

ANNEX

AAN talks to Afghans about celebrating Nawruz under Taliban rule

Our report “Simple pleasures Amidst Great Frustrations: An essentially outlawed Nawruz in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan” is based on informal interviews conducted in March 2023 with nine people from across Afghanistan – five women and four men, between the ages of 26 and 63, about their feelings and plans for the 1402 Nawruz, Ramadan and the coming year. Their responses are listed alphabetically by district or city name:

- 38-year-old woman from Ahmadabad district, Paktia province, 15 March 2023
- 27-year-old woman from Herat city, Herat province, 7 March 2023
- 45-year-old man from Jurm district, Badakhshan province, 15 March 2023
- 28-year-old woman from Kabul city, Kabul province, 13 March 2023
- 63-year-old man from Kandahar city, Kandahar province, 14 March 2023
- 26-year-old woman from Mazar-e Sharif city, Balkh province, 14 March 2023
- 40-year-old man from Nawmish district, Helmand province, 15 March 2023
- 32-year-old woman from Nili city, Daikundi province, 13 March 2023
- 938-year-old man from Sheberghan city, Jawzjan province, 14 March 2023

These interviews are, we believe, worth reading in full as they not only reveal great frustrations, but also small pleasures that together point to the precariousness of human existence, to which all could relate in one way or another, in Afghanistan and beyond.



Girls walk to school in Gardez, Paktia province. Photo: AFP, 8 September 2022.

1. 38-year-old woman from Ahmadabad district, Paktia province

Nawruz is the main ancient festival in Afghanistan. People consider it a national and cultural heritage, and by honouring and welcoming it [we celebrate] the beginning of the season of freshness and the renewal of nature. People celebrate Nawruz differently in different provinces. The celebration in Paktia is less colourful than in Kabul, Herat, Balkh and other northern provinces. People don't make as much preparation here. Only residents in the centre of Paktia [Gardez city] prepare for Nawruz. During the Republic, the state and civic activists organised colourful celebrations. They strung up lights in Gardez city, the bazaar was bustling, and people bought dried fruit and other things for Nawruz. There were concerts, and people went [for picnics] to green areas with their families. The youth danced the *atan* [traditional dance] and sang. They cooked their food in the open air. But people in the districts [of Paktia] don't celebrate Nawruz. They don't even know about it. In the past, the women used to visit graveyards to pray for the dead and distribute halwa [sweet dish made from made flour or semolina usually served at funeral and graveyards to honour the dead].

But people celebrate it in Gardez city, [they] clean their houses and wash their homes. Those who could afford it paint their houses. Some families prepare *samanak* [a nawruz dish made with germinated wheat], *haft miwa* [seven dried fruits soaked in aromatic water] and *haft sin* [an arrangement of seven symbolic items]. But it's not as colourful as in the northern provinces, and it's not celebrated in every house. Some families only prepare halwa very simply and inexpensively and distribute it to their neighbours. In the last two years, however, there's been no sign of Nawruz and people are uninterested. It's because people are in a very bad economic situation. Besides, the state has no programme. Families can't go to recreational sites. The Taleban have banned music and singing. In this province, the youth used to play music and sing around this time, but they can't do it now. People are fearful. They think that if they have some plan to celebrate the new year, they might face threats or dangers. For this reason, no one dares to make such a plan. In the past, the youth, families, and even we the teachers, went to picnics, but there are no such things this year.

So far, I've tidied up the house and will also prepare *haft miwa*. It'll be prepared on the night of the new year. In the past, we held events for the students. They sang *taranas* [ballads, songs]. We spent this day very happily along with other teachers and the pupils. But this year, girls can only go to school until grade six. But other teachers and I plan to hold a ceremony to celebrate both Nawruz and Ramadan. One day before the beginning of Ramadan, the women in our area prepare a special meal and enjoy it together in an event attended by women only. It's like *mehmanwari* [invitation party] that we call *da rana khwara* [food of light]. Every year, one day before Ramadan starts, the women gather in one house, prepare and enjoy this food together. It's a tradition from the past. We want to celebrate this year at school. The neighbours are also busy doing similar things because Nawruz and Ramadan are at the same time this year. Most families clean and tidy up their houses. Because it's difficult to do hard work in Ramadan, families clean their homes both for Nawruz and the Eid [at the end of Ramadan]. They're still busy doing these things.

