

Controversial cinema, surplus bargains, historic soccer, shoe hurling - an Afghan news round-up compiled by Elayne Jude for Great North News Services

## The Patience Stone

In Persian mythology, the patience stone, or syngue sabou, is a magical black stone that receives the problems of those who confide in it.

In writer-director Atiq Rahimi's new film, "The Patience Stone," the comatose husband of a Muslim woman living in a Middle Eastern country during an insurrection symbolises the stone.

Abandoned by his brothers and fellow jihadists, an injured warrior is cared for and hidden by his wife. She confides her dreams and desires, and relates the abuses of their loveless marriage to his unconscious form.

The Paris-based filmmaker fled Afghanistan in 1985 but now makes frequent visits. Based on his own novel, "Patience Stone" was adapted by Rahimi and screenwriter Jean-Claude Carriere. It was made in Morocco, with some exteriors shot in Kabul.

When "Patience Stone" opened last year in Kabul, it provoked more hostility from female viewers than from men. The director attributed the strong reactions to the film's treatment of sexuality.

The wife experiences passion for the first time when she begins an affair with a young soldier who mistakenly believes she's a prostitute. She begins to kiss and caress her comatose husband as she never did during their marriage. She visits her aunt, a prostitute.

Iranian actress Golshifteh Farahani, who plays the woman, moved to Paris five years ago after

running into trouble with the government for her appearances in banned Iranian movies. Their mutual friend Carriere brought Rahimi and Farahani together.

"I have done 27 or 28 movies in my life, and this was the only movie that the feelings of the character stayed with me when work was finished," Farahani said. "I felt the pain and the sadness and the weight on her shoulders."

"The intellectual Muslims seemed to have liked the movie," said Rahimi. "A lot of young artists and filmmakers asked me to screen the movie at local cinematheques and film clubs [in Kabul]."

The film was Afghanistan's entry for the international feature category at the Oscars, and won a human rights award at the Istanbul Film Festival.

It is scheduled for UK cinema release in December 2013  
<http://www.filmdates.co.uk/films/4770-the-patience-stone/>

govliquidation.com

After 12 years of war in Afghanistan, officials are now pondering what to do with \$50 billion in equipment half a world away. Much of the gear is trickling at knockdown prices to the public. Each day, new items appear on the site govliquidation.com, as bases around the country release surplus items from rafts and trucks to fire engines and pretzel stands. The site has a full auction catalogue with interactive state maps and helpful links to local shipping companies.

By December 2014, the U.S. military will have transported home some 35,000 vehicles and 95,000 containers at an estimated cost of \$6 billion. It is the largest retrograde history.

Since Afghanistan is landlocked, the U.S. must fly the equipment out, transport overland through Uzbekistan, with its dubious human rights record, or pay huge customs fees to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The cost of moving the containers alone could reach \$237 million. It

becomes more cost effective to give away or destrpy incountry,

2,000 of the massive eight-ton troop carriers known as MRAPS, costing more than \$1 million tax dollars, are to be scrapped locally. Others are now parked at the Sierra Army Depot in California, home to tens of thousands of combat vehicles, and more than \$1 billion in clothing. The base has its own rail yard and airstrip, and goods arrive daily. 1,500 employees of the Army Materiel Command sort and store each item.

Some of that may well end up a click of the mouse away from you. It's one way to claw back your taxes.

Home game

Afghanistan hosted their first international soccer match for 10 years when they play Pakistan in a friendly.

The match took place on an artificial pitch at the AFF (Afghanistan Football Federation) stadium, FIFA said.

It was Afghanistan's first international home game since Turkmenistan won 2-0 in 2003, and the first against Pakistan in Kabul since 1977.

Ranked 139th in the world, Afghanistan are unbeaten in three outings this year, having beaten Sri Lanka and Mongolia and drawn with Laos.

President Karzai watched the Afghan team's 3-0 victory on television, and street parties erupted at the final whistle.

The second season of professional premier league, which kicked off in the capital Kabul this month, was broadcast live by leading Afghan TV and radio channels.

Meanwhile, the Afghan Girls' National Football Team defeated Kyrgyzstan's national team 1-0 in a friendly match held in Kyrgyzstan.

A series of friendly matches is being played between Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan.

The matches were organised to prepare the teams for the 2013 South Asian Football Federation Gold Cup (SAFF) in Nepal. The 2013 South Asian Football Federation Championship will be the tenth edition of the tournament.

These boots were made for whacking

In Afghanistan, where an AK-47 is often used to settle scores, shoes are hurled at enemies for self-defense, and to shame and humiliate. Women defend themselves against harassers by shoe-throwing on the streets of Kabul. Youtube features Afghan parliamentarians using their shoes as a weapon of choice inside the chamber.

One MP, an ethnic Uzbek from the north, began railing at a Pashtun colleague during a debate, blaming all the suicide and roadside bombings and corruption on ethnic Pashtuns. The Pashtun MP retaliated by throwing his shoes at his accuser. In parliament even women throw shoes at each other. Last year a female MP popularly known as "the general" suddenly threw her shoes at another woman MP who represents nomads during a debate. The general descended two rows and began punching the other MP before others intervened.

A young medical student and body builder, Jalil Parwani, was biking home with a friend from the Kabul medical faculty when they came across six female students walking home. Parwani began to harass them, shouting "You look like a princess walking so nicely and romantically." The girls ignored him and then ducked into a hamburger shop. Parwani and his friend followed. The two young men were hit by a barrage of shoes thrown by the girls. He says the one he

called a princess hit him harder than the others.

Safia Safi, a third-year Kabul university student and ethnic Pashtun from eastern Afghanistan, was harassed by a young man on a Kabul street. She immediately threw her shoes at him. But he ran off with Safi's shoes, forcing her to walk home barefoot. Safi's brother exploded when he heard the story, grabbed a knife, and ran after the man, threatening to kill him. "He should have known that it's not wise to bother Pashtun girls," said Safi.

### Circus Skills the Afghan Way

Afghanistan's Mobile Mini Circus for Children would have been heretical under the Taliban. Today the circus, founded by Danish dance instructor David Mason, is one of the few projects still expanding as international aid tails off.

"Left on the street, kids turn to bad things, becoming suicide bombers or street thugs," said Murtaza Nowrozi, an 18-year-old juggler. "It's better for them to go to school and join programmes like this."

Many of the children are orphans, or from refugee camps. Some have been on tour to Denmark, Germany, Italy and Japan, and some have stayed on with the project to become teachers.

Mason started the circus with his own money, securing his first donation of \$1,000 in 2002. The project now runs centres in seven provinces and has about 300 regular students. The budget is close to \$500,000 and its national tours have reached nearly 3 million people.

The shows are tailored to comply with regional mores. In eastern parts of the country, girls do not perform. In the ultra-conservative south, performances run without music. Passages from the Koran, the central religious text of Islam, are always recited at the start.

"We are doing things in a very Afghan and Islamic way," said Mason. He refuses to be dispirited

by the prospect of a Taliban revival. He is confident the circus will thrive. "It's just a matter of mutual understanding and accepting each other."

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