

Afghanistan



AFGHANISTAN

Official Name:	Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan
Capital:	Kabul
Area:	251,733 square miles (652,090 square kilometers)
Population (1988 estimate):	14,481,000
Languages:	Pashto and Dari (Persian)
Religion:	Islam (official)
Literacy:	20 percent
Life Expectancy:	Population: 47 years; Male: 48 years; Female: 46 years
Official Exchange Rate:	43 Afghani = \$1



Description:

This flag was adopted on January 27, 2002. It is tricolor (black, red and green) all pieces joined together vertically from left to right in equal proportions; the breadth of each strip equalling half of its length, having in the middle the insignia of the *mehrab* (an arch in a mosque) and the mender (a tiered pulpit placed in front of the *mehrab* in a mosque from which addresses are delivered) in white, flanked by two flags and ensconced in two sheaves of wheat.

National Anthem Of Afghanistan

Garam shah l^a garam shah
 Ta e muquadas lamara
 E da-^az^adš lamara
 E da-nekmarghì lamara
 Muzh patñf^anunokÂ
 Pri kra da-barì l^ara
 Ham da-toro shpo l^ara
 Ham da-ran^ai l^ara
 Sra da-sarb^azì l^ara
 Paka da-rorì l^ara

D^a inqil^abì vatan
 Os da-k^argar^ano de
 Dagha da-zmaro mìr^as
 Os da-b^azgar^ano de
 Ter-so da-sitam daur
 Var da-mazdñr^ano de
 Muzh pa-n^arìv^alo-ke
 Sola au ururì Èv^arñ
 Muzhan ziy^ar istunko-ta
 Par^akha ^az^adì Èv^arñ
 Muzh varta dode Èv^arñ
 Kor Èv^arñ kalì Èv^arñ

Adopted in 1978

Written by Suleiman Laeq (1930-)

Translation

Be warm, become warmer
 You the holy sun
 Sun of good fortune
 We have survived the storm
 Have come to the end of the road
 We have also gone through the paths of darkness
 To the way of light
 The red road of victory
 The sacred path of brotherhood
 Our revolutionary homeland
 It now belongs to the workers
 The inheritance of lions
 It now belongs to the peasants
 The age of tyranny has passed
 The turn of the laborers has come
 We want peace and brotherhood
 Among the people of the world
 We demand more freedom
 For all those who toil
 We want bread for them
 And we want houses and clothes

Introduction

Afghanistan is a rugged, mountainous country nearly the size of Texas that is divided by a high mountain ridge that extends right through its center. It is also divided by ethnic conflicts, competing political and religious ideologies, old super-power strategies and war.

The natural terrain of Afghanistan has never supported an easy or affluent life for its people. The western extension of the Himalayan mountain range known as the Hindu Kush is an imposing, 600 mile barrier through the middle of the country.



The land slopes away from this range in three different directions, into jagged foothills and stark river valleys. Only 12 percent of this land is arid, and it receives an average rainfall of less than 12 inches a year. Severe drought conditions throughout the country since 1996 effected both agriculture and raising livestock. Towards the south the land is normally inhospitable desert. It is wracked by seasonal sandstorms that have been known to bury entire villages.

The mountainous terrain in the north has unexploited mineral resources, primarily iron ore and natural gas. This land experienced a severe earthquake in February, 1998, that destroyed more than 20 villages and killed several thousand people. Nowhere in the country can life be characterized as naturally comfortable or abundant.

The three-way slope of the landscape down from the high, forbidding ridge of the Hindu Kush divides the country into three distinct ethnic and linguistic regions. Northern Afghans are predominantly Uzbeks and Turkmen, who share a strong sense of identity as well as the Turkish language, with the peoples who live across the northern border in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan – all former republics of the Soviet Union.

The Tajik and Hazara peoples live on the western slope of the Hindu Kush. They belong to different Islamic traditions, The Tajik primarily Sunni Muslim, the Hazara Shias, but they share a common language, Dari, which is a dialect of Farsi, the language of Iran (where Shia Muslims are predominant).

The Pathans, or Pushtuns, the largest ethnic group, live on the southeastern slope of the country. They are like the Tajik and northern Afghans, mainly Sunni Muslims, but they speak a different language, Pashto. They share both this language and their ethnic identity with the people across their southeastern boundary, in the Northwest Province of Pakistan. Such a geographically separated and diverse population has not provided an easy basis for a shared identity as a nation.

A Land in Crisis

Twenty-three years of war have left Afghanistan in misery and ruins. Once proud cities, such as 3,000-year-old Herat, have been bombed into rubble. Villagers have been slaughtered, irrigation systems wrecked, fruit orchards chopped down, and wheat fields planted with land mines. At least 1.5 million Afghans were killed during the war against the Soviets from 1979 to 1989 and in civil wars since. Another 3.5 million remain refugees in Pakistan and Iran. Famine stalks the countryside, while widows in the capital city of Kabul beg in the streets.

The Afghans are tough people. Their defiant spirit was forged in the rugged Hindu Kush Mountains that sweep across the heart of the country, as well as in isolated valleys and on desert plateaus. Their rich cultural mosaic of Persian and Central Asian traditions dates back to at least the time of Cyrus the Great in the sixth century B.C. But they are in deep trouble now.

One in four Afghan children will die before the age of five. Life expectancy for men and women has fallen to 46. There is little or no electricity, safe water is hard to find, and health services are scarce for men and nearly nonexistent for women. Fewer than half of Afghan men and 15 percent of women are literate. Relief agencies warn that a fourth of the population remains at risk of death from war, hunger, or poverty. “They have finally hit rock bottom,” the United Nations reported in 2004.

When the Taliban militia took control of most of Afghanistan in 1996, ending years of fighting among rival warlords and ethnic factions, the fundamentalist movement promised to restore order, disarm the population, and enforce Islamic law. In its zeal to turn back the clock to its own vision of the seventh century, the Taliban focused more on enforcing its puritanical interpretation of Islam, executing criminals in soccer stadiums, evicting

girls from schools, banning women from workplaces, outlawing music, and forcing men to wear beards – than on dealing with famine, refugees, or public health. By harboring the suspected terrorist, Osama bin Laden, even after the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., the Taliban further isolated the country from the rest of the world, leaving the door open to the regime’s downfall.

