

Business and Politics in the Muslim World

Afghanistan This Week

Report Number: 121

Week 22-28 May 2010

May 30, 2010

Mohammad Amin

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Political Headlines Summaries

ISAF helicopter shot down in Helmand

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Over 1,000 Afghan child casualties in 2009

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Wolesi Jirga refuses to debate bills

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Three NATO soldiers killed in south

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Tribal elder among four dead in Faryab

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50 Taliban killed in Ghazni clashes, police claim

GHAZNI CITY (PAN): Fifty Taliban insurgents have been killed in ground and air offensives and clashes with security forces in different parts of southern Ghazni province over the last 24 hours, police said on Monday.

1,600 to attend twice-delayed jirga

KABUL (PAN): Around 1600 people, including 320 women, would participate in the twice-delayed Peace Advisory Jirga on June 2, Education Minister Ghulam Farooq Wardak said on Monday.

226 candidates included: IEC

KABUL (PAN): Some 226 parliamentary poll candidates who had failed to make it on to a preliminary list would be given a second chance to reapply, the Afghan Independent Election Commission (IEC) said on Thursday.

'Political motives behind Afghan ethnic violence'

MAIDAN SHAHR (PAN): Certain figures in Kabul are using the ethnic violence between Hazara and nomadic Kuchi communities for their own political benefit, locals said.

Geo-Strategic Headlines Summaries

Visiting British ministers seek early troop withdrawal

KABUL (PAN): The British foreign secretary, William Hague, flew into Kabul on Saturday for meetings with top political and military officials, amid reports his government was looking for ways to speed up a troop withdrawal.

UK to train Afghan security forces in Helmand

LASHKARGAH (PAN): Three visiting UK ministers on Sunday pledged continued assistance from the British government to southern Helmand province, the world's largest opium-producing region.

Bill on Afghan exit strategy in US Senate

WASHINGTON (PAN): A piece of legislation asking President Barack Obama to set a timetable for withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan has been raised in the US Senate.

Russia for stronger UN role in Afghan peace efforts

KABUL (PAN): Russia has called for detailed deliberation on all aspects of the national reconciliation process being pursued by the government of President Hamid Karzai.

US looking forward to the peace jirga

WASHINGTON (PAN): The US is looking forward to the Afghan peace, where President Hamid Karzai is expected to call on the Taliban to renounce violence, a spokesman said.

Timetable for US troop withdrawal opposed

WASHINGTON (PAN): US Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, disagreeing with some lawmakers from his own party, has opposed a timetable for a responsible withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan.

Afghanistan epicenter of al-Qaeda extremism: US

WASHINGTON (PAN): Afghanistan and Pakistan are the epicenter of the violent extremism practiced by al-Qaeda, the Obama administration says in its National Security

Strategy (NSS), submitted to the US Congress.

Afghans believe US is funding Taliban

Intellectuals and respected Afghan professionals are convinced the west is prolonging conflict to maintain influence in the region.

Social Headlines Summaries

50,000 refugees return from Pakistan

KABUL (PAN): Nearly 50,000 Afghan refugees have returned home from Pakistan over the past two months, the UN refugee agency said on Sunday, linking the arrivals to the worsening security situation in the neighbouring country.

700 families at risk of landslide moved to safe area in Sar-i-Pul

MAZAR-i-SHARIF (PAN): Hundreds of families, at risk from a landslide in northern Sar-i-Pul province, have been moved to safer areas, an official said on Tuesday.

Angry teachers close schools in Nangarhar

JALALABAD (PAN): Teachers have closed 77 schools in a district of eastern Nangarhar province to protest a delay in distribution of land, officials said on Wednesday.

3,000 families get access to clean drinking water

SHIBERGHAN (PAN): More than 3,000 families in northern Jawzjan province have got access to clean drinking water with the completion of a project, an official said on Wednesday.

400 families flee Helmand towns

LASHKARGAH (PAN): Hundreds of families, fearing the resumption of clashes between Taliban and security forces, have fled troubled districts of Marja and Nad Ali in southern Helmand province.

13,500 Nimroz families get electricity

ZARANJ (PAN): About 13,500 families in the southwestern province of Nimroz are benefitting from electricity transferred from Iran, officials said on Thursday.