We're five in our family: myself, my child, my mother-in-law and brother-in-law. My husband has gone to Saudi Arabia. During the Republic, he had a job. We both had jobs in our area. But after the changes, my husband lost his job and couldn't find another one. He had to go abroad for work. I myself have a job in a school. My husband works outside the country. No one else works in our family. My brother-in-law studies.

Nawruz is especially important for people. We also had a very cold winter. I'm happy and thankful that winter has ended and the season has changed to freshness and the renewal of nature. These changes bring human beings new hope and energy. So, I feel happy and have plans for the new year,

which I hope to be able to implement. I hope that with the coming of the new year and the blessed month of Ramadan, there'll be permanent peace in the country and that the doors of schools and universities reopen for girls and women. Every girl and woman has hopes of her own. I hope that the new year won't be another disappointing year for Afghan girls and women.

2. 27-year-old woman from Herat city, Herat province

People [in Herat city] are slowly making small preparations for Nawruz. There's a ditch next to our house. They [the neighbours] are having it cleaned. They hire labourers and are having it cleaned. Some are buying flowers to plant in their courtyards or at the entrances to their houses or to keep in vases inside their houses. We also bought flowers and planted them at the entrance to our house. The municipality has encouraged people to plant saplings, but there has been less enthusiasm. People don't want to go out much and buy, for example, new clothes in the bazaar.

Going on picnics on Fridays has become less frequent. Few families go out to enjoy the coming of spring. Those who go are all men. Women don't go. It's because nowadays there are restrictions for women to go on picnics. They can't speak and laugh. Hijab has also become strict. There's no enthusiasm like in the past [before the fall of the Republic]. This year Nawruz and Ramadan come together. Women are busy with *khana paki* [literally shaking the house, or house cleaning] before Nawruz. We have also started cleaning and tidying up our house. We do this every year, but we don't have the same enthusiasm.



A seller of flowers, saplings and shrubs around the time of Nawruz near the mediaeval Musalla complex, Herat city, Herat province. Photo: Said Reza Kazemi, February 2021.

When I could go neither to the clinic nor my NGO job for four weeks, that was a very frustrating time for my female colleagues and me. We became depressed. We cried. Our hearts were broken, and we had no interest in life. Even now, the workspace has reduced for us, and our relationships have become very limited. There's a new rule every day. We should do such-and-such today and such-and-such tomorrow. A *mahram* [husband or a male blood relative] must accompany us when we leave the house.

I have no special feelings for Nawruz and the new year. It doesn't register in my mind that the year is changing and we're entering the year 1402. The days and months just pass and I have no particular sentiment. I feel *belataklif* [not knowing what to do and feeling uncertain about what will happen]. I was very enthusiastic in the past. However, I have a good feeling about the blessed month of Ramadan. I was in Iran last year and I had a difficult time there. Now I'm in Herat and with my family in our house.

3. 45-year-old man from Jurm district, Badakhshan province

People in Badakhshan, particularly women, start cleaning their houses, painting and decorating their rooms and washing their mattresses and curtains 10 to 15 days before Nawruz. Those who can afford it buy new things; those who can't clean and tidy up. The women cook *samanak*, which is prepared several days before Nawruz. They soak wheat along with *ab-e khamir* [liquid yeast]. Every morning when women prepare dough [to make bread] at home, they pour water from the dough on the *samanak*. These are some of the things the women do before Nawruz and the new year at home. Families prepare new clothes for their children and youth. On the night of Nawruz, women cook *samanak* until the following morning. They cook delicacies such as *shirin berenj* [sweet rice] and *halwa*. They then distribute them to neighbours and at mosques for Nawruz. They also visit their friends and go to recreational sites in every direction. Women also get together and go to green areas. They take tea and bread with them and have fun. Nawruz brings harmony and compassion to communities. Families get together when the year changes, sitting by their Nawruz tablecloths. In some areas of Badakhshan, people hold *buzkashi* games.

But all this happened in previous years. Now, there's no spirit of Nawruz among the people. Poverty and unemployment are problems that have taken the Nawruz spirit from the people. People don't have food for the day. Some people have to borrow food such as tea, flour and rice, so their families don't go hungry. They borrow and barter because people have run out of cash. When they borrow, they do so at an interest, sometimes returning double [the amount borrowed] to the shopkeeper. When they get one kilo of something, they must return two kilos later. So, people live their lives with great difficulty. The dignity and splendour of the past are all gone this year.