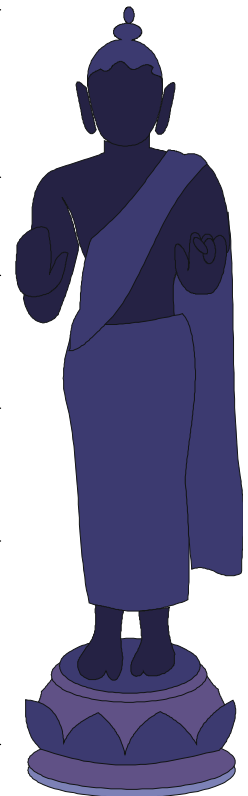
Afghanistan has never been an easy place to live. Today it is a nation in chaos.



History at a Glance

1838-1842:	First Anglo-Afghani War. British invade to thwart Russian influence. Retreating British force massacred.
1878:	Second British invasion of Afghan territory, again to counter Russian expansion.
1879:	Afghanistan and Britain sign the Treaty of Gandomak. Afghan Amir Abdur Rahman Khan given authority over internal affairs, but Britain retains control of international policy.
1893-1895:	Durand Line (political boundary) dividing Afghanistan and British India confirmed. The border splits the Pashtun ethnic group, leaving half in what is now Pakistan.
1919:	Third Anglo-Afghani War. Afghan army attacks British troops in India. By treaty Britain gives up interest in Afghanistan, making it a fully independent state.
1921:	Afghanistan signs friendship treaty with Russia. Other friendship treaties signed with Turkey, Italy, and Persia.
1923-1929:	Amir Amanullah Khan introduces social reforms, prompting a backlash from conservative forces. He flees after civil unrest in 1929.
1933:	Mohammad Zahir Shah begins a 40-year reign as king.
1936:	Afghanistan signs a mutual trade agreement with the Union of Soviet Socialist Russia and a friendship treaty with the United States.
1953:	General Mohammed Daoud becomes prime minister, turns to Soviet Union for economic and military aid after U.S. declines to help.
1961-1963:	Pakistan closes its Afghan border to discourage Pashtun efforts toward political reunification with their ethnic group in Afghanistan.
1963:	Daoud forced to resign as prime minister following border disputes with Pakistan.
1964:	Constitution adopted providing for democratic government, but King Zahir Shah and legislature fail to agree on reforms.
1973:	Daoud seizes power in a coup and declares Afghanistan a republic. His reforms alienate communist factions.
1978:	Mohammad Taraki takes power in a pro-Soviet coup led by Hafizullah Amin. Daoud is assassinated.
1979:	Taraki assassinated and replaced as prime minister by Amin. He was killed in a coup backed by Soviet troops, who install Babrak Karmal. Rebel mujahidin fighters exploded into guerrilla war.

1980:	Fighting by mujahidin escalated. United States, Pakistan, China, Egypt, Iran, and Saudi Arabia funneled money and arms to rebels.
1985:	Several rebel groups joined to fight Soviets. Many Afghani civilians fled their homes.
1986:	Najibullah Khan replaces Babrak Karmal as head of government. United States armed mujahidin with stinger missiles to shoot down Soviet helicopter gunships.
1988:	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Union of Soviet Socialist Republic and United States signed peace accord. Soviet troops began to withdraw.
1989:	Last Soviet soldier left Afghanistan. Mujahidin continued to fight Najibullah Government.
1990:	Afghan refugees reached a peak of 6.2 million.
1992:	Najibullah yielded power to mujahidin when Kabul fell. Burhanuddin Rabbani, an ethnic Tajik, proclaimed to be the president. Rival factions continued to fight.
1994:	Rabbani's power struggle with Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar rekindled civil war. The Taliban captured Kandahar.
1996:	Taliban deposed Rabbani, executed Najibullah, and seized control of Kabul, imposing a strict Islamic regime.
1998:	Major earthquakes hit northeast Afghanistan. U.S. missiles directed at training camps of Osama bin Laden in Khost Province in retaliation for attacks upon U.S. embassies in Africa.
1999:	UN imposed air embargo and economic sanctions on the Taliban for providing sanctuary to Osama bin Laden.
2001:	The Taliban destroyed two giant statues of Buddha at Bamian dating from the third and fifth centuries, calling them an affront to Islam.
2001:	On September 9, suicide bombers posing as journalists assassinated anti-Taliban resistance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud.
2001:	Three weeks after the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., the United States and Britain rained bombs and missiles down on Afghanistan, targeting Osama bin Laden's training camps and the Taliban regime that harbored the suspected terrorist.



Contemporary History of Afghanistan

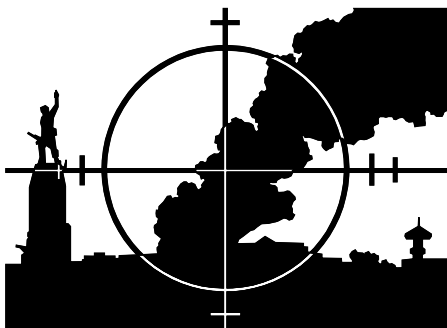
In 1953, Sardar (Prince) Muhammed Daoud Khan, then commander of the Afghan army, seized the authority of prime minister. He managed to institute many economic and social reforms leading up to the adoption of a constitutional monarchy in 1964. As an indication of Daoud's reforming zeal, in 1959 women were allowed to remove the chadar (the traditional heavy veil worn in public), and they participated for the first time in the 1964 elections. Also participating in the 1964 elections was a newly formed Communist party led by Nur Mohammed Taraki, son of a nomadic Pushtun family, and Babrak Karmal, an upper class intellectual from Kabul.

Elections were held again in 1969, but by then, local tribal leaders, who were both religiously and socially conservative, better understood the electoral process. They gained control of the Assembly in order to preserve their traditional authority and effectively limited further reform.

Impatient with this resistance, Sadar Daoud, a tribal leader overthrew the government in 1973, with the help of the army. He set himself up as the military dictator of the country. To secure his rule he strengthened the army and the bureaucracy. With Soviet government aid, he strove to build an industrial sector to replace agriculture and handicrafts as the primary sources of the country's wealth. To assert this independence, he promulgated a new constitution in 1977 that outlawed all political parties other than his own, including the largely urban and intellectual Communist party. A new Assembly then elected Daoud president of the Republic of Afghanistan.