Economical Headlines Summaries

Kabul to seek funds for railroad project

KABUL (PAN): The government would seek assistance from the international community for the construction of a railroad linking northern Kunduz province with western Herat at the July 20 Kabul Conference, a minister said on Sunday.

Kabul to seek \$14b in assistance

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan would seek 14 billion US dollars in assistance from the international community over the next three years at the Kabul Conference, scheduled for July 20, the finance minister said on Sunday.

Eastern zone set to produce 900 tonnes of fruit

JALALABAD (PAN): Orchards grown with the assistance of the United States in eastern Afghanistan would produce 900 tonnes of fruit this year, an official said on Monday.

Key railroad project to be completed in four months

KABUL (PAN): The construction of a 50-kilometre railroad, connecting Afghanistan to its northern neighbour of Uzbekistan, would be completed in the next four months, a top official said on Tuesday.

Political Headlines

ISAF helicopter shot down in Helmand

Pajhwok Report - May 22, 2010 - 12:22

KABUL (PAN): An International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) helicopter was shot down by Taliban militants in their stronghold of southern Helmand province on Saturday. NATO said the chopper was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade, as it prepared to land at a checkpoint in the Nad Ali district.

No one was seriously injured in the attack. The helicopter is in a secure site and the damage is being assessed, the alliance said in a brief statement.

A spokesman for the Helmand governor, Daud Ahmadi, told Pajhwok Afghan News two crewmembers of the helicopter were slightly injured in the incident.

As usual, the Taliban fighters moved swiftly to claim responsibility for the downing of the aircraft. The groups spokesman, Qari Yousaf Ahmadi, said more than 20 soldiers were killed or wounded.

On May 11, the guerrillas shot down an ISAF helicopter in the Sangin district of the same province, causing no casualties.

Over 1,000 Afghan child casualties in 2009

Pajhwok Report - May 22, 2010 - 16:09

KABUL (PAN): More than 1,000 children were killed or injured in the war in Afghanistan in 2009, including 131 killed in airstrikes and bombings by international forces, the United Nations said.

The annual report of the secretary-generals special representative to the UN Security Council cited Afghan police for the first time in a list of worst violators of children's rights.

Combat is no place for children. We still live in a world with those who would use children as spies, soldiers and human shields, Radhika Coomaraswamy, the special envoy for children in armed conflict, said in the report, released Friday.

Last years war casualties In Afghanistan were a marked increase over 2008 due to the escalating insurgency in the southern provinces, the report noted.

Militant groups, including the Taliban, were responsible for 128 child deaths while military operations by international forces left 131 children dead, according to the document.

Sexual violence against children had become a widespread phenomenon in Afghanistan, the report said, adding the prostitution of young boys had become a matter of concern.

Wolesi Jirga refuses to debate bills

Abaseen Zaheer - May 22, 2010 - 20:14

KABUL (PAN): The Wolesi Jirga, or lower house of parliament, refused to debate any bills on Saturday after President Hamid Karzai missed a deadline to introduce the remaining 11 members of his cabinet.

On May 19, the Wolesi Jirga gave Karzai three days to name the remaining cabinet ministers otherwise they would go on strike. It was the second ultimatum in less than a month for introducing the rest of the 25-member cabinet.

During Saturday's session, the MPs said they would stay silent until the new cabinet members were introduced. Chairman Muhammad Younus Qanuni said no session of any commission would be held until the ministers were introduced.

An MP from the western Badghis province, Azita Rafat, said the delay in introducing the remaining cabinet members had worsened relations between parliament and the government.

"The government neither respects the votes of the nation nor us," she said.

She warned that any unprofessional choices would be vetoed. Karzai has been careless about the decisions of parliament, Malali Ishaqzai, an MP from Kandahar said.

On January 2, parliament rejected 17 of Karzai's nominees, accepting only seven candidates.

Among those rejected was a powerful warlord, Ismail Khan, who was put forward as the minister of energy.

On January 9, another 17 ministers were introduced, but again the MPs approved only seven of them.

Three NATO soldiers killed in south

Pajhwok Report - May 22, 2010 - 11:12

KABUL (PAN): Three International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) soldiers and a civilian working with them were killed in separate attacks in the restive south on Saturday.

Two ISAF service-members and the civilian accompanying them died following an insurgent attack in southern Afghanistan, where Afghan and NATO forces are poised for a long-planned offensive.

