A recent newspaper article highlighted "narrative bias" which leads to a distorted or outdated view of an issue or country. It highlighted for instance that one of the biggest users per capita of Youtube is Saudi Arabia - and largest number of "hits" was by women in the category of education. An Iraq telecoms company has just raised ober 1 billion dollars to invest in a countryt whose main appearance in the news is suicide bombings. Rwanda, scene of a million person ethnic cleansing with weapons like machetes has one of the fastest growing IT sectors in Africa. In Kenya, approaching 20% of GDP passes through mobile-phone based payment systems.

The U K Defence Forum contribution to offsetting "narrative bias!" about Afghanistan is its Afghan News Roundup. The second installment of December 2013 edition, compiled by Elayne Jude for Great North News Service, covers on the next page more positive stories hidden away in the world's media on topics like National lampoon, Salang facelift, Parliament fails to impress, funding female security, and refugee camp at Mons.

Will the real Hamid Karzai please step forward

There's no physical resemblance, which makes 28 year old itinerant comedian Zabiullah's spot-on impersonations of President Karzai even more uncanny.

Known simply as Zabi, recordings of his act are ubiquitous on Afghan mobiles. On YouTube, he's had over 100 000 hits.

People stop him on the street for a presidential rendition of the day's news. Zabi is happy to oblige, in exchange for a adrink or a meal, as long as the police or intelligence officials are not around. Five years ago he lost his job as a tea server in a government office, as his colleagues feared his mimicry would bring trouble to their door.

His Karzai schtick is extremely funny and truly sophisticated. As Karazai, he blames the foreigners for fixing the 2009 elections ("I was just a simple Pashtun! The Americans taught me how to rig the elections!") and for his present reluctance to step down ("The Americans put me in power! I was just sitting in a hotel. Why should I leave now?").

He's not to everyone's taste. There is no public tradition of political satire here. Zabi uses profanities and shatters taboos, often ending with the catch-phrase, "Tell your mother I said hello!" — in a country where female relatives are sacrosanct. Zabi suffered mild brain damage from childhood meningitis, and struggles to control his impersonations, and his behaviour. He left school in the sixth grade because of learning disabilities. He cannot easily judge when he has crossed the line.

As the end of the Karzai presidency approaches, Zabi worries about what comes next. "Next year, no one will want to hear Karzai impersonations," he said.

Salang Redux

The Salang Pass, built by the Soviets in the 1960s and never closed during the Soviet occupation, has received a $19.5 million makeover to help an guaranteed exit route for the Coalition.

Anti drone strike protests have prevented the moving of military hardware via Pakistan's main border checkpoint since early this month, and raised doubts about the route's longer term viability. Pakistan stopped NATO traffic for seven months after a U.S. airstrike killed 24 Pakistani troops in November 2011.

The Salang Tunnel allows cargo to be shipped through Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, still part of the USSR when the Soviets withdrew in 1989. In 2012 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers last year began renovating the tunnel, completed in late November 2013. The Salang Tunnel will be a new experience for the American motorist

Thick, black exhaust limits visibility, cars play chicken with one another on the narrow two-lane road and poor ventilation turns it into a carbon monoxide death trap for gridlocked motorists. In 1982, a fire reportedly killed nearly 1,000 Soviet troops.

Transportation via the Salang Tunnel, Central Asia and Russian is slower and more expensive than the route through Pakistan preferred by NATO's logisticians.

On Dec. 3, the Pentagon announced it had stopped using Pakistan's Torkham Gate border crossing "to ensure the safety of the drivers contracted to move our equipment." A more southerly crossing, where Pakistan's Balochistan province borders Kandahar province, remains fully functional.

The US also flies equipment out of Afghanistan in jets, but again, this is enormously expensive.

A spokesman for ISAF told NBC News that the Pakistani anti-drone protests would have "no long-term impact" on the pullout.

Poor Report for Parliament

A report from the Women, Peace & Security Research Institute has found coordination between the three bodies of the Afghan government is flawed, and MPs do not properly represent their constituents.

The report, based on study of Parliament's work over the past year, finds that Parliament is better at ratifying laws than government oversight. Representation of the populace scored only three points out of a hundred.

First Deputy Speaker of the Senate Mirwais Yasini acknowledged the report's findings to be justified.

"Government interference remained an important challenge...and it has international external forces behind it," Parliamentary Advisor to the Research Institute Khalil Roman commented.

Afghanistan's Female Soldiers - fully funded at last

US Congress passed the 52nd National Defense Authorization Act, designating a minimum of $25 million to bolster the numbers of women in the ANSF. Currently, women comprise only one percent of the Afghan National Police, and 0.3 percent of the Afghan National Army.

Both the House and Senate defense appropriations bills have similar provisions, addressing recruitment and retention of women.

Without female security personnel, Afghan women will not be able to vote in the 2014 elections. Most voter registration and polling stations are sex-segregated. Women-only polling stations will remain closed without women to staff them. Last year there were at least 13 recorded accounts of male insurgents dressed as women entering restricted areas from which they then attacked. There were no female body searchers to challenge them.

87 percent of Afghan women experience domestic violence or forced marriage. Women are more likely to report these crimes to female police officers, who are, in turn, more likely than male officers to register and investigate.

Afghan Asylum Seekers hit Belgium

Over 300 Afghan asylum seekers and their supporters have set up a protest camp in the Belgium town of Mons, seeking Belgian residency permits.

The asylum seekers have set up camp in Mons' main square, cheek by jowl with Christmas decorations and vendors. They are known as the Afghan Collective.

The Afghans previously occupied a Brussels church, and have been supported by Archbishop Andre Leonard, head of the Roman Catholic Church in Belgium

The demonstrators reportedly marched some 70 kilometers from Brussels to see Prime Minister Di Rupo, who is also Mons' mayor. Di Rupo was abroad at the time. Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration and for Social Integration, Maggie De Block, informed the Afghans that their requests would be processed as for any other illegal immigrants.

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