We've already cleaned our house. My son is engaged. We've bought something for Nawruz and we'll take it [to his fiancée] in the coming week. In the days of Nawruz, families whose sons are engaged take fish dishes and sweets to the families of their daughters-in-law. Currently fish-cooking and confectionery shops are bustling in the bazaar. We make our sweets ourselves at home, but some people buy from the bazaar. Our neighbours are busy doing the same things. Some are cleaning their house and there might be some who don't do so. Many youths are currently not in the village. They've gone to seek work in Iran and Pakistan. The economy of many people isn't good at all. They don't make special preparations [for Nawruz].



A boy flies a kite in a field in Fayzabad district, Badakhshan province. Photo: Omer Abrar/AFP, 14 March 2023.

We're ten people in our family. My wife and I have four sons and four daughters. My eldest son has a job in Kabul. My other sons go to school. Now we only have one working person. It was better in the past. I also had a job. But with the coming of the new state, I lost my job. Now I'm jobless.

I have a good and happy feeling because of the coming Nawruz and Ramadan. Nawruz is like a revolution in time. The cold season changes into the spring and everything becomes wet, fresh, green and joyful. Similarly, the human spirit becomes happy and blossoms. But there's no hope for the future. We face an uncertain future. There's no hope for the future that people's economic situation will get better and that they'll find jobs. I'm happy about the coming of Ramadan. It's a month of goodness and blessing. I hope that the blessed month of Ramadan brings some light and some good changes, so that people's living conditions improve and that we get out of this situation.

4. 28-year-old woman from Kabul city, Kabul province

We've made some preparations for the new year. We've painted the rooms, washed our curtains, and tidied the house. We'll prepare haft miwa. At Nawruz, we visit our close relatives to congratulate them on the new year. As usual, people are making some preparations for the new year. They clean their houses. They paint the rooms. They prepare haft miwa and haft sin. These all indicate the coming of Nawruz and the new year.

But this year is very different from the previous years. Women and girls used to go with their families to picnics in parks and green hills. Now women don't even have permission to breathe. Maybe many families won't celebrate this Nawruz. They have problems, economic problems and problems facing women. Previously women went to parks and recreational sites with their families. The Taleban don't allow women to go to parks. This Nawruz is, therefore, lacklustre. There's poverty and unemployment everywhere. People don't have the mood for Nawruz.

This year we only painted the rooms and tidied up the house. I didn't prepare new clothes for myself. We didn't buy anything special for Nawruz, either. We only prepare haft miwa for Nawruz because it's a tradition for us and we don't want this to go away. And for Ramadan, which also comes with Nawruz [this year], we prepare apple jam and *aloo bukhara* [dried plum jam] for *sahri* [a meal that fasting Muslims eat early in the morning]. *Padar janam* [my dear dad] eats nothing else for *sahri*. People's economic and mental conditions are very poor. They have economic problems. Some families have nothing to eat. We have neighbours who struggle hard to make a meagre living. People were forced to sell whatever they had. Many people sold their houses and other possessions to buy food. We also have neighbours who have very good lives, but they're not compassionate and don't want to help their neighbours and those around them.



Greenhouse selling flowers for Nawruz, Kabul city, Kabul province. Photo: Sayed Asadullah Sadat, 15 March 2023.

We're eight people in our family: three sisters, one brother, my brother's kid, parents. Previously I had a job. I was a defence lawyer. I had my own office. I worked and I had a happy life. When the Taliban came to power, I lost everything. Now, I can't even get out of the house because of fear.

I don't feel well because I lost everything. I have no hope for life. My life just passes. In the past, I was very happy because of Nawruz. But such happiness isn't there this Nawruz. I lost my job. Many of our relatives have migrated out of the country. Few remain who we can visit at Nawruz or who come and visit us. Previously it was very happy for us. My cousins and I used to get together and then go from house to house. We went out and enjoyed nature. Now few remain and they're all occupied by their own sorrows. The happiness of the new year has been taken from us. But I'm happy about Ramadan. I hope that with the coming of the blessed month of Ramadan, all these misfortunes will go away from our country, all will regain their rights and we will get out of this situation and darkness.

5. 63-year-old man from Kandahar city, Kandahar province

There's no taste [*maza*] of Nawruz this year. It's because Nawruz is no longer an official holiday. Offices must remain open. People who aren't part of the government will definitely go on picnics, but men separate from women. For example, there's a park in Aino Mina [an area in Kandahar city] and it's only for women on Wednesdays. But people with land and gardens will go there with their families. They'll take their food and other necessities with them.