In a separate incident, also in the south, a NATO-led soldier was killed in a roadside bomb blast, the ISAF press office in Kabul said in a brief statement.

In line with its policy, the multinational force revealed neither the nationalities of the fallen troops nor the exact locations the attacks.

Saturday's fatalities bring to 214 the number of international troops killed in Afghanistan this year. Americans and Britons have borne the brunt of the casualties.

Tribal elder among four dead in Faryab

Zabihullah Ehsas - May 23, 2010 - 17:25

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (PAN): Three Taliban fighters have been killed and four others wounded in the northern province of Faryab, officials said on Sunday.

The insurgents suffered the casualties in retaliatory fire from policemen Saturday night, when the Taliban stormed a security checkpoint in the Shakh area of Qaisar district.

Heavy and light arms were used during the hour-long clash, police spokesman Col. Muhammad Afzal Imamzada told Pajhwok Afghan News. He said the attackers left behind two bodies of their associates, a machine gun and a rocket launcher. Separately, the guerrillas gunned down a tribal elder and injured two others in the Quraish village of Dawlatabad district, Imamzada said. The elder, Awraz Zabit, was shot dead inside his house by five armed motorcyclists. The police spokesman blamed a militant gang leader, Qari Ziauddin, for killing the man. "When I heard gunshots, I rushed to the house of Zabit and saw his dead body," villager Dr. Hayatullah said. No one has so far claimed responsibility for the murder.

50 Taliban killed in Ghazni clashes, police claim

Mirwais Himmat - May 24, 2010 - 20:37

GHAZNI CITY (PAN): Fifty Taliban insurgents have been killed in ground and air offensives and clashes with security forces in different parts of southern Ghazni province over the last 24 hours, police said on Monday.

The operations were conducted by Afghan and foreign forces in Moqur and Ab Band districts, as well as the provincial capital, Ghazni City, the police chief told a news conference here.

Brig Gen Khialbaz Sherzai said the forces carried out a ground and air operation against militants in Khelo, Bahauddin and other villages on the border between the two districts. The overnight clashes resulted in the death of 31 insurgents, the police chief quoted residents and intelligence operatives as saying.

On Monday, 13 Taliban were killed during a clash with Afghan and foreign troops in the Arzo village of Moqur district, according to Sherzai. The firefight left another 32 militants wounded.

A Kalashnikov assault rifle, a machine gun and a rocket were recovered from the site, where three dead bodies of militants were also found.

The Moqur district police chief confirmed the air raid, but gave no details. About today's clash, Col Barkatullah said the clash erupted after a Taliban ambush on a police patrol in the area.

He added the police suffered no casualties in the ambush. In a counterattack from the police and Afghan National Army personnel, 13 Taliban were killed, the police chief said.

Sherzai said two other insurgents were killed in a gunbattle with police in the Arzao village on the outskirts of Ghazni City on Monday. Another four Taliban died in a clash with security guards of a construction company in the Zana Khan district.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said he was unaware of the ground and air raids in Moqur and Ab Band. While denying Taliban fatalities in the clashes, he claimed the fighters had killed several foreign soldiers.

1,600 to attend twice-delayed jirga

Rahmatullah Afghan - May 24, 2010 - 10:56

KABUL (PAN): Around 1600 people, including 320 women, would participate in the twice-delayed Peace Advisory Jirga on June 2, Education Minister Ghulam Farooq

Wardak said on Monday.

Addressing a news conference in Kabul, he said a final list of participants had been signed by President Hamid Karzai and speakers of both houses of parliament.

Also the head of the jirgas technical commission, Wardak said the participants would arrive in Kabul on May 29 and their registration would start a day later. On May 31 and June 1, they will be informed about the procedure for the three-day event.

Originally scheduled for May 2, the jirga was deferred to May 29 due to a four-day visit of President Hamid Karzai to the United States. The traditional tribal gathering has now been set back to Wednesday to ensure the participation of all invitees.

Preparations for the much-awaited jirga, backed by the international community, are almost complete. The participants will explore ways of bringing stability to Afghanistan in the context of President Karzai's new strategy for peace and development.

On June 2, the participants -- government officials and tribal elders -- will be divided into 30 committees, each comprising 50 members. On the second day, they will decide which militant groups should be contacted for talks, and by whom.

