



# NEWS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BUILDING STRONG®

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## Building Strong: The Corps of Engineers provides war-torn Kabul University with engineering books

**KABUL** - Mustafa Kanishka attended Kabul University at a time when peace reigned in Afghanistan, when the Kabul School of Engineering was ranked one of the highest in the region and when going to school to get a higher education was an expectation, not a privilege. That was in the early 1970s.

Today, the university that gave Kanishka the foundation to succeed as an engineer struggles to maintain its war-torn buildings and its instructors teach outdated material from outdated books. What was once a renowned school for engineering currently fails to provide students with the fundamentals of a good education, something Kanishka refuses to let continue.

“Practically anyone under the age of 45 can be called a child of war,” Kanishka says. “And the education opportunities in this country have suffered because of it.”

Kanishka works as a project manager for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan Engineer District-North capacity development program and occasionally guest speaks at Kabul University. During one of his lectures, Kanishka came to realize that something needed to be done to help the faculty and students of the school. So he enlisted AED-N to do an evaluation of the school’s conditions and curriculum, and according to Kanishka, what the Corps found was shocking.

“What we came to realize is that the engineering department faculty has been a target,” Kanishka says. “They didn’t have basic things to provide a good education like books and an adequate laboratory. What we found was horrifying.”

Kanishka blames the downfall of Afghanistan’s engineering education on what he calls “brain drain.”

“The country has gone through a sad transformation in the last 30 years where education just wasn’t a priority,” Kanishka says. “It has been suffering from brain drain for so long.”



U.S. Army Corps of Engineer employees along with students and faculty from Kabul University’s engineering college help unload more than 400 boxes of engineering books bought by the USACE District- North. (photo by LaDonna Davis)

Current assistant professor and graduate of Kabul University's engineering college, Farid Momand, tends to agree.

Momand received his undergraduate degree in civil engineering from Kabul University in 2004. He then was accepted to a graduate program in the United States at Ohio University. In 2010, Momand came back to Kabul with his master's degree to give back to the school that he considers home. But, coming home only highlighted the harsh reality and differences in the quality of education students receive in the United States and Kabul University.

"In the States, the universities are very well equipped and high tech," Momand says. "Students have access to unlimited resources, labs and books for their programs; in Afghanistan resources are very limited. We don't have good laboratories or access to quality materials."

The downfall of Kabul University's engineering college can be traced back to when the Soviet's invaded Afghanistan in the late '70s. The Soviet government changed the language of the engineering college from English, the official language of engineering, to Dari and Pashtu, the official languages of the Afghan people.

The engineering college's problems continued through the '80s when the school was closed and all the professors were distributed to other colleges within Kabul University.

In the '90s, the engineering college opened its doors again with very limited resources but was overtaken by the Taliban who banned women from studying, looted the college and destroyed and burned all of the school's books.

Upon witnessing the degradation of Kabul University's engineering college, Kanishka had one goal in mind- to give the department back its education foundation, one book at a time. "Books are the very first instruments of teaching and learning," he says.

As part of the capacity development program, one of the Corps' goals is to help build up the Afghan people's knowledge and skills in engineering and construction so that they can develop their own country long after the Corps has left.

"If you are going to learn, you have to have the adequate resources, and textbooks are the first step," says Zalmai Zaheb, the dean of the engineering department at the university.

In order to provide books for the engineering department, the first hurdle the Corps had to overcome was developing a list of adequate books, manuals and teacher guides that the school faculty could all agree upon. The second was getting the funding.

Because the engineering department had been using outdated materials for so long, when it came time for the faculty members to prepare a list of books they needed, all they could come up with was dated material.

“Our students were using photo copies of dated books because there weren’t enough books to go around,” says Zaheb.

In order to overcome that hurdle, the capacity development team put a request in to universities in the U.S. to provide a list of up-to-date engineering books. Once the faculty at Kabul University agreed upon the list, it was time to figure out the next step- who would supply the books.

After sifting through many vendors – none of which could provide the books at cost or mail them to Kabul – the capacity development team finally found BookPal, LLC, a vendor that would deliver the books in a timely manner at the cost that they needed.



The first shipment of books contained more than 400 boxes and 3,000 books featuring more than 75 titles. A second and final shipment of books comparative in size will be delivered to the university later in March. (USACE AED-N photo)

With a vendor and lists of books complete, getting the books funded was the next challenge.

The books are funded through the Commander’s Emergency Response Program, a program which gives Army commanders the authority to use money at their discretion to fund humanitarian relief and reconstruction projects in Afghanistan.

The only problem is that under the program, the district commander, Col. Thomas Magness, has a limited spending amount of \$750,000. The books cost \$851,000.

In order to get the funding for the books, Magness had to send a special request to USFor-A , or U.S. Forces Afghanistan- a higher headquarters that oversees the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan. Within weeks the agency approved the funding and the book drive was a go!

On Jan. 28, the first shipment of more than 400 boxes and 3,000 books featuring more than 75 titles arrived at the district’s compound. The final shipment of books, comparative in size, will arrive later this month.

It took a relative small army of Corps employees to load the books onto several trucks for delivery to the university and more than 40 university staff, students and Corps employees to unload the many boxes of books once at Kabul University.

But, in the end, the labor was worth the effort.

“We needed variety,” says Momand. “Before we only had a few books in each course; before we had to copy books to give to the students, now we have enough books to give the students so we don’t have to break any copyright laws.”



Kabul University's engineering college received brand new engineering text books and teachers guides just in time for the 2011 spring semester. (photo by LaDonna Davis)

Seeing the boxes of books stacked up against the wall of the school's study room was a sight that nearly brought tears to the dean's eyes.

"Right now I am so excited it is hard for me to speak," Zaheb said during the book delivery. "From the first meeting with Col. Magness, I was not sure this would happen, but now I see. Right now these books are like water for a man in the desert. It is not enough to say thank you very much. It is very difficult to share my feelings."

But providing books for the students and faculty at Kabul University wasn't enough. In the coming months the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also will upgrade the engineering school's electricity and heating and air conditioning system and provide the school with new

laboratories.

Furthermore, the Corps of Engineers has extended the capacity development book program to try to reach all the universities with engineering colleges in Afghanistan. That's 10 universities total.

"We want all the universities to flourish because that is the main element in stabilizing the country, to stabilizing freedom," Kanishka says. "The Corps has thousands of projects throughout Afghanistan, we need thousands of engineers to maintain and build them. When these students graduate, they will be the ones helping us with the transition of responsibility to the Afghan government,"

For Momand, the new books bring the engineering department one step closer to the quality education that he received in the United States. "These are all the up-to-date books you can find in the States," he says. "These are all great tools to get us on the right path to a quality engineering program."