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## **Afghanistan and Tajikistan Dedicate “Bridge to Friendship”**

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Nizhny Pyandzh, Tajikistan – Marking the transition to economic stability for Afghanistan and Tajikistan came with all the pomp and circumstance that a dedication ceremony should. The dedication of the “Bridge to Friendship” here, on Sunday, promises to open a Central Asian trade route that until now was sporadic at best.

Afghanistan President Hamid Karsi, Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmonov and U. S. Secretary of Commerce Honorable Carlos M. Gutierrez, arrived by motorcade to a crowd of cheering Afghan and Tajik citizens. The trio paraded in front of the canopy covered seating areas on their way to the stage. The stage stood prominently on the bluff a few steps from the bridge with an over view of the river - the river that for years had separated the two countries in so many ways.

Afghanistan-Tajikistan Bridge project, a \$37 million dollar complex, includes the 672 meter (2204 feet) weathering steel bridge, customs buildings, inspection bays, check points and roads that connect this bridge to a virtually untapped trade route between the two countries. Prior to the bridge, the only way across this part of the river was on a ferry that has limited capacity and the inability to operate year round.

“Exchange of goods will increase in numbers thru this bridge initially and (will) unilaterally benefit the people of these countries,” President Rahmonov said. He went on



to thank the U.S. for building the bridge, praise the friendship with President Karsi, and speak of the recently announced joint Afghanistan/ Tajikistan [hydro electric](#) power plant project and the potential stability that exportation will bring.

“I want to support the words of my dear friend of Tajikistan and we hope all his sayings will come true,” President Karsi said. He

President Rahmonov center, President Karsi on his right and Honorable Gutierrez moments before the ribbon cutting in the middle of the bridge.

also thanked the U.S. and reminisced of the ground breaking ceremony and the prosperity that he hoped would follow with this bridge. "My wish is coming true."

Until now the nearest open water port for this region connected directly by roads was the Black Sea 2800 kilometers away. Opening this trade route for farmers and manufactures gives them a land route to a warm water port to the south that is almost half the distance at 1500 kilometers.

"Much as the [Silk Road](#) was integral to the great civilizations in the past, the by ways of the region are again proving to be the cross roads of commerce, of peace and of stability," Honorable Gutierrez said. The bridge will tie in to the existing road in Sher Khan Bander, Afghanistan and the road to Dusti in Tajikistan, significantly improving the flow of aid, commerce and trade within Central Asia.

Border crossing complexes on both sides, scheduled for completion later this fall, are primarily for border security. Included in these complexes are immigration and customs as well as state of the art scanning equipment to thwart smuggling. "It will take a joint effort to avoid using this bridge for trafficking in human beings, drugs and arms smuggling ... this should be a symbol of love, noble action and creativity," President Rahmonov said.



Amidst elevated security preparation continues into Saturday evening.

Funding for the projects came from multiple donor nations with the United States contributing the largest portion. "This bridge is an example of the best in International cooperation. Several countries, Norway, Japan and the European Union, also joined in the effort," Honorable Gutierrez said. He went on to thank the two countries for their support and cooperation with the project and their dedication to the prosperity of their people. He also extended a special thanks to the US Army Corps of Engineers and Brian Walls, Project Manager, for devoting tireless energy and effort.

The project is being managed as two separate projects, the bridge and the border crossing complexes. The design-build bridge contractor is Rizzani de Eccher S.p.A. of Udine, Italy. The contractor for the border crossing complexes is Technologists Incorporated based out of Kabul Afghanistan.

Rizzani employed over 450 people at the peak of the 19 month bridge construction period. Citizens of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Philippines, Italy, India, Russia, Africa, Thailand, Europe and North America all worked together to make this a success. 19,100 cubic meters of concrete, three quarters of which is below water, and the weathering steel girders make the bridge low maintenance. 2152 tons of steel reinforcement support this structure and give it the ability to handle a zone five earthquake, the highest level of seismic activity.

The 11.5 meter wide bridge spans the river once called the Oxus. Some in Afghanistan call it Aamoo or Amu, while the Tajiks call it the Pyandzh or Panj Darya. There are four small bridges in remote areas along this river closer to the source in Badakhshan Region. None of the bridges are even half the width of the bridge at Nizhny Pyandzh and are only 3.5 to 4.5 meters wide and incapable of supporting the massive weight of commerce. The [first](#) two bridges opened between 2002 and 2004, the rest in 2006.

The amount of time before the promise of new sources of revenue along the major routes and jobs within the immediate area may be hard to predict. If the area near the

bridge is the barometer for gauging this, then there is a bright future for this region. New hotels have sprung up on both side of the border and a new restaurant and gas station are open for business on the Tajikistan side.

Through the execution of these construction contracts, the U.S. is demonstrating their commitment to assist both countries on the road to economic stability and to aid in the reduction of dependency on foreign donors.

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