On the concluding day, committee members will present their reports to the assembly, which will evolve a mechanism for negotiations with anti-government forces.

226 candidates included: IEC

Syed Abbas Sadat - May 27, 2010 - 14:47

KABUL (PAN): Some 226 parliamentary poll candidates who had failed to make it on to a preliminary list would be given a second chance to reapply, the Afghan Independent Election Commission (IEC) said on Thursday.

The aspirants had until Saturday to re-register, an IEC spokesman told a press conference in Kabul.

The Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) on Monday had ordered the IEC to include the 226 candidates who had been excluded from a preliminary list issued on May 12. The candidates had been left off the list as they failed to submit the necessary 1,000 voting cards, the IEC said.

After some candidates complained, the ECC directed the commission to put the names of 226 on the list within five days.

Noor Muhammad Noor, the IEC spokesman, said the candidates had two days to meet the requirements. He added the previously submitted 1,000 voting cards by the candidates had been declared null and void.

Noor said 21 of the previously disqualified candidates had already been re-registered.

The election commission would release a list on June 1 of candidates who failed to meet the conditions, Noor said.

The process of registering complaints which started with the release of the preliminary list would continue till June 7, he added.

"After the end of that date, no one will have the right to lodge a complaint," Noor said. He said they included the candidates following the ECCs request to review their documents.

Noor said 90 of the sitting 95 MPs had registered their names with the commission.

About 6,800 polling centres and 20,000 polling stations will be established across the

country for the September 18 polls, he said.
Of 249 seats in the Wolesi Jirga, 67 are reserved for women.

'Political motives behind Afghan ethnic violence'

Hakim Basharat - May 25, 2010 - 18:48

MAIDAN SHAHR (PAN): Certain figures in Kabul are using the ethnic violence between Hazara and nomadic Kuchi communities for their own political benefit, locals said.

A deadly clash erupted between the Kuchis and Hazaras over a land dispute in the Dai Mirdad district earlier this month, a row which has led to violence on many occasions over the past few years.

"Some political groups get the benefit of your difference," said Khandan, who is a Kuchi. "Those people sitting in Kabul fuel the violence.

He said both Kuchis and Hazaras had suffered but there were some in Kabul who benefited.

A number of protests had been organised in Kabul over the past two weeks, demanding the government end the violence. Hazara MPs have walked out of the Wolesi Jirga and threatened to boycott Karzais peace jirga early next month if Kuchis are not forced off the land.

A Hazara local, Asadullah, said the row had a three-year background, blaming the Kuchis for starting the most recent round of fighting.

He said Kuchis burnt their houses and let their cattle eat the crops. He said the Kuchis did not own land in Dai Mirdad but had always brought their cattle to the area for grazing.

A local Kuchi elder, Zulfiqar Stanikzai, accused the Hazara villagers of blocking their way in the Dai Mirdad and the Behsud districts over the past three years.

He said they used to go to the Wars, Panjab and some other areas of Bamyān to find grazing for their cattle.

Provincial Governor Muhammad Halim Fidayee told Pajhwok Afghan News that they had formed a commission to review the situation. He admitted there had been casualties in the fighting but said local media and both sides were giving wrong figures.

Reports have suggested that at least four people were killed.

Chief of Dai Mirdad district Muhammad Shah Muslih said the dispute could be resolved only through peaceful talks.

The security chief of the province said they had gone there to implement the orders of the Interior Ministry. He said there was no trouble in the area at the moment.

Geo-Strategic Headlines

Visiting British ministers seek early troop withdrawal

Pajhwok Monitor - May 22, 2010 - 19:56

KABUL (PAN): The British foreign secretary, William Hague, flew into Kabul on Saturday for meetings with top political and military officials, amid reports his government was looking for ways to speed up a troop withdrawal.

Hague was joined by Defence Secretary Liam Fox and International Development Secretary Andrew Mitchell. The three will meet with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, other Afghan officials and Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the US commander in charge of all NATO and US troops in Afghanistan.

Britains new Conservative leadership which won elections earlier this month had pledged to make Afghanistan a priority, although have also said there will be no major change in policy.

"Our most urgent priority is to get to grips with Afghanistan," Hague said in a statement posted on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website ahead of his departure. "We need to give the strategy time and support to succeed, and we are here in Afghanistan to explore this at the earliest opportunity."

