

Afghanistan Review

Week 02

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Comprehensive Information on Complex Crises



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This document provides a weekly overview of developments in Afghanistan from 04 January – 10 January 2012, with hyper-links to source material highlighted in blue and underlined in the text. For more information on the topics below or other issues pertaining to events in Afghanistan, contact the members of the Afghanistan Team, or visit our website at www.cimicweb.org.

Economic Development

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The [price of a litre of petrol](#) jumped significantly over the course of the past week in Kabul, from AFN 62 (USD 1.28) to AFN 89 (USD 1.84), reports *Pajhwok Afghan News*. A litre of diesel likewise increased from AFN 63 (USD 1.30) to AFN 70 (USD 1.45). The price of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), which is commonly used for cooking and heating, remained stable at AFN 59 (USD 1.22) per kg at those shops supplied by the Afghan Ministry of Commerce and Industries ([MoCI](#)). However, other dealers sold LPG for between AFN 77 (USD 1.59) and AFN 80 (USD 1.66) per kg. *Pajhwok* did not specify the reason for increases in the price of petrol and diesel. However, *The Los Angeles Times* noted that global crude oil prices also climbed this past week after Iran suggested that it could [close the Strait of Hormuz](#), through which a large volume of Middle Eastern oil and gas makes its way to global markets.

The Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries ([ACCI](#)) released a statement saying that it plans to organise a [conference concerning economic development](#) in Afghanistan ahead of the Fifth Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, commonly referred to as RECCA V, which will take place on 26 and 27 March in Dushanbe. The ACCI-organised conference will involve representatives of Afghanistan-focused business councils from Dubai, Great Britain, the Netherlands and the United States. Participants in the ACCI-organised conference will develop a strategy and set of proposals to help influence the deliberations at RECCA V.

A report carried in the Indian newspaper *Business Standard* shows that [Afghan exports to India](#) have grown by 324% between 2003, when the two countries signed a trade agreement, and 2010. Afghan exports grew from USD 34 million per year in 2003 to USD 146 million per year in 2010. Indian exports to Afghanistan also increased by 135% to USD 411 million per year in 2010.

Some Afghan traders interviewed by the *Financial Times* fear that the departure of international forces from Afghanistan will result in a [sharp decline in the country's economy](#). Early signs of a downward economic trend can be seen. Wages for multi-lingual, computer-literate Afghans have fallen by up to 25% over the past 12 months. In addition, property in Kabul now rents for 30-40% less than it did a year ago. Some traders indicate that these declines only affect a narrow proportion of the country's population and that many economic improvements of the last decade may persist despite an anticipated reduction in international spending. Citing one example, an Afghan entrepreneur notes that imports of the Red Bull energy drink, a luxury item in Afghanistan, have skyrocketed over the past two years despite an initial decline in international spending in Afghanistan during that time period.

Afghanistan's Minister of Agriculture, Mohammad Asif Rahimi, indicated that recent [high levels of rainfall](#) in the country means that the country is likely to experience higher agricultural production and less food insecurity in 2012 than had been anticipated, according to the *Daily Times*. The minister noted that areas which experienced a drought in late 2011 have received particularly high levels of precipitation in recent weeks. The country will still need to import approximately one million tonnes of wheat and other cereals in 2012. Afghanistan's

agriculture sector is growing, and Rahimi sees strong potential for further growth in exports of fruit and nuts, particularly to India.

In other agricultural news, an Agri-business Development Team ([ADT](#)) from the US state of Kansas has provided [support to Nangarhar University's Agriculture Programme](#), according to a report from Regional Command-East ([RC-E](#)) of NATO's International Security Assistance Force ([ISAF](#)). They jointly collaborated in the development of an 11-week training course to aid in building the skills of local farmers. Forty-six students graduated from the programme in December 2011. Students learn about drip irrigation, plant production, crop disease, marketing, soil science, gardening, artificial insemination, pruning/grafting, designing of orchards, greenhouse operations, canning and winter feed mixing during the course.

Governance & Rule of Law

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The *Guardian* claimed that the United States would release a “handful of Taliban figures” from Guantanamo Bay in exchange for the Taliban’s opening of a political office in Qatar. The administration of US President Barack Obama [quickly denied the claims](#), according to *The Atlantic*.

