

2 Feb 99

To: Mark Pont, MCI/Quetta

From: Dick Scott, MCI/Lashkar Gah

~~Subject: Surprise: Unannounced Opening of the Boghra Canal~~

At some point late in the afternoon yesterday, the President of HAVA ordered the re-opening of the Boghra Canal. I learned of this when Engineer Payenda returned from his work site at Loy Manda, which includes work/fill at the nearby Shamalan Canal intake. The return of the water put some of his work at this site under water resulting in some damage to the fill/compaction work. In total we had some 1000 men at work in the canal yesterday. Most would not be able to continue work today because their work desilting the canal is below water line. However, Mohd. Karim, Nad-i-Ali chief water master, took quick action to delay this problem. He went to the Shamalan control gates, closed the gates on the Boghra canal and opened wider the intake gates on the Shamalan, diverting this new flow down the Shamalan. We have no idea if the central control authorities are aware of this action. We do know that farmers from Nad-i-Ali were among those pressuring the head of HAVA to re-open the Boghra Canal.

I had a discussion with HAVA Deputy Akundzada about the project, the work and some problems yesterday at about 4:00pm on the service road near the Nad-i-Ali work site. He did not mention the canal re-opening so I assumed he was unaware of this pending action. At the time we were having problems with the grader starter. He said that if we could not find the required parts to inform him and he would find the needed parts. That is, our working relationship with this man is and has been completely open and cooperative. He would have told us if he had known of the canal opening. Later today, I met with him at the heavy equipment parking area at the Lashkar Gah bridge. He was embarrassed about the opening which he learned about later. He said that the plan was to keep it open for a week but that it was likely to be closed sooner than that. Farmers at the Loy Manda work site told Eng. Payenda that with this clear weather it would only be necessary to open the canal every 10 days, assuming no cloudy or rainy weather which would reduce the need for irrigation.

But this action of closing the canal without notice fits with the personality of the President of HAVA, Abdul Samad Khujandi who plays the role of the dynamic leader who takes action as he sees fit. He is known to have considerable political support in Kandahar and the people around him appear somewhat afraid of him. Sometimes these quick actions are mis-guided and require a bit of thought first. For example, in October, he took up the task of

re-channeling the river in the area of the Lashkar Gah bridge in an effort to protect the right bank approach to the bridge that has been in danger of wash-out for some years. Among other things, he closed the Russian built Shamalan canal intake that is just upstream of the bridge and is in fact the main cause of the bridge endangerment. But this intake provides water for the Shamalan canal for the region south of Aynak.

The regular Shamalan canal has been out of service south of the S-10.7 lateral since the early 1980's because of the war and mujahadin control of that Basharan area. It was apparently in response to this situation that the Russians built the new intake for the canal near the bridge, an area they controlled.

The areas south of the S-10.7 lateral intake off the Shamalan canal receive their water from this lateral. This includes Basharan, Bolan and part of Aynak, as well as areas further south but on the western or desert side of the Shamalan region.

As a side note, the Shamalan canal has been breached in three locations by the Helmand River south of the S-10.7 lateral. One breach was repaired some 3 years ago by MCI. The other two wash-outs are growing, reaching some 300 plus meters of washout canal. Without a major engineering/reconstruction effort, this section of the Shamalan canal is not likely to ever be brought back into use, and large areas of good farm land can be expected to eroded away by the spring river floods.

With the Russian Shamalan canal intake off the Helmand river out of action, a good part of the south Shamalan region is without water or at least is very water short. Apparently farmer efforts have been able to re-route some of the S-10.7 lateral water into the area previously receiving Russian intake water off the old Shamalan. But this lateral is not very large and even before this re-routing, no surplus lateral reached within 2 kms. of the end of the lateral. The wasteway drain at the end of this lateral has not seen any waste water for years.

At an Eid gathering south of Saidabad, central Shamalan, one of the main discussions centered on the lack of water resulting from the HAVA head's action of closing the Russian intake, which was considered ill advised to say the least. A great deal of dissatisfaction was voiced. One of the main voices was a local, young mullah. The gathering was in the guest house of a past famous commander who is now aging and was silent during the discussion. There can be little doubt that numbers of petitions from Shamalan farmers have been received by HAVA. It is not clear why the intake has not been re-opened. The political pressure is clearly there. The intake could be opened with a bulldozer cutting one gravel dike. (It would need to be closed before the spring flood.) And the work in progress to protect the bridge, stopped for more than a month because of a lack of funds, is not

likely to re-start in the near future.

In short, I see the re-opening of the Boghra Canal for one week (hopefully) as a quick fix in response to farmer pressure for water. But there appear to be some inconsistencies in the decision making process when looking at the Shamalan and Boghra examples.

---