The visiting ministers are also expected to meet British troops, while Mitchell said he would be "looking at ways to improve the quality and impact of our aid" to Afghanistan. Britain has about 9,500 soldiers in Afghanistan, most of whom are in the southern province of Helmand.

Their visit comes as NATO gears up for a major military push in neighbouring Kandahar province, the spiritual birthplace of the Taliban.

Fox, however, told the Times of London newspaper, that the 8,000 or so British troops in Helmand would not go to Kandahar, despite coming under US control a day earlier.

He said he was also in Afghanistan to look at how to bring British troops "as soon as possible". Some 286 UK soldiers have been killed since the beginning of the conflict and public sentiment has turned sharply away from being present in the country.

Fox said Britain was not a "global policeman" and Afghanistan should look after its own security. McChrystal, the US commander in Afghanistan, has said that by 2014 Afghans should be able to manage their own security. But Fox said that he wanted to see whether there was "room to accelerate it without diminishing the quality".

The British ministers will be joined in Kabul by the US undersecretary for state, William Burns, although it is not clear if they will hold any joint meetings.

A day earlier, on Friday, the German president Horst Koehler made a surprise visit to Mazar-i-Sharif, where he met with German soldiers.

In addition, England footballer David Beckham was expected in Helmand on Saturday.

UK to train Afghan security forces in Helmand

Zainullah Stanikzai - May 23, 2010 - 19:18

LASHKARGAH (PAN): Three visiting UK ministers on Sunday pledged continued assistance from the British government to southern Helmand province, the world's largest

opium-producing region.

Foreign Secretary William Hague, Defence Secretary Liam Fox and International Development Secretary Andrew Mitchell arrived in Lashkargah, the provincial capital, on Sunday.

They met Governor Gulab Mangal and British troops stationed in the lawless province, a spokesman for the governor, Daud Ahmadi, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

After the meeting, Fox told reporters their visit was aimed at assessing the security situation and discussing it with local authorities. He said the UK would train Afghan forces to enable them to take over the responsibility for Helmands security.

In response to a question, Hague said British troops' movement to central parts of the province was not a failure. He called the rotation a technical move, which he did not explain.

Speaking on the occasion, Andrew Mitchell said his country remained committed to the pledges of assistance to Helmand. "We are here to meet government officials and residents, highlight our priorities and initiate work in certain areas of common interest." Governor Gulab Mangal said the British officials had promised him cooperation in different fields. He added they had evinced a keen interest in training Afghan troops on a priority basis.

Bill on Afghan exit strategy in US Senate

Lalit K Jha - May 26, 2010 - 17:30

WASHINGTON (PAN): A piece of legislation asking President Barack Obama to set a timetable for withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan has been raised in the US Senate.

Introducing the bipartisan legislation on Tuesday evening, Senator Russ Feingold said Obama had already indicated that his surge strategy in Afghanistan was time-limited and that he would begin redeploying troops in July 2011.

All we are asking is that the president provide further details about how long he intends to leave our troops in Afghanistan, and about what variables could lead him to change his mind about this timetable, he said on the Senate floor.

However, Feingold clarified the amendment to a war spending bill did not set a specific date for the withdrawal of US troops. It does not require the president to actually redeploy troops. And it does not place any restrictions on funding, he said.

The move simply required Obama to provide a timeline for the redeployment of US troops, and to identify what variables would warrant the alteration of that timeline.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had already testified that she anticipated it would take three to five years to transition control to Afghan security forces, Feingold said.

My bill would simply require the president to lay this out clearly and specifically and to spell out what, if any, conditions would warrant a longer US military presence.

Feingold said requiring the administration to detail an exit strategy would provide men and women in uniform greater certainty about their deployments. After almost a decade of war, our service-members deserve to know how much longer our military operations in Afghanistan are expected to continue.

The lawmaker said a timetable also would help make it clear to US partners in

Afghanistan that its support was not unconditional or indefinite. That was an important message that the current Afghan leadership needed to hear, he said.
A vote on the amendment was not expected on Wednesday.

Russia for stronger UN role in Afghan peace efforts

Pajhwok Report - May 25, 2010 - 18:12

KABUL (PAN): Russia has called for detailed deliberation on all aspects of the national reconciliation process being pursued by the government of President Hamid Karzai. The peace effort should be considered in the context of relevant UN Security Council decisions and the communique issued at the end of the January 28 London Conference, a statement from the Russian embassy said on Tuesday.