Analysts told *Bloomberg* that the Taliban’s plan to open a liaison office in Qatar is the first formal indication to date that the group is [interested in negotiating a settlement](#) to the conflict in Afghanistan. The Afghan High Peace Council’s adviser on international affairs told *Reuters* that one of the Council’s senior members [will travel to Qatar](#) to gather more details about plans for a Taliban political office in the Gulf nation.

Despite initial optimism, some concerns regarding the potential Taliban office in Qatar also emerged. The governor of northern Balkh province, Atta Mohammad Noor, opposed the idea of a Taliban political office and told *Pajhwok Afghan News* that no foreign country, such as the United States, has the right to hold direct talks with the Taliban [without consulting the people](#) of Afghanistan. In addition, political commentator Waheed Mujdha told *Pajhwok* it was not clear whether the Taliban would continue to insist upon the [departure of foreign forces](#) from Afghanistan as a precondition for peace talks. Moreover, *The Christian Science Monitor* says it remains [unclear how much control](#) the Taliban’s senior leadership wields over fighters on the ground. US forces have reportedly eliminated many of the mid-ranking commanders who link insurgents in Afghanistan to Taliban leaders in Pakistan.

According to *The Guardian*, in early January, President Hamid Karzai [ordered the transfer](#) of the American-run military detention facility at Bagram airfield in [Parwan](#) province to Afghan control within a month. The order reportedly came after Gul Rahman Qazir, the chairman of the Afghan government’s Constitutional Oversight Commission, briefed President Karzai on reports of human rights violations at the detention facility. Commission member Mohammad Amin Ahmadi told the *Voice of America (VoA) News* that detainees [listed complaints](#) ranging from being denied access to a lawyer to being tortured with gas. *Pajhwok* states that the [US government is in talks](#) with Afghan officials concerning the transfer of the facility to Afghan control. Victoria Nuland, a US Department of State ([DoS](#)) spokesperson, told *Pajhwok* that detention operations will be transitioned to the Afghan government “in a manner that is maximally responsible.”



Source: “[Supreme Court Hosts Successful Judicial Conference](#)”, ISAF, Dec. 2011

Approximately 170 judges participated in the Supreme Court’s [2011 National Judicial Conference](#) from 25 to 28 December 2011 in Kabul, according to a report of the event produced by personnel from NATO’s International Security Assistance Force ([ISAF](#)). The conference (*pictured left*) focused on “simplifying the judicial process” and was intended to provide a platform for discussion, deliberation and exchange of experiences among Afghan judges. New and simplified administrative processes intended to improve timeliness and transparency within judicial services were explained at the event. The conference also included several lectures on forensic evidence and criminalistics presented by Justice Babrakzai, a recognised authority on these subjects. The Supreme Court will publish a book summarising the outcome of the conference once the High Council approves the results of the conference.

Some members of Afghanistan’s lower house of parliament, the [Wolesi Jirga](#), told *Pajhwok* that government officials have [violated the country’s constitution](#). Despite repeated calls by lawmakers, President Karzai has yet to submit his nominees for several ministry posts to the *Wolesi Jirga*. The affected ministries include the following: water and energy, women’s affairs, public health, urban development, transport and aviation, telecommunications and information technology and higher education. Each of these is being led by an acting minister who has not been confirmed by the *Wolesi Jirga*.

According to *The Washington Post*, Afghan officials and analysts believe that [Iran is attempting to discourage](#) Afghan leaders from establishing a long-term security partnership with the United States. The article indicates that Iran is cultivating closer relations with the Taliban, funding Afghan politicians and media outlets and expanding cultural ties. Iran signed a bilateral defence agreement with Afghanistan last month. As the deal was being finalised, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi argued that foreign military bases nearby are the main cause of instability in the region.

A mass grave containing at least [10 human skulls](#) was discovered in [Balkh](#) province by construction workers, Afghan officials told *Reuters*. The grave was discovered near the site of a major battle during the country's civil war in the early 1990s. Construction works and Afghan army operations around the grave have been put on hold at the request of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission ([AIHRC](#)), which will investigate when the people were killed.

