

# Afghanistan national day

## Election another step on road to rebuilding Afghanistan

Eklil Hakimi  
AMBASSADOR OF AFGHANISTAN TO JAPAN

As Aug. 19 marks Afghanistan's National Day, I would like to avail myself of this opportunity, on behalf of President Hamid Karzai and the government of Afghanistan, to convey my deepest respects to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko,



and to Prime Minister Taro Aso.

While this specific day is celebrated in honor of our nation's independence and restoration of sovereignty, our national legacy and our special relationship with Japan extend back further than the 100 years represented by this date.

Initial contact with Japan owes its existence to the old Silk Road, and its transport of ideas and goods, such as the lapis lazuli-decorated belts and mirrors found in Shosoin

in Nara. Zoroastrianism and Buddhism's presence in Japan can trace their origins to Afghanistan. While the practice of Zoroastrianism has since passed, its influence is evident in such examples as the March 12 Shunie Otaimatsu Festival that involves religious tree burning. This tradition shares its roots with the present-day Afghan custom March 21 of purifying homes with smoke.

The first Afghan to visit Japan was Gen. Ayub Khan in 1907. As Adm. Heihachiro Togo's guest of honor, the two celebrated Asian victories over colonial powers. In a gesture of empathy and respect, Gen. Khan granted support to Tokyo Haihei In, a home for soldiers disabled in the Russo-Japanese War. The friendly terms between the countries were later reaffirmed when King Habibullah Khan provided assistance to the victims of three destructive earthquakes in 1914. Japan was also very well received in Afghanistan, with Japanese goods, such as cloth, chemical products and machinery, in high demand. The first Japanese to visit Afghanistan was Hisao Tani, a military officer, followed by Yasunosuke Tanabe in 1925, who after returning to Japan went on to establish the Japan-Afghanistan Club in 1935.

Formal relations were established in London on Nov. 19, 1930, with the signing of the Afghan-Japanese Treaty of Friendship by Marshal Shah Wali Khan and Tsuneo Matsudaira, the Japanese ambassador to the United Kingdom.

Now, nearly eight years after the overthrow of the oppressive Taliban regime, Japan continues to be a valuable and dedicated partner through its support of our reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Japan first dispatched Maritime Self-Defense Force vessels to the Indian Ocean to engage in refueling missions as a member of the international coalition in the "War on Terror." On Jan. 21 and 22, 2002, Japan convened the first International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan, where Japan's pledge of \$550 million made it the first nation to offer assistance to our rebuilding. From 2001 to the present, Japan has pledged over \$2 billion in aid for use in various sectors, including refugee reintegration, internally displaced persons, income generation, medical care, sanitation, capacity building for education, clearing mines, farming, small businesses, the Afghanistan New Beginnings Program, the

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program, irrigation and road construction. The JICA has also taken on a major role in the reconstruction of the new Kabul International Airport terminal and is involved in the design of the planned Dehsabz City (New Kabul City).

With the help of Japan, our other international partners and the drive of our people, we have begun to reclaim our previously hampered prosperity.

Our accomplishments in the last few years alone are promising: Over 90 percent of chil-

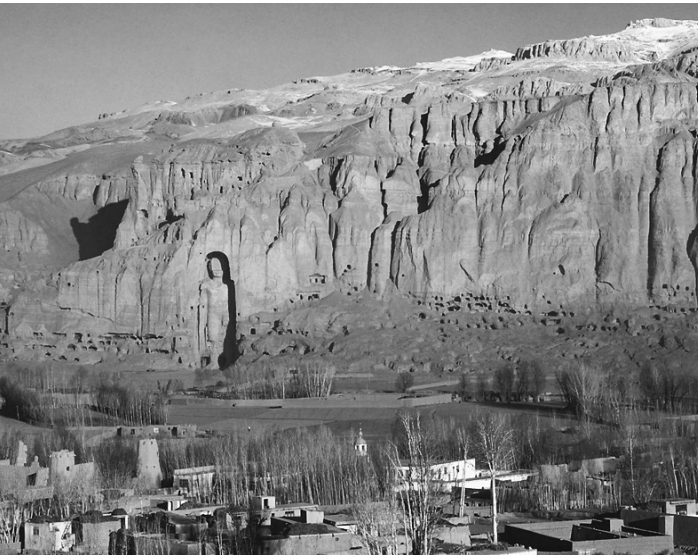
dren under 5 years old have been vaccinated against polio; 6.2 million children are attending school (40 percent girls); and around 4,000 school buildings have been constructed or rehabilitated, with 4,400 more planned in the next four years. The DDR program has collected 57,629 weapons and 12,248 heavy weapons, demobilized 62,376 combatants and reintegrated 53,145. Over the last year, 49 sq. km of minefields have been cleared, and over 81,000 antipersonnel mines, 100 antitank mines and 2.5 million explosive remnants

have been destroyed. Our nation is set to be mine-free by 2013 and we aim toward self-sufficiency in security as our national army has grown to a force of over 90,000 active servicemen.

It is indeed our desire to stand on our own feet. Our constitution was drafted as the region's most progressive and now the latest stage in the development of our young democratic system will be realized in tomorrow's election. The people stand at this crucial juncture using their voices,

protected by the freedoms that they have so justly earned, to shape the direction that our nation takes.

On this day when international attention has once again been focused on Afghanistan, it is with heartfelt gratitude that we extend our thanks to the Japanese people for their enduring friendship and support. As Afghanistan regains its rightful place as a partner, our nations will extend our Silk Road legacy into a future of mutual support, friendship and benevolence.



Ancient legacy: The Buddhas of Bamiyan, destroyed by the Taliban, are shown in this photo from 1977. YOSHIAKI NAGASHIMA

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## Japan invests in Afghanistan's future

Kenshiro Matsunami  
SECRETARY GENERAL, JAPAN-AFGHAN  
PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP LEAGUE

On behalf of the Japanese people and the Japan-Afghan Parliamentary Friendship League, I would like to express my deepest congratulations on the occasion of Afghanistan's National Day. When I taught at Kabul



University, Afghanistan was a nation of peace and development. When I left the modern and liberal campus in 1975, it was a hub for the best and brightest in the country. I can only imagine the sadness of those students whose future prospects were hampered by the following decades of devastation.

My role within the Diet has since taken me back and allowed me to witness firsthand the aftermath that senseless conflicts have wrought. Despite the sadness I felt, I was also

touched by the integrity and optimism of the Afghans as they began to rebuild their homeland.

I am pleased to say that Japan is committed to Afghanistan's redevelopment. We are now the third-largest financial contributor and our contributions are not handouts, but an investment in our Afghan brothers and sisters. Through such efforts as the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), and Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) programs, and

various initiatives by the JICA, stability is taking hold. Just recently, Japan has also sent a team to help monitor the Aug. 20 election.

Regardless of the form of Japan's role, however, our partnership and friendship will continue to strengthen and mature. Just as Afghanistan generously provided aid in the wake of the earthquakes of 1914, ours is a relationship of mutual respect and responsibility. Again, please accept my best wishes on this national day.