At a meeting with UN Secretary-General's Special Representative Staffan de Mistura in Kabul on Monday, Russias foreign minister Sergey Lavrov also stressed full respect for UN sanctions on the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

The two sides exchanged views on ways of strengthening the UNs role in international civilian efforts to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The peace jirga, slated for June 2-4, and the July 20 Kabul Conference also figured at the meeting, as did the struggle against illegal production and trafficking of drugs.

Lavrov described the narcotics commerce as a threat to international peace and security, the statement added.

US looking forward to the peace jirga

Lalit K Jha - May 27, 2010 - 13:10

WASHINGTON (PAN): The US is looking forward to the Afghan peace, where President Hamid Karzai is expected to call on the Taliban to renounce violence, a spokesman said.

But the USs main focus is on rooting the Taliban from their spiritual homeland of Kandahar, the US State Department spokesman, P J Crowley, said.

The jirga has been delayed twice. It was initially scheduled for May 9 but was postponed to May 29 so that Karzai could travel to the United States to meet with the US president.

It was pushed back to June 2 due to an ongoing protest by parliamentarians.

Were looking forward to having the jirga take place," Crowley said, but added that Washingtons focus was more on Kandahar, where NATO troops are in the coming weeks expected to launch a major military operation.

"We are beginning to focus greater energy and attention on Kandahar as part of our strategy for helping to increase government influence, both at the national level and at the local level to greater portions of Afghanistan," he said.

The Kandahar action, he said, is about bringing security and effective governance to all of Afghanistan.

Timetable for US troop withdrawal opposed

Pajhwok Correspondent - May 28, 2010 - 13:59

WASHINGTON (PAN): US Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, disagreeing with some lawmakers from his own party, has opposed a timetable for a responsible withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan.

President Barack Obama had articulated a sound strategy for surging US troops in Afghanistan, a well-defined mission to enable them to succeed, and a clear plan to begin to bring the soldiers home starting next July, he said on Thursday.

I have always believed that our commitment in Afghanistan should not be open-ended, which is why I continue to support the presidents plan. We have begun to reverse the Talibans momentum in Afghanistan and weakened al Qaedas operations, safe havens and leadership in the region, Reid said.

The US would continue to press the Afghan government to end corruption and take responsibility for governing the country, but the troops had to reverse the Taliban momentum and to begin returning home next July, he added.

In light of the presidents strategy and the recent progress, now is not the time to change course, Reid said in response to an amendment moved by Senator Russ Feingold, requiring Obama to provide a timetable for a responsible withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan.

Also on Thursday, the Senate nixed the bill asking Obama to submit a timetable for pulling US forces out of Afghanistan. The 80-18 vote rejected Feingolds call for a comprehensive troop timetable.

At a White House news conference, President Obama supported the strategy of General Stanley McChrystal, commander of US and NATO troops in Afghanistan.

We are going to clear out Taliban strongholds; we are going to strengthen the capacity of the Afghan military; and we are going to get them stood up in a way that allows us then to start drawing down our troops but continuing to provide support for Afghanistan in its effort to create a stable government, Obama said.

Afghanistan epicenter of al-Qaeda extremism: US

Lalit K Jha - May 28, 2010 - 14:01

WASHINGTON (PAN): Afghanistan and Pakistan are the epicenter of the violent extremism practiced by al-Qaeda, the Obama administration says in its National Security Strategy (NSS), submitted to the US Congress.

The danger from this region will only grow if its security slides backward, the Taliban controls large swaths of Afghanistan, and al-Qaeda is allowed to operate with impunity, the administration said in the 52-page strategy.

In order to prevent future attacks on the United States and its allies, Washington must work with others to keep the pressure on al-Qaeda and increase the security and capacity of its partners in this region, it added.

In Afghanistan, we must deny al-Qaeda a safe haven, deny the Taliban the ability to overthrow the government and strengthen the capacity of Afghanistans security forces and government so that they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistans future.

The document said the US was working with the government of Pakistan to address the local, regional and global threat from violent extremists. The al-Qaeda and its allies must not be permitted to gain or retain any capacity to plan and launch international terrorist attacks, especially against the US homeland.