A commission set up by Afghanistan's Ministry of Justice ([MoJ](#)) to [curb human trafficking](#) and kidnappings held its first session this past week, Minister of Justice Habibullah Ghalib told *Outlook Afghanistan*. The commission includes representatives of several ministries, the Attorney General's Office ([AGO](#)), the AIHRC and the National Directorate of Security.

DECEMBER 2011 BONN CONFERENCE PAGE ON CIMICWEB

The Civil-Military Fusion Centre (CFC) developed a unique web page focused upon the [Second International Bonn Conference on Afghanistan](#) at its CmicWeb portal. While the conference is now complete, this page continues to feature open-source information from relevant organisations and think tanks alongside a chronological listing of documents from past events such as the July 2010 Kabul Conference on Afghanistan. It also includes documents which emerged during the course of the Second Bonn Conference itself. *For further information on this page, contact the CFC at Afghanistan@cimicweb.org.*



Humanitarian Affairs

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The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)) released its [Consolidated Appeal Process \(CAP\) for 2012](#). The CAP document warns that the majority of Afghans are “chronically or acutely vulnerable” and worse off than last year due to the intensified conflict and severe weather, including floods and drought in different parts of the country. The plan lists several population groups which will require assistance in 2012. These include, among others, the following:

- 600,000 conflict-induced internally displaced persons (IDPs) plus 70,000 natural disaster-induced IDPs;
- 3 million Afghans affected by natural disasters, including 2.8 million affected by last year's drought;
- 5.4 million Afghans with no access to basic services due to the conflict; and
- 182,000 refugee returnees (i.e., Afghans opting to return to Afghanistan after having sought refuge abroad).

The combined effects of on-going drought and heavy snowfall in [Badakhshan](#) province are [causing children to starve](#), says *Pajhwok Afghan News*. One local official cited in the article said parents are forced to abandon their children and leave them with local government officials because they cannot afford to feed them. Heavy snowfall has blocked roads, which hampers the local economy, raises food prices and limits the ability of aid workers to deliver assistance to those that need it most. *Pajhwok* also reports the Salang Pass, an almost 3,000-meter-long tunnel which connects northern Afghanistan to Kabul, had been [blocked by a heavy snowstorm](#), leaving as many as 100 vehicles stranded on both sides of the tunnel during on 05 January.

Elsewhere, heavy [snowfall blocked the Kabul-Jalalabad highway](#) at several sections, stranding highway traffic for five hours on 06 January, as reported by *Pajhwok*. *Pajhwok* also reports that almost [19,000 destitute families](#) in Kabul will receive food coupons over a six-month period. The USD 3 million project is being funded by the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) and administered by the Ministry of Public Works ([MoPW](#)). Individual coupons are worth USD 25 and will enable the purchase of “essential daily use items”. Meanwhile, *Bakhtar News Agency* reports that [winter aid was distributed](#) to almost 350 impoverished families in Bagram district of [Parwan](#) province. The aid was provided by the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) in cooperation with the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation ([MoRR](#)) and consisted of a variety of items including blankets, winter clothes, shoes, water and soap.

Infrastructure

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Progress on [railway construction in Afghanistan](#) may be moving forward in order to enable the country to export its valuable mineral resources, according to the *Inter Press Service*. A rail line from the Uzbek border to Mazar-e Sharif in [Balkh](#) province was recently completed, and the Asian Development Bank ([ADB](#)) is now planning to extend this line to the city of Herat in western Afghanistan. A Chinese state-owned company, the Metallurgical Group Corporation ([MCC](#)), offered to build another rail line linking northern Afghanistan with the Pakistan in order to export ore from its Aynak copper mine in [Logar](#) province. Construction works on the railway have yet to begin. However, Juan Miranda, the head of the ADB for Central and West Asia, said the following (referring to MCC and the Chinese government): “If they build it, they will. If they don't, we will.” However, experts such as Thomas

Ruttig of the Afghan Analysts Network ([AAN](#)) have noted that the physical terrain in Afghanistan, as well as insecurity, make railway construction a daunting prospect and one which may require many more years to realise.