The Soviet Invasion

Resistance to Daoud's nationalist reform program came from both sides of the political spectrum, from the leftist, modernizing groups in the city of Kabul, and from the more conservative elements in the countryside. A zealous group of militant tribal leaders called the mujahideen emerged at this time. The mujahideen sporadically attacked various targets to harass Daoud's government. But Daoud was more concerned about the growing influence (encouraged by the Soviets) of the urban forces of the left, and he began to purge suspected Communist Party members from the military and the bureaucracy.



Within a year of the formation of his new government, Daoud was overthrown by army officers who felt threatened by his purge. Nur Mohammed Taraki, leader of the People's Democratic (Communist) Party, then took over the reins of the government. Infighting among the Communist Party leadership led to President Taraki's assassination in 1979 and the subsequent rise to power of his former associate and arch rival, Hafizullah Amin.

The new rulers were encouraged by the Soviet Union to reform Afghanistan into a socialist industrial state. They adopted a vigorous campaign to break up the landholdings of the local chieftains and to increase literacy among the people. Mujahideen resistance to these reforms intensified to a point where President Amin sought Soviet military aid to protect his government in Kabul. The Soviets feared that continuing civil strife caused by Amin in Afghanistan would diminish their influence and investment there, as well as threaten the security of the adjoining Soviet states to the north.



The Soviet Union sent 85,000 troops to Kabul in December, 1979, not to protect Amin, but to depose him and his radical faction of the Communist Party. The Soviet forces installed, in Amin's place, an early factional leader in the Communist Party, Babrak Karmal, to undertake a more moderate approach to socialist reform.

When the Soviet military forces entered Afghanistan, hordes of refugees fled across the borders of the country that placed them among neighboring peoples with whom they felt a strong sense of kinship. More than 3 million Afghanis crossed the border into the Northwest Province of Pakistan, where they lived in refugee camps; two decades later, 1.2 million are still awaiting a time of sufficient peace and political stability for them to return home.

Another 2 million people fled across the border into Iran, where they have been largely assimilated. Although the Iranian government speaks occasionally of deportation, fewer than half of those refugees have returned from Iran since the departure of the Soviet Army in 1989. At their peak, these two groups of refugees comprised more than one third of the total population of Afghanistan.

Soviet Withdrawal

In 1986, Babrak Karmal resigned as president. The following year, he was replaced by an associate, Dr. Muhammed Najibullah, to rule the country from Kabul. In 1988, the leaders of nine Sunni Muslim rebel groups met in Pakistan to form an interim government in exile. Faced with this more united resistance, the Soviet Union became unwilling to sustain the losses of the intensifying military stalemate. It entered into an accord with the United States to withdraw all of its forces by February 15, 1989. In September 1991, the United States and the Soviet Union further agreed to stop providing arms to the warring factions in Afghanistan effective on January 1, 1992 and to urge a ceasefire in that troubled land.

Warfare between President Najibullah's government and the mujahideen continued unabated for more than three years after the Soviet troop departure. The mujahideen had tried to adopt a common strategy and combine their military forces. Lack of religious, ethnic, and military cohesion thwarted their attempts to overthrow the Kabul government. President Najibullah offered to form a joint government with the leaders of the resistance, but these leaders could agree only that they did not want the communists to share in any part of a new government.

In March 1992, Najibullah was overthrown by his army, and mujahideen forces under the command of Ahmad Shah Masood, a Tajik Afghani, overtook the city of Kabul.

In June, a "national council" of mujahideen leaders elected Burhanuddin Rabbani as interim president. But rival mujahideen groups, particularly the forces led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a Pushtun, continued to contend for recognition and power in Kabul and the surrounding countryside.

In December, a "Council for Resolution and Settlement," consisting of 1,400 delegates, met in Kabul to elect Rabbani to another 18 months as president. It also set up a 250 member Parliament to draw up a new Constitution in anticipation of nationwide elections in 1994. But not all of the rival mujahideen groups supported the Council. The competing political forces of President Burhanuddin Rabbani and Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, leaders of the two strongest factions, continued to ravage the country.

In 1994, as President Rabbani began to gain the upper hand in the mujahideen infighting, a new force arrived to intensify the conflict. The Taliban (“seekers of religious knowledge”) started as a group of Pushtun religious students from the southern Afghan city of Kandahar. They rose up in indignation to oppose the corruption of local warlords in that area of the country. Their reforming fervor spread rapidly among a people weary of the militancy and corruption of the mujahideen.

By the fall of 1996, Taliban forces, supplied by arms from Pakistan, won a following and were in control of the southern two thirds of the country. In September, they drove the mujahideen government out of Kabul, and established a reign of reactionary religious terror in a city that had aspired to become modern.

The Taliban’s reforming zeal countenanced many human rights abuses. Most severely oppressed were the women of Afghanistan, particularly widows, who were deprived of jobs, humanitarian aid, and education under the Taliban regime. By 1999, the Taliban controlled 90 percent of the country.

After the events of September 11, 2001, when the United States deployed forces to Afghanistan and the Taliban were defeated, Karzai of Northern Alliance became the President.

An Uncertain Future

Since the Soviet withdrawal from the country, with all of the fighting among the mujahideen and the rise of the Taliban, the Afghan people throughout the land continued to suffer the ravages of war. Many of the millions of refugees who fled to Pakistan and Iran during the time of Soviet occupation were hesitant to return. The destruction of their villages, the soil depletion and the mining of their fields, and severe drought made the prospect of return far less secure than the security and support they receive in refugee camps. And some refugees, especially women, expressed fear of repression in their homeland because of the Islamic fundamentalist fervor of both the mujahideen and Taliban leaders who were competing for control of their country.

The country has been torn by too many levels of conflict, between modernization and traditional ways of life; between democratic and socialist ideals; between fundamentalist and reform Islam; between ethnic and linguistic groups; between tribes and factions within parties and religious sects and of the level of destruction, arms trading and terrorist training that it introduced into the country. It is no wonder that many people in Afghanistan find comfort even in the severe control of the Taliban, which has extended to encompass almost all of the country.

After the events of the September 11, 2001, the Taliban Government has been removed. The new interim government has been formed by the Afghan tribal leaders and the international community to establish political stability and restore law and order.

However, the primary objective and the most immediate task of this new government is to rebuild the infra structure of the country and restore the confidence of its people in order to bring the millions of refugees back from neighboring Pakistan and Iran.

