

Kabul River Return Delights Residents

Author: IWPR

City's river flows once more after years of drought reduced it to little more than a trickle.

Four-year-old Fareed took his grandfather's hand as they walked down the muddy bank into the river that runs through Kabul. Fareed had never seen it flowing before - this winter's snow and spring rains ended five years of drought that had left it dry.

Fareed splashed the water with his small hands. His 62-year-old grandfather, Mohammad Naeem, wrapped in a blanket and wearing a traditional turban, played along with him. They watched other people in the river - boys swimming, women and girls washing clothes and carpets. "Everyone loves the water, just like me," Fareed said to his grandfather.

The return of the Kabul River gives the capital's residents more than just a place to wash. The water table is rising again, allowing some residents to draw more from their wells.

Kabul and its hills are growing greener by the day, making its parks more pleasant and the land around the river itself like a park.

Electricity supplies have increased, too, because the city gets hydroelectric power from the rivers that flow toward it from surrounding mountains.

Almost every Kabul resident has some contact with the river. Bus stops and shops line both banks downtown, and it flows through six major districts of the capital, bisecting it from southwest to northeast.

The river starts from the Oani valley in the mountains of Paghman and continues its flow to the east, joining the rivers of Logar, Panjsher, Alishing, Alingar and Kunar.

In the Taleban era, several years of drought left it little more than a trickle and the water table receded. But in February the rains began to fall and by March it was flowing strong. In April, snow melting in the mountains added to the supply. The water table has recovered by 70 to 80 per cent, and over the next few months it should get fully back to normal, said Sultan Mohammad, director of hydrology and irrigation at the ministry of power and water.

However, the drought is by no means over, and persists in southern and western areas such as Farah, Nimroz, Badghis, and Herat provinces.

Nonetheless, the river's new lease of life has lifted the spirits of Kabul residents, who say the end of the drought is a sign of both God's mercy and a good president.

"We say that the righteous leader is the shadow of God," said Jan Agha, 59, a local resident. "It is clear to us that the rains are due to having a good and righteous president."

While most are pleased with the turnaround in the river's fortunes, the change has resulted in a number of

problems.

The rising water has created a health hazard, noted Mirwais Ayubi, 45, a doctor who has lived near the river since he was seven. "Many people threw their garbage in the (dry) river bed, and the rain and high waters carried all the accumulated garbage through the city," he said.

It has also dealt a blow to some of the city's traders. Merchants had set up a market close to the bank of the river when it stopped flowing five years ago. They called it the Titanic, hoping the allusion to the successful Hollywood film would attract business. But when the waters began to flow again, the market like the stricken liner vanished. The traders, commented one local resident, had forgotten the old proverb that "a house near the river will be destroyed".

Jan Mohammad, 39, sold shoes and clothes at the Titanic market. Now he has to ply his wares on the street, where they are exposed to rain, sun and dust. Police harass him because he isn't legally allowed to work there. He doesn't want the drought to return, but would like to have a decent pitch - not easy to find in this period of rapid urban renewal.

In addition to the aforementioned problems, many Kabulis have been disappointed that their electricity and water supplies have not improved as much as they had hoped - some of the latter are still restricted to only a few hours a day, every four or five days.

This is largely due to the fact that the country's infrastructure is in such bad shape after years of warfare and looting. Power stations are badly damaged. So are pumps and the authorities can't afford the fuel to run those that work. With the rising water levels, people are at least able to use the city's wells.

Arifa Barat Niek Seyar is an independent journalist in Kabul.

Focus: [Afghanistan](#)

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kabul-river-return-delights-residents>