Afghan News Roundup - April 2013 compiled by Elayne Jude for Great North News Service

On the next page : The return of Nancy Hatch Dupree, the non-return of an Afgantsy, photographers, feminists and Facebook fraud.

Afghanistan archive welcomed home

In the heyday of the hippie trail, adventurous travellers relied on Nancy Hatch Dupree's unique and erudite guide to Kabul. Nancy Dupree, an American, and her late husband, archaeologist Louis Dupree, traveled throughout Afghanistan conducting excavations.

They also collected a written treasure of irreplaceable knowledge of Afghan art, history and culture. This archive was begun in Pakistan for safekeeping in 1979. In 2006, Mrs. Dupree brought the collection to Afghanistan. This grew into an active, working archive containing extensive material on Afghan history and society, and a resource for students, journalists and policy makers. This month, the Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University (ACKU) officially opened the most advanced library and research center in Afghanistan, on the campus of Kabul University.

There are approximately 80,000 documents, from the time of the Soviet invasion, the rule of the mujahedeen, the Taliban era and the present day; monographs, serials, newspapers, historical books and magazines, about the socio-political history of Central Asia and relations between Afghanistan and its neighbours.

ACKU's new building was funded by the Afghan Government, the United States Agency for International Development, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, The Asia Foundation, the Royal Norwegian Embassy, and the Dupree Foundation.The Centre was designed and overseen by an international team of architects, using indigenous materials. The furniture was designed and manufactured in Kabul. There is a reading room, lecture hall, gallery space, underground stacks, and a section to house ACKU's mobile outreach program, ABLE, which brings easy-to-read books in local languages to new readers throughout Afghanistan.

"By opening the doors of the Afghan Centre at Kabul University today, we are also helping to open new opportunities for the leaders of an Afghan society capable of contributing to the growth of their nation," said Mrs. Dupree. "ACKU is helping ensure that the people of Afghanistan once again have important resources about their history, culture, and development. We are proud of what we have accomplished to date, and look forward to accomplishing much more in the years and decades to come."

www Afghan Photography Network

The Afghan Photography Network is a young website, still in development, but already raising the profile of Afghan photographers.

One is 29 year old Farzana Wahidy. Born in Kandahar, she was a teenager when the Taliban took over the country in 1996. At age 13 she was beaten in the street for not wearing a burqa, To carry a camera would have been unthinkable.

After the fall of the Taliban, Wahidy began a photojournalism course, becoming
the first Afghan female photographer to work for the AFP and AP, and winning a scholarship to study in Canada. In 2010, she returned home.

Aiming to show the detail as much as the big picture of Afghan life, Wahidy focuses on women. "It's easier for a woman to get access," she says.

Her subjects range from street traders to the secret lives of female prostitutes. And Wahidy was not the only one to recognize the need for this type of photography in Afghanistan. She is now part of the recently created Afghan Photography Network.

About a quarter of the Netwrok's photographers are women. Of the eight women in her original photojournalism program, Wahidy is the only one working as a full-time photographer. "When I get a good photo," she says, "that is a beautiful day."

http://www.afghanphotographynetwork.com/

Women organise for electoral quotas

Women professionals have formed a movement to back women's rights in the upcoming presidential election, beginning with a proposal to parliament on securing gender quotas for women candidates.

The group is expected to give parliament a proposal next Monday which includes a demand that gender quotas are introduced in the presidential, parliamentarian, and provincial council elections – with as many as 50 percent of positions allocated to women, or that only half the number of votes are required for a female candidate compared to a male candidate.

It proposes that women candidates should be given funds from the Ministry of Women's Affairs, to be repaid should the candidate not be elected.

The Foundation for Free and Fair Elections of Afghanistan (FEFA) welcomed the proposal.

"There should be more facilities for women considering the current situation in the country because women do not have the same amount of opportunities as have men," said FEFA executive director Jandad Spinghar.

The presidential and provincial council elections will be held April 5, 2014.

Point of no return

According to Soviet veteran organization officials, the Soviet soldier found in Afghanistan after 33 years on a Missing in Action list does not want to go home.

The former army intelligence officer was seriously injured in 1980 in a skirmish. Alexey Eremenko, aka Sheikh Abdullah, was nurtured back to health and taught healing by his Afghan saviour.

Warriors-Internationalists Affairs Committee traced him to Shindand District earlier this year. Eremenko reportedly spoke by telephone with his relatives after 33 years. He was saddened to learn his mother was dead, and close to tears when he was presented with a surprise pre-recorded video message from his brother in Uzbekistan.

The ex-Soviet soldier said, "I have spent most of my life here, there's nothing to talk about."

Facebook False Friends

With social and religious taboos restricting face-to-face contact between unrelated members of the opposite sex, Facebook's popularity has skyrocketed in Afghanistan. Internet cafes charge around 100 Aghanis, or $2, an hour, for this virtual access.

While being seen chatting to an unrelated boy in public can tarnish a girl's reputation, "with Facebook, there is no risk of being beaten up by your female friend's relatives," reasons one young man with a heavy Facebook habit.

According to the Communication and Information Ministry, there are now more than 470,000 registered Facebook accounts in Afghanistan, compared to 6,000 in 2008.

Some 2 million of Afghanistan's 30 million people have access to the Internet, mostly through Internet cafes and mobile phones. An informal survey suggests that many Afghan Facebook users are urbanites in their late teens and 20s. Male Afghan Facebook users appear to have

little concern about online security -- their photos, status updates, and posts are often open to the public. But female Facebook users in Afghanistan rarely post their photos online, at least publicly. They also tend to post photos of celebrities -- Indian actresses are a favorite -- as their profile pictures.

Mock female accounts can be the cause of real heartbreaks in Afghanistan, says Rafiullah Baher, a 22-year-old Kabul student.

"A friend of mine believed he was deep in a relationship with a girl on Facebook and that it was getting serious. But the girl turned out to be a bogus profile made by our local butcher's son," says Baher. "It took my friend a while to get over his heartbreak."

"Now I try to add only those who I know," Baher says. "And I hesitate to chat with girls on Facebook because it seems 50 percent of Afghan female Facebook accounts are fake profiles made by boys."

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