The shrine of Baba Wali, Arghandab district, Kandahar province. Photo: Wikimedia Commons, 2003.

People are very committed to their traditions. Almost every family in the city prepares haft miwa for Nawruz. They eat it themselves and send it to their close friends. Another tradition here in Kandahar is to prepare *landi palaw* [a rice dish with dried mutton]. They prepare landi [dried mutton] in the winter and for many, landi palaw is the last landi dish of the bygone year. Folk games such as wrestling are also very popular among men.

Now it's like the first time of the Taleban rule. There are no longer three days off at the beginning of the [solar hejri] year. Families can't go on picnics in green and open areas. Music is no longer permitted. Business isn't good, either. However, security is good and one can now freely travel anywhere. Despite all of these, I think many families will go to their lands and gardens for picnics, they'll prepare haft miwa and they'll also prepare landi palaw. Those who have less money will eat less meat [which is more expensive], but everyone can afford to prepare haft miwa at least. So, there'll be no impact on local Nawruz traditions inside people's houses and gardens.

People are generally very happy around the time of Nawruz in Kandahar. Those who are involved in crafts such as carpenters, tailors and auto mechanics take ten days to two weeks off for Nawruz. They close their shops, go on picnics and travel as far away as Mazar [in the north].

In Khakrez district of Kandahar, there's a shrine called Ziarat-e Shah Maqsud Baba where locals raise a *janda* [flag] at Nawruz as in Mazar. Before Nawruz, people go there, set up tents and take food and other necessities with them. Some stay there for as long as a week. At Nawruz, there are special people in the shrine who beat large dohols called *naqara* [large cylindrical drums with two skin heads]. They beat the dohols every morning and afternoon and sing: "Sayyed Tajdar, Boland Tajdar." They believe that Sayyed Tajdar [a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, with a crown] or Boland Tajdar [a high-placed crown-holder] refers to the shrine Ziarat-e Hossaini Baba in Gereshk district of Helmand. The derwishes who run both the Ziarat-e Shah Maqsud Baba in Khakrez and the Ziarat-e Hossaini Baba in Gereshk are all Dari- or Farsi-speakers. At Nawruz, locals go to Ziarat-e Hossaini Baba and do something or say something that makes a reference to the Ziarat-e Shah Maqsud Baba in Khakrez. This shows close connections between the two shrines. Ziarat-e Shah Maqsud Baba has a place called *sang-e surakh* [rock with a hole]. Locals and visitors go there and then try to get out. Some go in and then get out easily. People who are stressed or anxious can't get out easily or need someone else's help to get out. Locals believe those who go in but can't get out on their own are *gunahkar* [sinners]. Another famous shrine is the Ziarat-e Baba Wali in Arghandab district near the Dahla dam by the Arghandab River. There's also a tradition called *Charshanba-ye Awwal-e Sal* [the first Wednesday of the year]. On this day, only women may enter the Ziarat-e Baba Wali. They take food and other necessities with them and have fun. Now, unfortunately, the Taleban have banned all these Nawruz traditions in these shrines.

Generally, there's optimism that we'll have good weather this year, full of rain and water. People in Kandahar are mostly engaged in horticulture and agriculture. If there's water, their business and life will be good. If their business and life are good, they'll spend more money. This winter was a harsh one. It hadn't been this cold for the last 30 years or so. But it was good because it snowed and there was water. Let's pray to God that there'll be lots of rain and water in Hamal [March/April], too. In any other respect, nothing looks good in this land.

6. 26-year-old woman from Mazar-e Sharif city, Balkh province

The Nawruz celebration in Mazar-e Sharif is the most brilliant in the country. For three days, people go on picnics in every direction, visit their friends, women prepare samanak at Nawruz night while playing music and singing, families prepare haft miwa and cook special dishes like *sabzi palaw* [herbed rice]. But this year isn't like the previous ones. In the past, the city was bustling in these days. People would come here from every corner of Afghanistan [to celebrate Nawruz]. There's no such thing this year. There's no such thing this year. People's hearts are broken. They've become poor. Their economic situation isn't good at all. Besides, the state doesn't allow people like the youth to go on picnics and play music. Previously, in the nights around Nawruz, the youth would roam around, playing music, singing and dancing on the streets. Anyway, people don't forget their traditions and some have made some preparations.