The loyal *jirga*, a traditional decision-making body, convened in June 2002. It included 1,050 seats for locally elected representatives from the country’s various geographic regions and included religious leaders, provincial governors, and women. In addition, there were 502 seats for selected delegates including Afghan refugees abroad. Shortly after the loyal

jirga convened, it elected Karzai leader of the transitional government and interim president of Afghanistan.

A number of countries have pledged huge sums of money for the rebuilding of Afghanistan, in an international conference in Tokyo, in January, 2002.

Government and Administration

Form of Government: Presently, transitional

Chief of State and Head of Government: President of the Revolutionary Council

Legislature: Revolutionary Council and Central Committee of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan

Voting Qualifications: All citizens 18 years of age

Political Divisions: 19 provinces



President of Afghanistan
Hamid Karzai

Geography

Location: Southern Asia, north and west of Pakistan, east of Iran Border

Area: 437,000 miles

Climate: Arid to semiarid; cold winters and hot summers

Terrain: Mostly rugged mountains; plains in north and southwest

Mountain Ranges: Hindu Kush, Pamirs

Elevation Extremes:

Lowest Peak: Amu Darya 258 feet

Highest Peak: Nowshak 7,485 feet

Largest Lakes: Ab-e-Istadeh ye Moqor, Sari Qul, Band-e-Kajaki

Major Rivers: Amu Darya, Helmand

Major Cities: Kabul, Quandhar, Heart and Mazar-e-Sharif

Natural Resources: Natural gas, petroleum, coal, copper, chromites, talc, sulfur, lead, zinc, iron ore, salt, precious and semiprecious stones

Natural Hazards: Damaging earthquakes occur in Hindu Kush mountains; flooding; droughts

Environment – Current Issues: Soil degradation; overgrazing; deforestation (much of the remaining forests are being cut down for fuel and building materials)

Land and Climate

Mountains cover about four fifths of Afghanistan. From the Pamir Mountains in the northeast, the giant Hindu Kush range stretches westward across the country. The range is highest in the Wakhan Corridor, where Nowshank Peak rises to 24,557 feet (7,485 meters) above sea level. Narrow river valleys and broad plains spread from the central highlands to barren desert country in the west.



Afghanistan's rivers are fed by melting snow and glaciers in the mountains. Northern streams flow toward the Amu Darya, which forms part of the country's border with the Soviet Union. The Amu Darya is Afghanistan's largest river, but the Helmand in the southwest is longer. The Kabul River provides water for the fertile valleys and basins around Kabul and Jalalabad.

In winter and spring Afghanistan receives most of its meager rain and snowfalls. Temperatures drop below 0 degrees (-18 degrees Celsius) in the windswept uplands. The lowlands have milder winters. But the summer sun may raise desert temperatures to 115 degrees (46 degrees Celsius) or higher.

Frontal winds sweeping in from the west may bring huge sandstorms or dust storms. The desert regions receive less than 4 inches (10 centimeters) of rain a year. The high mountains receive more than 40 inches (100 centimeters) of precipitation, most of which falls as snow.

Plant and Animal Life

Like its climate, Afghanistan's plant life is diverse. In the southern deserts, few trees grow. Spring rains may bring flowering grasses and herbs.

Farther north, plant life becomes richer at the higher altitudes. Plants, shrubs, and herbs include camel thorn, locoweed, spiny rest harrow, mimosa, and common wormwood. In addition to these plants there are a number of trees including wild walnut, oak alder, hazel, wild peach, and others. North of the Hindu Kush are pistachio trees, which yield nuts for export.

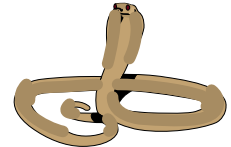
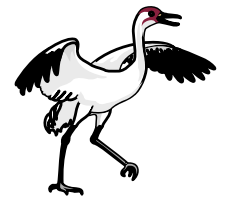
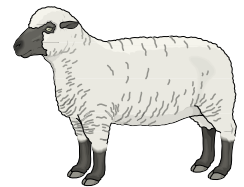
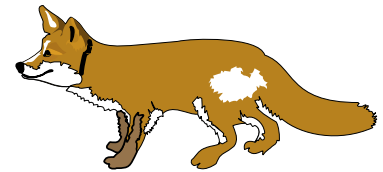
Afghanistan has more than a hundred mammal species; some of them are nearing extinction. They include the leopard, snow leopard, goateed gazelle, *markhor* goat, and bactrian deer. Other wild animals that survive in the country's subtropical temperate zone include wolves, foxes, hyenas, jackals, and mongooses.

Grazing animals include ibex, wild goats, and sheep. Wild boar, hedgehogs, shrews, hares, mouse hares, bats, and various rodents also prosper.

More than 380 bird species have been identified in Afghanistan; 200 of them breed there. Birds are widely hunted, and some species are becoming rare. Few Siberian cranes, for example, have survived.

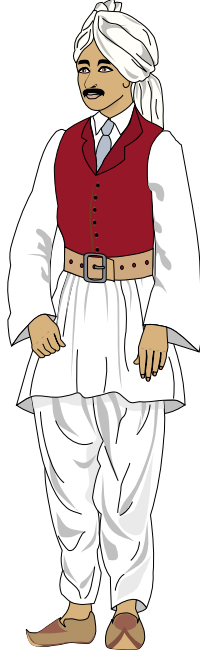
Snakes, lizards, skunks, salamanders, and frogs are also common to the country. There are many varieties of freshwater fish in the rivers, streams, and lakes.

Desertification is a process, in which human intervention causes good land to turn into desert and is quite prevalent in Afghanistan. Because many Afghanis are poor, they collect dung, uproot shrubs, and cut trees



for fuel. Domestic animals overgraze the ranges. Improper irrigation adds salt to fields. Ancient records and archaeology show that once-rich areas have become barren stretches of rock and sand.

Culture and Society



Population: 26,813,057 (July 2001)

Life Expectancy at Birth: Total population: 46.24 years

Male: 46.97 years

Female: 45.47 years (2001)

Nationality: Noun: Afghan(s); adjective: Afghan

Ethnic Groups: Pashtun 38%; Tajik 25%; Hazara 19%; minor ethnic groups (Aimaks, Turkmen, Baloch, and others) 12%; Uzbek 6%

Religions: Islam (Sunni Muslim 84%; Shi'a Muslim 15%; other 1%)

Languages: Pashtu 35%; Afghan Persian (Dari) 50%; Trukic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen) 11%; 30 minor languages (primarily Balochi and Pashai) 4%; much bilingualism

Literacy: Definition: age 15 and over who can read and write

Total population: 31.5%

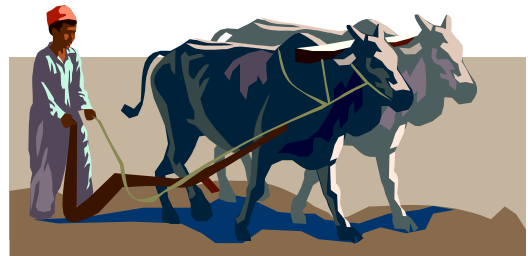
Male: 47.2%

Female: 15% (1999 est.)

