

Kabul's Animal Bazaar

by Jack Goldfarb

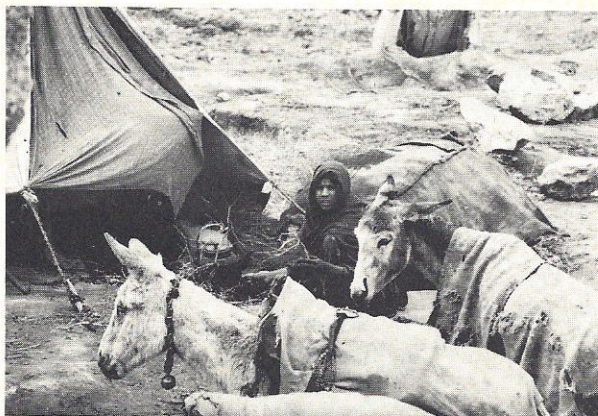
Blue-eyed and white-turbaned, Ahmad, the Tajik camel driver, urges his troop of sandy-colored beasts into a dusty field alongside the Kabul River. Last night he and his fellow cameleers had rested in a nearby caravanserai ... the men in a mud-walled hut, the camels in the courtyard. Now it is 6 AM, and they have risen before dawn to offer their camels to the early customers at the Mas-Lakh ... Kabul's fascinating Animal Bazaar.

Because Ahmad and his com-

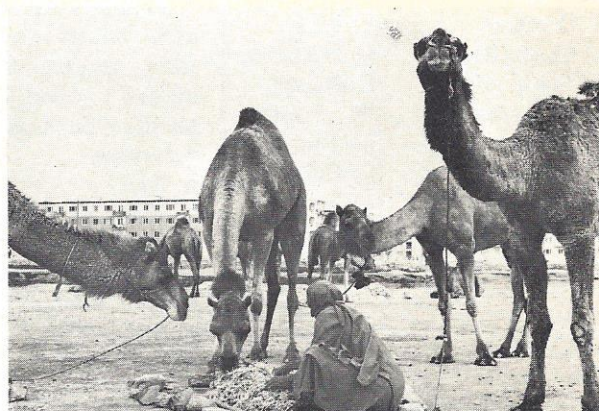
third is set aside for their own use, one-third for other relatives and the last third is donated to the poor. If one family cannot afford to purchase an entire animal, as many as seven families pool the cost, each redividing its share the same way.

Though the buyers are mostly city dwellers, they are shrewd determiners of an animal's worth. No pig in a poke is bought here. (In a poke or out, pigs are taboo

gins in earnest. As buyer raises and seller lowers, each figure is prefixed by sworn vow of "absolutely final." When bid and asked eventually arrive within close range, seller retires to consult fellow tribesmen. Both parties now sense closing price. Grudgingly, dolefully, they agree. Afghan paper currency, called *afghanis* changes hands in thick sheafs. The transaction is sanctioned by a *Barakat*, an invocation of divine blessings, and a handshake says



Nomad girl makes meal en route to Kabul where donkeys will cost about \$7.50 each.



Camels will sell for about \$75.00 each. In background are modern Russian-built apartment houses.

panions could ride their camels much of the way, their journey to the Mas-Lakh was easier than most. Many drovers and herdsmen walk over a thousand miles with their cattle, buffalo, sheep, donkeys or goats to sell them in the Afghan capital where they fetch the best prices.

The buyers are butchers, slaughterhouse owners, farmers from nearby villages, Mess Officers shopping for military units and ordinary citizens who swarm to the market in great numbers just before religious festivals. At those times, families buy whole animals and divide them according to custom. One-

in this Moslem country.)

The ritual of bargaining at the Animal Bazaar begins with the buyer and seller goading each other to name an opening figure. When an amount is reluctantly suggested, the other party goes into histrionic shock. He recovers quickly, however, to declare further negotiations a waste of time.

Buyer then itemizes animal's numerous defects. Seller extols infinite merits. Cagey intervals follow with buyer going through motions of imminent departure.

With a groan of martyrdom seller quotes "last price." From this point on haggling be-

Amen. Buyer and seller may now even venture a smile, each convinced he has gotten the better of the deal.

In between *Barakats*, the animal traders wander off to the *samova*, an adjacent, mud-brick teahouse, where two shiny brass samovars are kept steaming by the bearded proprietor, the *samovarchi*. Scores of floral-painted teapots line the shelves, and the pungent smell of lamb soup fills the snug room. The tribesmen sit cross-legged on the floor, pouring tea from *chinaki*, devouring crumbly slabs of goat cheese and chunks of flat, crusty *nan* bread. ■

TRIP & TOUR—February-March 1973