ONGOING ACTIVITIES

PARK E ZARNEGAR, KABUL

Taking its name from the palace in which the treaty ratifying Afghanistan’s independent status from imperial British Indian Rule was signed in 1921 (and which was demolished in the 1960s) this park is on the site of orchards originally laid out by Babur’s uncle Ulug Beg in the 15th century. Apart from the imposing brick mausoleum of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (above) and adjoining mosque, the only evidence of the history of the site is the gulistanserai pavilion built by Habibullah Khan in around 1910, and the tall plane trees that flank the stone-lined water channels that cross what is now a public garden.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN D7, KABUL

As part of ongoing efforts to promote socio-economic development in District 7, two workshops were established in early 2008 to provide residents with training in basic carpentry and tailoring skills. Experienced carpenters are providing instruction over 6 months to 20 young men from the district, in order to develop skills that will improve their chances of finding employment. In addition to furniture, the outputs of the training course include windows and doors for installation in the nearby Gozargah school, where 4,600 girls are taught in 4 shifts in a derelict private house and in tents. Individuals or organizations with an interest in placing orders with the workshop should contact Ghulam Sakhizada (0798 175 375) gmohd_sakhizada@yahoo.com.

In an adjoining compound, 20 women from the neighbourhood are receiving initial instruction over 4 months in tailoring. Based on an assessment of demand and skills at the end of the initial stage of the course, students will be supported in establishing home-based enterprises in the district.

VISITORS TO BAGHE BABUR

Following the example of the 27,000 people who visited Baghe Babur over the Nawruz holiday, H.E. First deputy President Ahmad Zia Masood joined the Mayor of Kabul and members of the Kabul Old City Commission in the garden on 16th April. After reviewing the activities of the Commission, which coordinates urban conservation and development initiatives in the old city, H.E. Ahmad Zia Masood stressed the importance of safeguarding of the surviving historic fabric and urged that effective development controls be enforced for all new construction in this highly sensitive area.
Two and a half years ago, preservation work began on the mosque and cistern complex adjoining what was once Darwaza Malik or the King’s Gate to the old city of Herat. Across a courtyard from the summer and winter mosques, which date in part from the Safavid era, is a cistern built in the late 15th century by Ali Sher Nawai and described, and dated*, in a 16th century verse (right):

As well as being one of the oldest surviving cisterns in the old city, this is unusual for its rectangular plan, over which pairs of transverse and cloister vaults have sections of the brick masonry laid vertically, with a small central dome. Following repairs to the superstructure and roof of the dome, the lime plaster that rendered the reservoir of the cistern waterproof has been restored in a manner that matches the characteristics of the original saraje finish. A mix of slaked lime, sand, ash, straw and water is beaten with a wooden paddle for 7-8 hours, after which the plasticity is tested by seeing if the mix bonds 2 fired bricks together. More straw is then added before treading by foot for 2-3 hours, after which the mix is ready for application to the walls as a base course. A second coat of plaster, in which bulrush fibres replace the straw in the mix, is then applied and smoothed with a round river stone, or a steel/wooden trowel. To date, some 200 metres² of lime plaster has been applied in this way to the Malik cistern, while the same technique is being used to repair damaged sections of the Chahar Suq cistern.

*Attributed to Sayyid Ikhtiyar in Majalis al-nafa’is, the chronogram in the last four words of the verse add up to 897 AH or 1491/2 AD

As the preservation of the superstructure of the 15th century Namakdan pavilion reaches its final stages, careful documentation has taken place of traces of a marble lined water-channel that ran through the building and a small octagonal pool that lay at its centre. Together with historic photos, this work has enabled the reconstruction of a system through which water will again flow under the newly-preserved dome of the pavilion, over a small marble cascade, and to the garden to the west. Along with the stabilization of the adjoining Abdullah Ansari shrine, this work is co-funded by the German government.