Way of Life

In the past many Afghans were nomads. They were constantly on the move, searching the dry plains and plateaus for water and fresh pasture for their sheep, goats, cattle, and camels. Some Afghans still live a nomadic life as animal herders, but most now are settled farmers.

The farms are small, and only the simplest hand tools are used. It is quite usual to see farmers plowing their fields with wooden plows or cutting their wheat crops by hand with sickles. Threshing machines are unknown. Farmers often thresh the wheat by hand, or they may walk cattle back and forth across large piles of wheat to separate the grain from the stalks.



Life in the villages has changed little over the years. A typical house is built of mud or mud bricks and has three or four rooms, furnished with rugs and pillows.

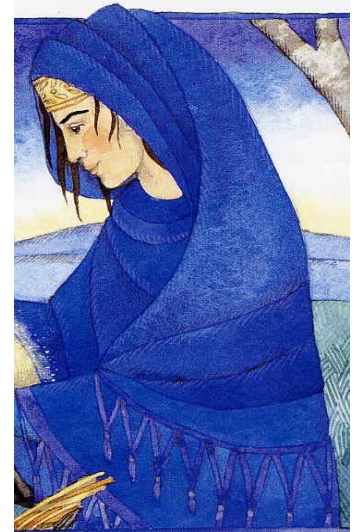
Round flat bread and rice are staple foods, together with mutton (sheep), goat meat, chicken, yogurt, and fruit.

Clothing

Traditional clothing for men consists of a turban wound around the head over a skullcap, and a long shirt worn outside baggy trousers. A vest and quilted coat are worn in cold weather. Village women wear a long dress over trousers and a cloth over their hair.

In the cities, European-style clothing or a combination of traditional and modern dress are common. Men often wear a turban and a suit jacket over Afghan trousers. Men of higher social status may wear a suit and tie and the distinctive Afghan *karakul* (lambskin) hat.

Traditionally, women appearing in public were required to wear the *chader*, a long garment that covered the body from head to ankle. Many city women, particularly in Kabul, the capital, had given up the *chader* for modern dress. Many women in the cities also held jobs outside the home.



Economy



Afghanistan is an extremely poor, landlocked country, highly dependent on farming and livestock raising (sheep and goats). Economic considerations have played second fiddle to political and military upheavals during two decades of war, including the nearly 10 year Soviet military occupation which ended February 15, 1989. During that conflict one-third of the population fled the country. Pakistan and Iran sheltered a combined peak of more than 6 million refugees. In early 2000, 2 million Afghan refugees remained in Pakistan and about 1.4 million in Iran.

The gross domestic product has fallen substantially over the past 20 years because of the loss of labor and capital and the disruption of trade and transport; severe droughts added to the nation's difficulties in 1998-2000.

The majority of the population continues to suffer from insufficient food, clothing, housing, and medical care. Inflation remains a serious problem throughout the country. International aid can deal with only a fraction of the humanitarian problems, let alone promote economic development.

In 1999-2000, internal civil strife continued, hampering both domestic economic policies and international aid efforts. Numerical data are likely to be either unavailable or unreliable. Afghanistan was by far the largest producer of opium poppies in 2000, and narcotics trafficking is a major source of revenue.

Destruction of Economy

Afghanistan's economy has seen widespread destruction over the past two decades of war. Most of the major formal social, administrative and economic institutions of the country have fallen apart due to the Soviet occupation, population displacement, and continued heavy fighting among various Mujahidden factions in 1992.



The nation's transportation and communication systems, heavy and small-scale industries, education and agricultural infrastructure are among the most seriously damaged sectors that need a tremendous amount of investment when peace and stability return to the country. At present, it would be difficult to expect significant improvement in the economic situation of the country. Although the situation is changing under the new government of President Karzai, progress is still very slow.

Deterioration of the situation

This economic decline has exacerbated the level of poverty and economic hardship throughout the country. Largely dependent on subsistence agriculture, the country has witnessed diminishing income levels, declining food security, reduced access to urgently needed services and an increasing population.

The changing state of the economy

All spheres of economy, excluding agriculture, was controlled by the government of Afghanistan. During the last two decades, the government has relinquished some of its control to the private sector.

The potential for further improvement of the private sector is still high and a large number of Afghan businessmen and traders might be interested in investing in small-scale industries provided that security and stability exist. However, this depends on the decision of the future governments of the country and the economic policy they may chalk out.

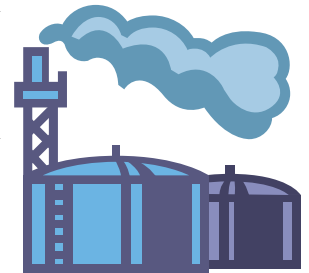
Central Authority

At present, no reliable information is available on economic indicators such as national income, the government budget, foreign trade, inflation rate, income distribution, employment, current level of Gross National Product, or balance of payments.



Chief Manufactured and Mined Products: Cement, cotton fabrics, fertilizer, hard coal, natural gas, rayon fabrics, woolen fabrics.

Chief Agricultural Products: Crops — barley, corn (maize), fruits, rice, vegetables, wheat. Livestock—cattle, donkeys, goats, poultry, sheep.



Education

Adult Literacy Rate: 31.5% overall; 15% for females

Primary School: 6 years (ages 7-13) and is compulsory

Secondary School: 6 years (ages 13 -19)

The educational system is in a crisis situation. It has been failing since long before the Taliban regime's edicts banning girls from education. In fact, participants attending a workshop at the World Bank in Washington reached a consensus that there must be a shift in focus from describing the enormity of the problems and what can't be done, to building understanding of and support for what can and



is currently being done by a variety of committed sources. The opportunities to make a difference in the lives of children—particularly girls—and the predicted devastating effects of inaction, were too great to waste time waiting for significant national educational developments in the war-torn country.