A family feeds white pigeons at the Rawza-ye Mubarak Shrine in Mazar-e Sharif. Photo: Nasim Fekrat/Afghanistan Matter, 3 December 2007.

Fortunately, Ramadan accompanies Nawruz this year. People always make special preparations for Ramadan. They go shopping for Ramadan and plan to cook sahri and eftari [meals before starting to fast and to break the fast, respectively].

We can't predict what kind of year the coming year will be. But I hope that it'll be a good and happy one. I have a good feeling. Thank God there's security now in the country. Security will be most important for the oppressed people of Afghanistan. One is happy when one's life and property are safe. But people suffer from economic problems and unemployment. Because there's no work, our youth flee the homeland every day. I take the new year and the new spring as a good omen for calm and peace all over the country.

7. 40-year-old man from Nawmish district, Helmand province

This Nawruz is very different from previous years in Nawmish district. It's because the economic situation of people is very poor. But people still do their traditions. Everyone has made preparations according to their ability. It's a Nawruz tradition to clean one's house, cook samanak and prepare haft miwa and the relatives and friends visiting will then enjoy it at Nawruz. Families whose sons are engaged take some haft miwa, jelebi [a sweet snack], fish and samanak to the girls' families. It's impossible not to have samanak on the first day of the new year because one sign that Nawruz is coming is the preparation of samanak. To prepare this, people place the samanak on a pot on a fire and make it ready by singing happily. They enjoy making it. The elders, the youth, the women and the children go to mosques at Nawruz and then enjoy eating food there. We say a prayer in the mosque at Nawruz. Afterwards, people bring whatever food they've prepared at home, such as samanak or halwa, and then everyone enjoys eating it and is happy. Some people visit the graves of their parents and dead and pray for them. They also visit their friends, passengers and the sick. They

go to recreational sites in the fields and in the foothills. We have a saying here: start the year happily and then you're happy the whole year. It's what our elders say. They believe if you are happy on the first day of the year, you will be joyful for the rest of the year. Nawmish is a very green district. It becomes especially pretty during the spring. All trees sprout to bud and blossom.

As in every year, we clean and paint our house and offer alms because of Nawruz. Also, every year the people of Nawmish collect money to buy saplings to plant for the new year. The youth gather and plant the saplings enthusiastically. This year some 50 thousand saplings may have been planted. It's both fun and greening the area. The state hasn't helped with anything – neither the previous state nor the current state.

I have a good feeling because Nawruz and Ramadan are coming together this year. Both are the big blessings of the God Almighty. Nawruz is the season of the revitalisation of nature, which is a sign of divine power. Every Nawruz is like the beginning of a new life for me. It is an omen of hope. Going to have fun in recreational sites reminds every visitor of the divine power, making us prostrate before and praise the creator of the universe. We say goodbye to the year 1401. It's not clear what developments will come in the new year. I'm happy about the coming of the blessed month of Ramadan. It's a month of grace, virtue and divine invitation. I'm happy to be a guest of Allah Almighty in this blessed month. I hope that with the coming of these two divine blessings, there'll be permanent peace in our country and some relief and light for our poor people.



Men and children sit in front of their house near the Tange Bazaar area in Kajaki, Helmand Province. Photo: Elise Blanchard/AFP, 21 March 2021.

8. 32-year-old woman from Nili city, Daikundi province

There isn't much of a Nawruz atmosphere in my neighbourhood and city. The current rulers have rejected Nawruz. They don't accept it as the beginning of the new year. They've also removed

Nawruz as a holiday. The Nawruz atmosphere is even more diminished than it was last year. People can't express their happiness easily because they want to be safe. They're afraid of doing anything that the current rulers have forbidden or contradicts their prohibition on Nawruz.

The other reason is poverty. An individual, a family or a city that wants to celebrate Nawruz needs some money. Right now, poverty reigns in the neighbourhood, city and province I live in. Few families can celebrate Nawruz. Most simply can't afford it. They don't feel like Nawruz this year.



Sprouting sabza at home before Nawruz, Nili city, Daikundi province. Photo: AAN interlocutor, 15 March 2023.

Another reason is that in Nili, as in Afghanistan in general, Nawruz meant the start of schools for all, girls in particular. It was like having two festivals: Nawruz and going back to school. Families whose daughters are in grades 6 or 5, or even 4, are anxious and worried about their daughters' future. Girls above grade 6 are not allowed to go to school at all. The families who have such school-going girls [above grade 6] have lost this simple joy of seeing their daughters go back to school and the others are worried about their daughters' future.