Al Qaedas core in Pakistan remains the most dangerous component of the larger network, but we also face a growing threat from the groups allies worldwide. We must deny these groups the ability to conduct operational plotting from any locale, the report stressed.

The US military and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) partners in Afghanistan were targeting the insurgency, working to secure key population centres and increasing efforts to train Afghan security forces, the NSS said.

The US promised to continue working with the United Nations and the Afghan government to improve accountable and effective governance. The administration is focusing assistance on supporting President Hamid Karzai and the ministries, governors and local leaders who combat corruption and deliver for the people.

We will also target our assistance to areas that can make an immediate and enduring impact in the lives of the Afghan people, such as agriculture, while supporting the human rights of all of Afghanistans peopewomen and men, the White House said in its report.

Afghans believe US is funding Taliban

The Guardian

05/26/2010

By Daniella Peled

Intellectuals and respected Afghan professionals are convinced the west is prolonging conflict to maintain influence in the region.

It's near-impossible to find anyone in Afghanistan who doesn't believe the US are funding the Taliban: and it's the highly educated Afghan professionals, those employed by ISAF, USAID, international media organisations – and even advising US diplomats – who seem the most convinced.

One Afghan friend, who speaks flawless English and likes to quote Charles Dickens, Bertolt Brecht and Anton Chekhov, says the reason is clear. "The US has an interest in prolonging the conflict so as to stay in Afghanistan for the long term."

The continuing violence between coalition forces and the Taliban is simple proof in itself.

"We say in this country, you need two hands to clap," he says, slapping his hands together in demonstration. "One side can't do it on its own."

His arguments are reasoned, although he slightly ruins the effect by explaining to me that no Jews died in the Twin Towers. It's not just the natural assets of Afghanistan but its strategic position, the logic goes. Commanding this country would give the US power over India, Russia, Pakistan and China, not to mention all the central Asian states.

"The US uses Israel to threaten the Arab states, and they want to make Afghanistan into the same thing," he says. "Whoever controls Asia in the future, controls the world."

"Even a child of five knows this," one Kabuli radio journalist tells me, holding his hand a

couple of feet from the ground in illustration. Look at Helmand, he says; how could 15,000 international and Afghan troops fail to crush a couple of thousand of badly equipped Taliban?

And as for the British, apparently they want to stay in Afghanistan even more than the Americans. The reason they want to talk to the Taliban is to bring them into the government, thus consolidating UK influence.

This isn't just some vague prejudice or the wildly conspiratorial theories so prevalent in the Middle East. There is a highly structured if convoluted analysis behind this. If the US really wanted to defeat the Taliban, person after person asks me, why don't they tackle them in Pakistan? The reason is simple, one friend tells me. "As long as you don't get rid of the nest, the problem will continue. If they eliminate the Taliban, the US will have no reason to stay here."

The proof is manifold, they say (although it does tend to include the phrase guaranteed to dismay every journalist: "everybody knows that ...").

Among the things everybody knows are that Afghan national army troops report taking over Taliban bases to find identical rations and weapons to their own US-supplied equipment. The US funds the madrasas both in Afghanistan and in Pakistan, which produce the young Talibs. US army helicopters regularly deliver supplies behind Taliban lines. The aid organisations are nothing more than intelligence-collecting agencies, going into regions the army cannot easily reach to obtain facts on the ground. Even the humblest midwife-training project is a spying outfit.

One political scientist, who works as an advisor to US agencies in the north of the country, recounts how people fear the continuing influence of the warlords, illustrating his point with descriptions of violence and corruption that extends into the realms of banking, government and trade.

Afghans hate these warlords, he says, but the US wants them kept in place. "If they were removed, and competent and clean people brought in, we would bring in revenues of our own. We could have our own economy, and demand foreign investment with transparency. We would have a true army, to protect us and serve Afghanistan."

So why do these well-educated Afghan professionals work for governments they are convinced want to sink their claws into their country?

There's nothing contrived about their patriotism – with their skills they could easily study or work abroad, but choose to stay to build a better future for their country. Afghans have a historical suspicion towards any foreign power involved in their country and maybe with the resilience of a nation which has seen off one occupier after another, they are willing to wait it out, confident the will of the US will break before their own.