One of the strongest themes of the workshop was the need to harness community support for education in Afghanistan. Communities are increasing demand for boys’ and girls’ education, and while community-run schools are the preferred development model in many other countries, in Afghanistan they are possibly the only hope for thousands of children.

The work of organizations like UNICEF, Save the Children, and the Swedish Committee, have been building and supporting schools, teacher training, and the provision of materials among other initiatives both within Afghanistan and in refugee communities.

Women’s Education

Female literacy in Afghanistan was never high. Before the 1979 Soviet invasion, only 1% of women graduated from high school. “People think everything was perfect before,” says Eric Donelli, the UNICEF (United Nations International Children’s Fund) spell representative in Kabul. “The Taliban are a product of a culture and a mentality.”

After the deployment of the United States troops and fall of Taliban government, things are returning back to where they were in the pre-partition Taliban era but Afghanistan needs a lot of resources to build up the new infrastructure for education.

Festivals

Religious holidays in Afghanistan are celebrated according to the lunar calendar, and other holidays like Independence Day, and New Year’s Day are celebrated based on the solar calendar. During many holidays Afghans usually visit friends and family, prepare lavish meals, and attend special prayers.

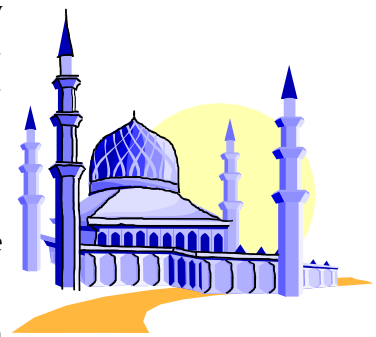
Eid al-Fitr

After a month of fasting (Ramadan), people start the day by wearing new clothes, and going to mosques for prayer. Afterwards, people visit or entertain friends and family. Children usually receive gifts or money called “Eidi.”

Eid al-Azha

It is celebrated on tenth day of the twelfth month of the Islamic (Hijra) calendar.

The day commemorates the Prophet Abraham’s devotion to God. He was willing to slay his son, Ismael, in sacrifice. Ismael was never killed; instead, God provided a lamb for the sacrifice. Muslims sacrifice a lamb, and the meat is given out to the poor. This holiday is celebrated in the same fashion as Eid al-Fitr, people visit friends and family and gifts are exchanged.



Ashura

Ashura falls on the tenth day of the month Muharram in the Islamic calendar.

This is a day of mourning. It commemorates the martyrdom of Prophet Muhammad's grandson Hussain and his followers at the battle of Kerbala.

Milad al Nabi

The twelfth day of the month Rabi al-Awal in the Islamic calendar.

On this day, people celebrate the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. They attend prayers, remember Muhammad, and entertain/visit friends and families.

Nowroze

Nowroze is on March 21. This is the first day of spring (New Year's Day for the solar calendar). The Taliban declared this holiday as anti-Islamic and cracked down on its celebrations. Despite this, people continue to celebrate it.

Jeshen

August 19 marks Afghani Independence Day. Even though Afghanistan was never a British colony, the British had control of its foreign policy due to an agreement signed by a former Afghan King. The third Anglo-Afghan War ended this agreement.

Other Holidays

Labor Day (May 1)

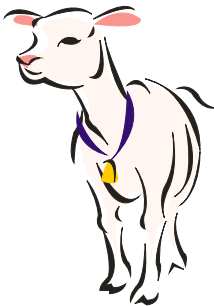
Remembrance Day for Martyrs and Disabled (May 4)

Popular Sports

National Sport

Buzkashi literally translated means "goat grabbing" is the national sport of Afghanistan.

Many historians believe that Buzkashi began with the Turkic-Mongol people, and it is indigenously shared by the people of Northern Afghanistan.



In *Buzkashi*, a headless carcass of calf is placed in the centre of a circle and surrounded by the players of two opposing teams. The project of the game, is to get control of the carcass. The competition is fierce, and the winner of a match receives prizes that have been donated by a sponsor.

In order for someone to become a champion or *chapandaz*, one must undergo a tremendous amount of difficult training. In fact, the best *chapandaz*, are usually over the age of forty. Not only the players but also the horses undergo arduous training.

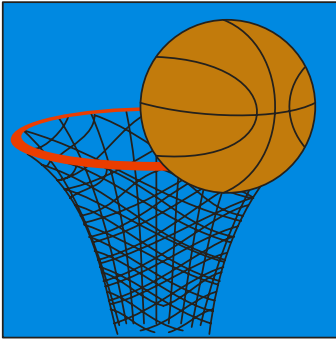
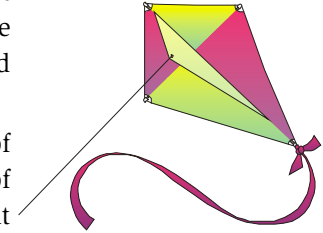
There are two types of *Buzkashi*, *Tudabarai* and *Qarajai*. In *Tudabarai*, in order to score, the rider must obtain possession of the carcass and then carry it away from the starting circle in any direction. The rider must stay free and clear of the other riders.

In *Qarajai*, the task is much more complex. The player must carry the calf around a marker, and then return the carcass to the team's designated scoring circle.

To many Afghans, *Buzkashi* is not just a game, it is a way of life; a way in which teamwork and communication are essential for being successful.

Other Sports Played In Afghanistan

- **Kite Flying:** Participants cover the strings of their kites with a mixture of powdered glass and flour. Then they outmaneuver each other in order to cut the string of an opponent's kite. They do this by rubbing the strings together: this sport is mostly played by children and young teenagers.
- **Topay- Danda** (Similar to stick ball): A polished stick of about one and a half feet is used to throw a smaller stick of about three inches. The object is to hit the smaller stick at one of its pointed corners with the big stick, making it jump in the air. The player then hits it again before it falls down. The challenge is to hit the stick as far as possible. The player who hits it the furthest is the winner.
- **Wrestling**



- **Boxing**
- **Basketball**
- **Soccer**
- **Bicycle Racing**
- **Archery**
- **Target Shooting**
- **Racing**

Kabul Museum

For thousands of years, Afghanistan was a crossroad for trade from India, Iran and Central Asia. As a result, many treasures and artifacts have been discovered and collected. The Kabul Museum, housed the most comprehensive record of Central Asian history. These treasures were tragically lost when the Kabul Museum was bombed in 1993.