Local [residents and traders have expressed concerns](#) to the *Asia Times* regarding a dried fruit and nut market recently constructed in the Chora district of [Uruzgan](#) province by a German development agency, *Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* ([GIZ](#)). The materials used in the project are described as being low quality and ill-suited for the local conditions. The head of the provincial department of economic affairs is calling on GIZ and other agencies to report on their activities every six months. The head of Chora district told the *Asia Times* that projects such as the Chora market are “merely symbolic, and not of benefit to people in the district”. Uruzgan’s governor has appointed a committee to investigate the market’s construction.

Power Engineering magazine released an article describing the [potential for and challenges facing the hydropower industry in Afghanistan](#). According to the author, Afghanistan’s water resources have the potential to generate hydropower for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. The Academy of Sciences of Afghanistan ([ASA](#)) estimates that Afghanistan has the potential to generate up to 23,000 MW of electricity per year, which is many times greater than the country’s current energy production. The sector reportedly needs investment in large dams as well as appropriate policies and the institutional capacity to further develop hydropower. In addition, the *Power Engineering* article highlights the benefits of small-scale hydro and solar power-generation projects implemented with the assistance of the international community. For more information on this topic, see the CFC report on “[Opportunities for Micro-Electric Power in Afghanistan](#)”.

On 05 January, a Tajik delegation arrived in Afghanistan for the fourth session of [the Tajik-Afghan Intergovernmental Commission](#), says *Central Asia Online*. The commission will review bilateral cooperation in areas such as energy, transport, agriculture, construction, science and technology. Top priorities for the event include discussion of the [CASA-1000 power line](#) from Tajikistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan and a separate power line linking Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

In addition, a number of individual infrastructure developments were reported by the media during the course of the past week.

- A [330 metre-long bridge](#) was inaugurated in Sawakai district of [Kunar](#) province, reports *Pajhwok Afghan News*. The construction of the bridge employed as many as 350 people. It was funded by the United States Agency for International Development ([USAID](#)) at a cost of USD 4.5 million.
- The Japanese government will fund the construction of [12-km-long road in Foladi](#), in [Bamian](#) province in central Afghanistan, reports *Tolo News*. The construction of the road will start next year and will cost USD 15 million.
- A [contract worth USD 3 million](#) was signed between the Ministry of Energy and Water ([MEW](#)) and the Iranian company [TMB](#), reports *Bakhtar News Agency*. Under the contract TMB will install equipment to provide electricity to more than 3,000 families in Deh Sabz district of [Kabul](#) province.
- An Afghan government committee held a meeting to discuss the [delay of several infrastructure projects](#) which are being overseen by various ministries, reports *Bakhtar*. The members of the committee attributed the delays to insecurity, low capacity, corruption, land expropriation, complex procurement systems and a lack of supervisory mechanisms.
- The United States Army Corps of Engineers ([USACE](#)) issued a press release indicating that it has [constructed several facilities](#) for the Afghan National Army ([ANA](#)) and the Afghan National Police ([ANP](#)). The projects include two schools, a complex of 25 ammunition bunkers, a headquarters complex for vehicle operations and extensive renovation of a vehicle maintenance centre.

Security & Force Protection

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The Pakistani and Afghan Taliban have formed [a five-member shura](#) (council) to coordinate their activities, according to *Tolo News*. Taliban leader Mullah Omar issued a statement in which he warned the Pakistani Taliban to either cease “un-Islamic” activities or to stop referring to him as their supreme leader. The *Pakistan News Service* says that Mullah Omar is concerned that [actions by the Pakistani Taliban](#), such as attacks against Pakistani troops, suicide attacks, kidnappings for ransom and killings of civilians, are drawing attention away from the fight in Afghanistan.

Many Afghans who do not sympathise with the Taliban are nonetheless showing [outward signs of Taliban support](#) in order to facilitate safe passage through conflict areas, reports *Agence France-Presse* (*AFP*). Travellers through areas controlled by the Taliban are dressing like the insurgents, growing beards and installing pro-Taliban ringtones on their mobile phones. Those caught on a bus at a Taliban checkpoint with US currency, English-language documents or other indications of dealing with foreigners may undergo interrogation or even be beaten or killed, according to the *AFP*.