The ban on women working has created many problems. In Nili and Daikundi overall, many women worked for NGOs and became the breadwinners and supporters of their families. These women have now lost their jobs and their incomes. This has not only impacted Nawruz celebrations but also the overall lives of these women and their families.

Of course, routines such as cleaning the house, washing curtains and carpets, planting saplings or arranging gardens happen like every year. However, Nawruz was previously a major celebration here in Daikundi. It's two years that the *Jashn-e Gul-e Badam* [Almond Blossom Festival] hasn't taken place in Daikundi. When the weather became warmer early, this festival happened before Nawruz and when the weather got warmer later, it took place after Nawruz. It's very sad. We had a women's association with 30 members from all over Daikundi. Every year the government used to send us invitations to the Almond Blossom Festival. We informed our colleagues and one or two people from our association used to speak at the festival. That was the spirit of the previous government. Now, we even hide ourselves.

We have no special plans for this year's Nawruz. We will only clean our house before spring. My daughter and I have planted a *sabza* [sprouted grains] and we will have a small celebration at home. My father might visit us for Nawruz. When I see the conditions of my neighbours and others in the neighbourhood and city, some of whom find their daily bread with difficulty, it puts me off celebrating, going out and having fun. My father and I intend to help one or two needy families, within our ability.

There's no official ban on going out and having fun, but there's fear. Families are afraid of being harassed or facing inappropriate treatment by those now in charge.

I have two children: a daughter aged seven and a son aged one and a half. I worked in a women's organisation from 2016 to 2021. Another woman and I led this organisation. Our goal was to enable women's participation in the implementation of UN Resolution 1325, which is about women, peace and security. We only worked with women and our work was progressing very well. Our office was in the city centre, in a very noticeable place. Since August 2021, our work has fallen apart, but we still manage to hold some meetings secretly. I've found a job in an international humanitarian organisation. I'm an HR officer and can work from home. I hope I can continue this work.

I don't feel much joy and happiness because of the coming Nawruz, Ramadan and the new year 1402. I'm worried about the future of my daughter and son. My work contract with the humanitarian organisation ends in April and I don't know whether it'll be extended. I don't know whether my husband would still have a job. I don't know how events will unfold in my neighbourhood, city and country. Everything is unclear and confusing to me.

9. 38-year-old man from Sheberghan city, Jawzjan province

For many years, muftis and mullahs have come to Jawzjan. They've kept telling people that Nawruz is a Zoroastrian tradition and isn't part of the sharia of Islam. Previously there was even the tradition of hoisting the janda in the shrines of the saints. Nawruz used to be like the other Eids.¹ People bought themselves new clothes. They visited each other. They prepared haft miwa and delicious food. They celebrated it by going on picnics in the open air on the green plains.

Now it seems like there's no Nawruz here in Sheberghan. There's no enthusiasm. It hasn't even come to our minds here. The muftis and mullahs have impacted the thoughts of the people. For example, they've told us that when we eat haft miwa with the intention of marking Nawruz, it's like committing a sin. When we prepare and eat it without any intention of celebrating Nawruz and any time of the year, it's fine. People have paid attention to and believed the muftis and mullahs. They're also afraid of not doing anything that might upset the Emirate. There's, therefore, no spirit of Nawruz where I live. If someone celebrates it, they do it at home and, even then, they try to hide it from the outside world.

However, the weather has now become very good. It's between 10 and 25 degrees Celsius. It's *hawa-ye eshqi* [lovely weather], as we say it. The plains have become green in Jawzjan. The grass on the plains is four to five centimetres high. In some plains it's even six to seven centimetres high. My colleagues and I recently went to Qush Tepa on a picnic. In that district, the grass on the plains will reach the knee as the year goes by and tulips will grow. We didn't see a single family coming to have

¹ Eid al-Fitr, the holiday of breaking the fast that marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, and Eid al-Adha, the holiday of sacrifice that marks the conclusion of the annual hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

fun on our way from Sheberghan city to Qush Tepa district. It was all young men coming on their motorcycles or in their cars.



A tree blossoming in the courtyard of a family compound, Sheberghan city, Jawzjan province. Photo: An AAN interlocutor, 15 March 2023.