In 1994, the United Nations attempted to stop the looting from the collapsed building of the museum by fixing it and transferring the artifacts to the steel doored vaults but the plunder continued. These looted artifacts have shown up all over the world and have brought large sums of money to criminals.

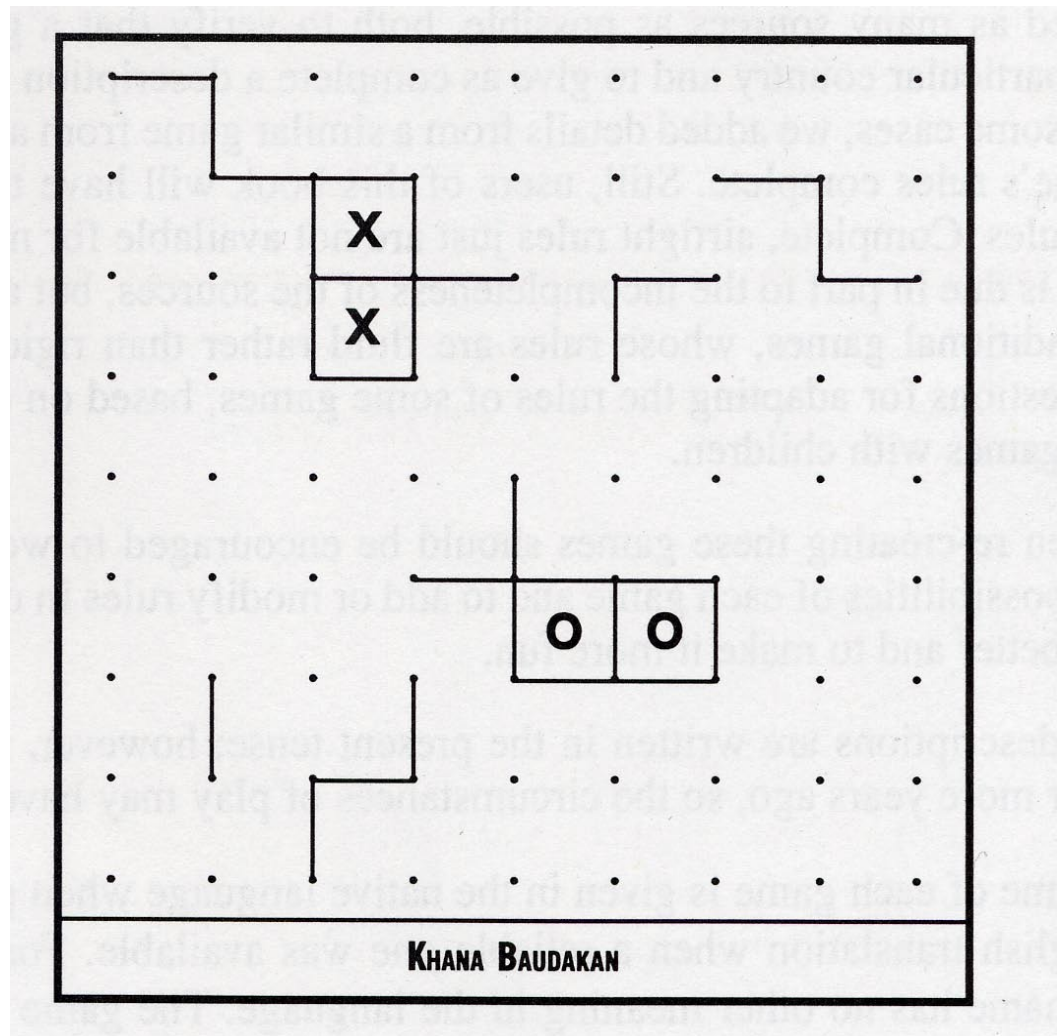


“Khana Baudakan,” a popular game for Afghan children

Playing area: A flat, clear space with smooth sand

Number of Players: Two

Materials: Sticks for drawing on the sand

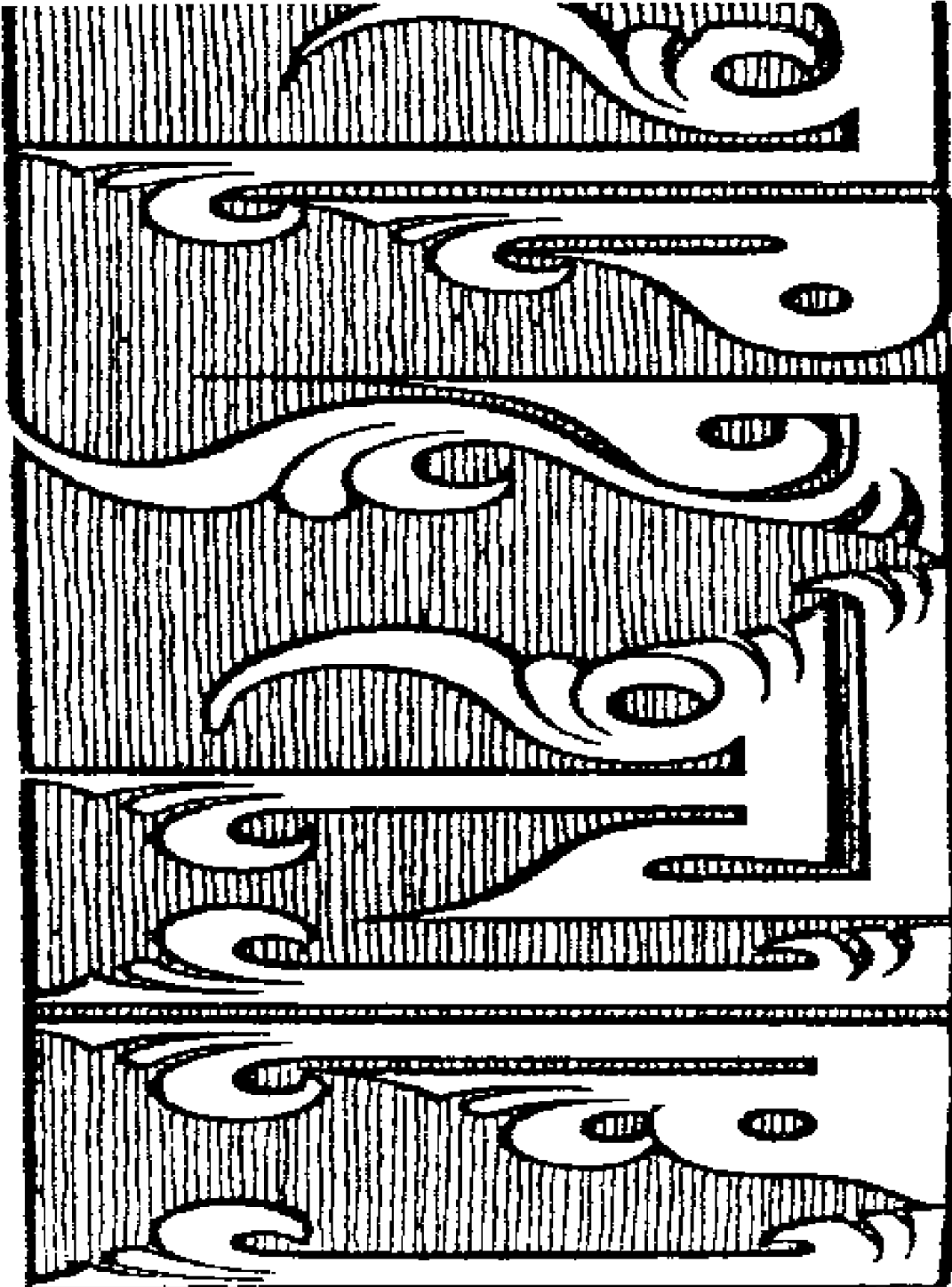


The players draw a square grid of dots on the ground about three inches apart, and they take turns connecting any two dots that are next to each other. Dots may be connected horizontally or vertically, but not diagonally. When one player draws the line that completes a box, he puts an “X” in it and takes another turn. A player will often make many boxes on one turn. The other player will mark his boxes with an “O.” Once the entire grid has been turned into boxes and there are no free dots, the player with marks in most boxes is the winner.

A game very much like this one, Pen the Pig, is played in the United States using pencil and paper. There is no fixed number of dots for the game.