The Afghan Ministry of Defence ([MoD](#)) said that, while Afghan forces can take part in night raids, they [do not yet have the capability](#) to undertake them independently, says *Tolo News*. Afghan forces are currently responsible for

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house searches during night raids, spokesman General Zahir Azimi said at a 02 January press conference in Kabul. Night raids have drawn the ire of President Hamid Karzai, who says they are targeting the wrong people and violating people's right to privacy. The Afghan MoD believes it needs more time before it is prepared for Afghan forces to undertake night raids on their own. NATO's International Security Assistance Force ([ISAF](#)) is reportedly working to build the capacity of the Afghan forces to take over night raids.

A *USA Today* story notes that NATO faces the task of removing about USD 30 billion worth of [state-of-the-art military equipment](#) from Afghanistan to keep pace with the troop withdrawal, which is scheduled for completion by the end of 2014. "The stuff we have here is the very best the U.S. has ever produced," a US official told *USA Today*. "It's better than anything available (to military units) in the United States."¹ Afghanistan is land-locked, making it difficult to withdraw large pieces such as armoured vehicles. Much of the equipment arrived through Pakistan, but deteriorating relations between the US and Pakistani governments have caused the suspension of cross-border shipments.

The US Air Force ([USAF](#)) will buy [20 Super Tucano aircraft](#) from Brazil to be used for training and for reconnaissance by the Afghan Air Force, *Tolo News* reports. The A-29 Super Tucano, a fixed-wing aircraft, is made by Brazilian manufacturer Embraer and is now in use by five other nations. *Strategy Page*, a security-focused website, notes that this model of aircraft was designed with a [counterinsurgency role](#) in mind; it is reportedly rugged and easy to maintain. Each aircraft will cost the USAF USD 17.7 million. Embraer will provide flight training, maintenance and spare parts to the Afghan Air Force.

An [ISAF soldier was shot dead](#) and another was wounded on 08 January in an exchange of gunfire with a man in an Afghan National Army ([ANA](#)) uniform, the *Associated Press* reported. Spokesman General Mohammad Zahir Azimi said the following about the incident: "Right now, an investigation is going on to determine whether he really was a soldier or someone using an army uniform. And if he was a soldier, what caused the shooting." The incident happened in an ANA base in [Zabul](#) province; the shooter was killed when ISAF soldiers returned fire.

A number of attacks against ISAF and civilians in southern Afghanistan were reported over the course of the past week. ISAF announced that [three service members were killed](#) on 05 January following an improvised explosive device (IED) attack there, *AFP* has reported. Another ISAF soldier was killed in that same region in an insurgent attack on 06 January. Four more ISAF members were killed that day in another IED attack in southern Afghanistan. Six children and an adult were killed in an explosion in Uruzgan; a bomb went off in a garbage bin in which they were foraging. Four other children standing nearby were injured by the blast.

Reuters, citing ANP officials, says that two Britons and two Afghans have been [detained for carrying dozens of AK-47 assault rifles](#) in Kabul. Kabul police chief Ayoub Salangi said the four men were illegally carrying the weapons along with ammunition in the eastern part of the capital where there are several foreign military bases. "Some of the weapons did not have serial numbers or (the numbers) had been removed," Salangi told *Reuters*.² He said the 30 rifles belonged to a foreign security firm in Kabul. "We asked the company to show their licence but they are yet to do so," Salangi said, adding that investigations into the four individuals are underway.

Three bombings on 03 January [killed 12 people in Kandahar](#) city, reports *AFP*. In the first incident, a suicide bomber on a motorcycle detonated a bomb near a police checkpoint, killing four civilians and a police officer, said [Kandahar](#) provincial police chief General Abul Razaq. A few hours later, a small explosion took place at a central Kandahar intersection. Shortly thereafter, another suicide bomber on a motorcycle detonated his explosives in the same area, killing three officers and four more civilians, provincial spokesman Faisal Ahmad said.

