

Afghan News Roundup compiled by Elayne Jude for Great North News Service : Very old ladies, very old street maps, dogs of the fallen, art expo in Doha

Born: 1877

At 136 years old, Khanum Hasno was the oldest lady in the village. Having been responsible for 465 grandchildren and great-grandchildren, she died in Nangarhar province, some 80 miles east of Kabul on 12 January 2013.

Her name has not been recorded as oldest woman of the world in the Guinness Book of world record. If Khanum Hasno was actually born in 1877, she was born in the year of the Ottoman mission to the emir of Afghanistan, seeking Pan-Islamic support against the common enemy, Russia, two months after the commencement of the Russian-Turko War.

The delegation had the blessing of the British rulers of India. It had been suggested that it was the British who, wishing to establish a permanent diplomatic mission in Afghanistan, attempted to use the good offices of the Ottoman Sultan to further their cause in the Great Game, for control of the strategically vital region. The Afghan refusal to permit the establishment of the mission lead to the start of the Second Afghan War the following year.

Bad Monkey Boulevard

Wall Street Journal Kabul bureau chief Yaroslav Trofimov loaded Apple's map of Kabul on his iPad –the existence of streets named Bad Monkey, Mojo Way, and Hillbilly Hameed.

Apple appear to have mined their data from a site called OpenStreetMap, (OSM),

an open source encyclopaedia of street maps. Kabul's details were created by a group of Afghan University students who created mischievous names for streets whose proper names were obscure or contentious, and have not been updated recently.

“The issue is that Apple took an old snapshot of the OpenStreetMap data and hasn't updated it since, so things like 'personal' street names are in there, even if they have been fixed since,” explained Kate Chapman, Indonesia-based director of the OpenStreetMap Team . “The fact that they don't update the data shows that the incentive for people to improve the map just isn't going to be there.”

Apple show little interest in updating maps of places where few use their Apps; but OSM is very popular among aid workers in the developing world.

Nowzad's precious pets

Traditionally, a dead soldier's dogtags were returned to his family. Nowzad Dogs charity goes further; it sends home his dog.

Pvt. Conrad Lewis, a British paratrooper in Afghanistan's Helmand province, adopted a stray dog and named her Peg. On Christmas leave in 2010, he told his father, Tony, that Peg was so important to him that he wanted to bring her home when he returned from his deployment. "That's your job, Dad," he said. In February 2011, Pvt. Lewis shot dead by a sniper. He was 22.

Pen Farthing, a former British Royal Marine, started a charity, Nowzad, helping reunite adopted pets with soldiers and contractors after they leave Afghanistan.

The parents, the charity and Conrad's fellow paratroopers hatched a plan: Peg was slipped aboard a military helicopter, then disguised as a military working dog. Afghan army soldiers were paid to deliver her to Kabul.

In Kabul, the Nowzad kennels nursed her back to health. Six months later, in November 2011, Peg arrived in Claverdon, Warwickshire.

"Having her here means so much to us," Tony Lewis said . "She is a link to Conrad's time in Afghanistan, a symbol of his sacrifice. She is something he loved, and we love her too.... She has his spirit."

More than 400 dogs, and a few cats, have been flown to new homes overseas by Nowzad. Most have to be smuggled out of military bases, where pets are technically against regulations. They are driven along dangerous roads to Kabul by an underground network of hired Afghan drivers, and, after health certificates, blood tests, quarantines, customs clearances, manifests and pet flight containers, on to the United States, Britain, Australia, Germany, Canada, South Africa and Italy. The average cost is around £1800.

In Warwickshire, Peg has settled into her new life with Conrad Lewis's parents. Peg gave Conrad love, comfort and loyalty, his father said. "The least she deserves is a loving home back with us."

<http://www.nowzad.com/>

First Female Governor Appointed

Sahra Shikeeb's appointment as district governor for Khaja Do Koh district in northern Jawizjan province has been approved by the Afghan government. She became the Karzai regime's first female district governor, starting work on 22 January.

According to the provincial deputy governor, around 40% of Jawizjan's public servants are women. The district is considered peaceful.

Afghan Art in Doha

The Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar will host an exhibition of Afghan art this year, as Doha prepares to mediate between Kabul and the Taliban. It's the first time the Museum has hosted any exhibition from the region.

The announcement coincides with assertions by Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister HE Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani, that they would allow the Taliban to open a temporary liaison office in Doha.

The exhibition will take place very shortly - in March 2013 - and was announced at the opening of the first Alain Ducasse restaurant in the Middle East, at the Museum on Doha's grandest boulevard, the Corniche.

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