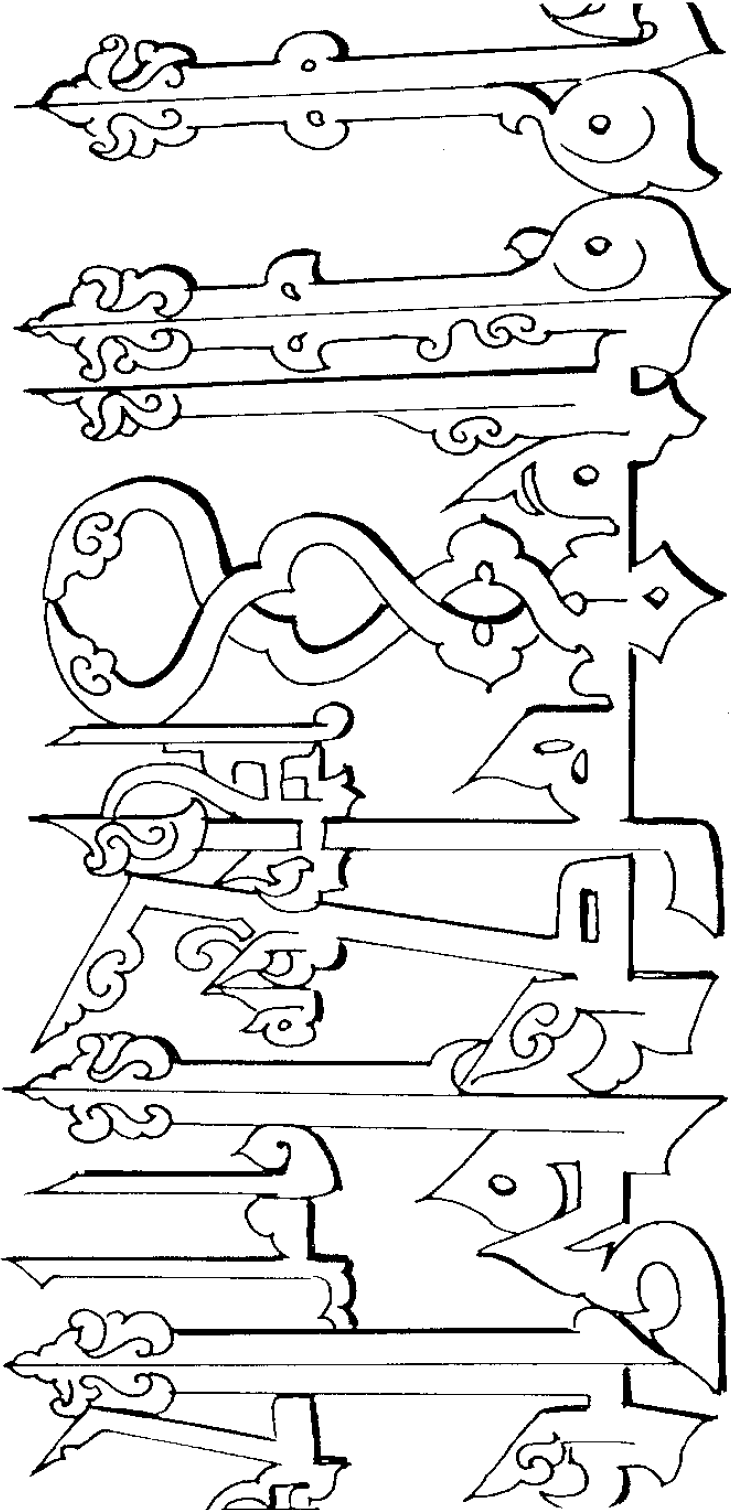
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“Melon,” an Afghan game

Playing area: A space, indoors or outdoors, where players can sit comfortably.

Number of Players: Five or more

This game is quite popular for Afghan people, particularly in nomadic tribes. On cold nights when they sit around fire, they play this game. The players sit in a circle, and one of them begins to tell a story. The story can be either a folktale that everyone knows or a made-up story, but it cannot be a story about something that really happened. When the first story teller has told a short bit of the tale, he stops suddenly. The next player must continue the story, and so on around the circle. If a player says something that does not make sense, contradicts an earlier part of the story, or cannot think of what to say next, he is out of the game. A player, who is out of the game, has to follow the command of the person who was telling the story before him. He can ask the player who is out to make faces or make voices of some animal or any other such thing he can think of.