Socio-Cultural Development

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C*B*S *News* reported on the reaction around the world and in Afghanistan to the case of the 15-year-old [Afghan girl who was tortured](#) by her in-laws for refusing to become a prostitute. Media sources indicated that case highlights both the problems and the progress of women 10 years after the Taliban's fall. "Let's Break the Dead Silence on Women's Plight," read the title of an editorial on 04 January in the *Afghanistan Times*, as noted in the *CBS News* report. Despite guaranteed rights and progressive new laws, Afghanistan still ranks as the world's sixth-worst country for women's equality in the United Nations Development Programme's ([UNDP](#)) annual Gender Inequality Index ([GII](#)). Nevertheless, Afghan experts say attitudes have subtly shifted over the years, in part thanks to the dozens of women's groups that have emerged. Fawzia Kofi, head of the Women's Affairs Commission in the Afghan parliament, told *CBS News* that the outcry over 15-year-old's case reflects a new willingness to publicly address sexual abuse. "I think there is now a sense of awareness about women's rights. People seem to be changing and seem to be talking about it," Kofi said.

A recent "Frontline" video from the US *Public Broadcasting Service* explores the world of ["opium brides"](#), a term used to refer to daughters of indebted opium farmers who are sold to drug smugglers to pay off debts. Farmers whose poppy crops are destroyed, often as a result of eradication programmes, become heavily indebted to narcotics traffickers and may be forced to hand over their daughters as payment.

¹ The parenthetical insertion was included in the original *USA Today* article.

² The parenthetical insertion was included in the original *Reuters* article.

As reported by *Pajhwok Afghan News*, a survey conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) says that 40% of all children in [Badakhshan](#) province are [forced into hard labour](#) by economic conditions. The article notes that 70% of these children (or 28% of all children in the province) work with their parents in the fields due to poverty. Most of the children who work in the capital city reportedly do so in shops, restaurants and bakeries.

Media reports concerning health issues emerged over the course of the past week. *Bakhtar News Agency* says a new medical clinic building in the Shinwari district of [Parwan](#) province was recently inaugurated. The construction, funded by the Japanese government, cost USD 150,000. The clinic will provide medical services for 20,000 local residents. In addition, a [research seminar](#) organised by the Academy of Sciences of Afghanistan ([ASA](#)) on hepatitis research was held in Kabul, according to *Bakhtar*. A message from Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health ([MoPH](#)), which was read aloud at the seminar, said that for the first time a vaccine against hepatitis was being administered to children younger than one year of age in Afghanistan.

According to *Pajhwok*, [new school buildings](#) costing USD 116,000 have been constructed for two schools in [Kunar](#) province. The buildings were constructed by the Ministry of Education ([MoE](#)) in the Sagi district. Together, the buildings will be able to accommodate 2,000 students.

Recent Readings & Resources

- "[Afghanistan at the End of 2011](#)", Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2012, by Anthony H. Cordesman.
- "[Healing the Legacies of Conflict in Afghanistan: Community Voices on Justice, Peace and Reconciliation](#)", Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, January 2012, by Emily Winterbotham.
- "[Climate Prediction Center's Afghanistan Hazards Outlook](#)", Famine Early Warning Systems Network / United States Agency for International Development, January 2012.
- "[Child Poverty Measurement: The Case of Afghanistan](#)", Università degli Studi di Firenze, December 2011, by M. Biggeri, J.F. Trani and V. Mauro.
- "[22 Results in Afghanistan](#)", United Nations Development Programme, December 2011.

The readings and resources above were brought to the attention of the CFC's Afghanistan Team during the course of the past several weeks. The CFC does not endorse any of these documents or their content. If you would like to recommend a report or website for this section of the "Afghanistan Review", please send the file or reference to Afghanistan@cimicweb.org. The CFC welcomes all recommendations but is not obliged to print them.

Afghanistan Events Calendar

- **Agricultural Development for Afghanistan Pre-Deployment Training.** The United States Department of Agriculture (www.usda.gov) and a consortium of American universities deliver this training. The curriculum will meet the needs of all deploying United States Government personnel in support of the USG Agriculture Strategy in Afghanistan. The training is for United States Government personnel and will take place in Fresno, California on the following dates: 16-21 JAN, 23-28 JAN, 26-31 MAR, 02-07 APR and 18-23 JUN. Participants will be enrolled on a first come first serve basis. Contact Ryan Brewster, US Department of Agriculture, at ryan.brewster@fas.usda.gov for further information.

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