and Coalition forces, launched nine joint operations in surrounding areas of Kabul, Parwan, Helmand, Wardak, Ghazni, Uruzgan and Khost province over the past 24 hours. A total of 27 armed insurgents have been killed and 14 detained by joint forces", it said.
Similar operations saw 23 insurgents killed and eight detained, September 15/16. There were five joint operations in Faryab, Sari Pul, Zabul, Uruzgan and Wardak provinces. At the same time, Afghan forces killed 21 insurgents and detained nine in the Kasham district of Badakhshan province. Two group commanders, Mullah Abadullah and Mullah Shir Mohammad, were captured. Afghan forces backed by NATO-led troops killed 21 insurgents and arrested 11 others, September 2/3. (Xinhua)
Rock Musicians play "Stealth Fest" Shows in Kabul
Organizers of Afghanistan's first rock music festival since 1975 went ahead with a month of concerts and music workshops in Kabul last month, despite a Taliban attack in the capital that caused some venues to close their doors to the musicians. Festival organizer Travis Beard said the shows are being promoted using an "underground stealth fest" strategy, with dates and locations announced at the

last-minute to young Afghan rock fans using text messages, e-mails, and social networking websites. More than 12 rock groups from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and Central Asia were scheduled to perform in Kabul during the month. (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty)