



## BOST II. MODERN BOST (LAŠKARGĀH)

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Near the ancient urban ruins of Bost and Laškarī Bāzār the new town of Laškargāh, taking its name from the nearby village of Laškargāh-e Bāzār, was established on an alluvial terrace on the left bank of the Helmand river in 1946, under the auspices of the Helmand-Arġandāb Valley Authority (HAVA). Designed as the hub of the Helmand development region, it differs profoundly in physical character and socioeconomic structure from other Afghan towns. The city plan, drawn up by American architects, consists of two rectangles flanking a quarter-circle, all spaciouly laid out and surrounded by a greenbelt. The public buildings are located near the river, as is the mosque, which has thus been relegated to the edge of the built-up area. The more comfortable residential neighborhoods are also near the river, and around them are laid out more modest residential districts, in which detached houses, row houses, and apartment buildings are mingled. None of the residences has the enclosed garden characteristic of Afghan towns; the overall effect is more that of an American town, with houses set amid open lawns. Several lots have, however, subsequently been enclosed by fences of reed mats, an indication of “reorientalization.”

The *bāzār*, which was begun in 1962-63, comprised 655 shops in 1973. It is laid out along one main boulevard in the southeast and is very unusual in the Afghan context. First, the shops and the lots on which they stand, like the residential lots, are not the property of individuals but belong for the most



part to the municipality or to public and semipublic companies connected with HAVA. Second, it contains a very special assortment of businesses, related to the relatively high standard of living of its clientele. There is, for example, an unusually large number of butcher shops, as well as general stores catering to demand beyond ordinary daily needs, dry-goods and fashionable dress shops, and modern restaurants. On the other hand, caravansaries (*sarāy*) are totally absent, as are shops for traditional garments (e.g., turbans). In fact, this *bāzār* is essentially geared to the needs of the town. The population of the surrounding rural area relies on *bāzārs* in the traditional villages of Kalač and Laškargāh-e Bāzār. The sole concession to its needs in the town *bāzār* is a number of second-hand clothing shops that sell to peasants the castoffs of the wealthier urban inhabitants. Besides, this commercial street is practically unique. There is only one very small secondary shopping center, in the southwestern part of town; the residential quarters are totally lacking in the small clusters of shops that customarily serve inhabitants' daily needs. Finally, an industrial quarter has developed in the southeast (an oil press, marble- and woodworking firms, various workshops devoted to repairs for HAVA).

The population consists in large part of HAVA employees and various kinds of officials. It is characterized by a very high level of literacy, younger than average age, and an overwhelming preponderance of males, there are proportionally fewer families than in other towns in Afghanistan. Aside from foreigners (mainly Americans but also numerous Indians and Filipinos employed in the middle and lower levels of HAVA), who remained for varying periods of time, the population has immigrated from many different provinces. Pashtun predominate in the upper classes and in the agricultural-development sector as a whole, while Tajik from around Herat seem to outnumber them in trade. Laškargāh, which is well supplied with water and electricity and enjoys a high level of services (schools, a hospital, etc.), has experienced very rapid growth, in contrast to halting development in the irrigated countryside that it administers. The population, estimated at about 5,000 inhabitants in 1973 (twice that figure if the nearby villages are included), rose to 21,600, according to the preliminary reports of the 1979 census, and new subdivisions have spread northward from the original nucleus in recent years.



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