They don't want Nato to leave for 15, maybe 20 years, anyway. It will take that long for

Afghan institutions to be able to survive independently. In the meantime, as my literature-loving friend – who works for a number of US agencies – tells me, there is no contradiction in survival. "I like Benjamin Franklin in my pocket," he smiles. So much for hearts and minds.

Social Headlines

50,000 refugees return from Pakistan

Pajhwok Report - May 23, 2010 - 15:31

KABUL (PAN): Nearly 50,000 Afghan refugees have returned home from Pakistan over the past two months, the UN refugee agency said on Sunday, linking the arrivals to the worsening security situation in the neighbouring country.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said it had resumed operations in late March in Pakistan through voluntary repatriation centres in Chamkani (Peshawar) and Belali (Balochistan).

"Returning refugees cited rising living costs, fewer jobs and the difficult security situation in Pakistan as key reasons for deciding to return to Afghanistan," UNHCR said in a statement.

The UN body said the return of Afghans from Iran remained remarkably lower than Pakistan as around 2,000 refugees had come back since the beginning of this year. Despite a growing concern about the situation of Afghan refugees in Iran after the execution of several men, the return rate is quite low.

"Throughout the repatriation operation since 2002, the months of May, June and July have always been the highest repatriation periods as refugee families decide to come back to work on their land after the end of the harsh winter season," UNHCR said.

Nearly 70 percent of Afghans having returned over the last two months were from the north-western Pakistani region and 13.7 percent from Baluchistan. A small number returned from Sindh, Punjab and Islamabad.

The UN record shows there are still some 2.7 million registered Afghans in Pakistan and Iran, many of whom have lived there for over two decades.

The UN voluntary return programme began in 2002 and more than 3.6 million Afghans have returned home from Pakistan and 865,000 from Iran with its assistance.

700 families at risk of landslide moved to safe area in Sar-i-Pul

Zabihullah Ehsas - May 25, 2010 - 12:11

MAZAR-i-SHARIF (PAN): Hundreds of families, at risk from a landslide in northern Sar-i-Pul province, have been moved to safer areas, an official said on Tuesday.

The face of the Narkoh Mountain in the Ji area has slid one and a half kilometers over the past five days, threatening to engulf the homes of about 700 families, Governor Syed Anwar Rahmati told Pajhwok Afghan News. Other villages were also at risk of flooding if the landslide had dammed the river.

Qurbani, a headmaster at Shaheed Safdari High School in Ji village, estimated that the sliding part of the mountain was about three cubic metres. "There was another mountain in front of Narkoh and people believed this would prevent any damage," he said. But the loose dirt and rocks were still inching their way towards the village, he said.

A provincial council member, Asadullah Khuram, said the landslide in Balkhab district of the province had not caused any casualties so far. He said everyone was moved to safety and had taken their belongings with them.

According to Khuram, all members of the provincial council and the governor held a meeting to discuss how to help those who had been displaced. Last year 20 houses were also buried in a landslide in the same area, he said.

Although the governor said the main cause of the landslide was not known yet, some villagers said they had heard the sounds of explosions.

President Hamid Karzai has ordered a team to be sent to the area.

Haji Haider, a resident of the area, said the slope of the mountain had been sliding over the past five days.

Angry teachers close schools in Nangarhar

Abdul Mueed Hashmi - May 26, 2010 - 20:30

JALALABAD (PAN): Teachers have closed 77 schools in a district of eastern Nangarhar province to protest a delay in distribution of land, officials said on Wednesday.

The teachers had sent a letter to the Department of Education, threatening to keep schools in Khogiani district closed as long as their demand remained unmet, an official told Pajhwok Afghan News.

A spokesman for the Department of Education, Muhammad Asif Shinwari, said the government had already completed the formalities for allotting land plots to the teachers in Chamtala desert. But some issues were yet to be sorted out, he added.

Naqeebullah, the headmaster of the Chamtala Higher Secondary School in Khogiani district, said his school had been closed in a show of solidarity with the protesting teachers.

He revealed 1,100 plots of land had been reserved for teachers but some powerful individuals were creating hurdles to the allotment process.

Ahmad Zia Abdulzai, provincial governors spokesman, said the allotment of plots had already been approved. He admitted there had been encroachments, but the problem had been resolved.

Abdulzai confirmed the provincial government had received reports about the closure of school in the district. He said efforts were underway to settle the issue.

3,000 families get access to clean drinking water

Hamid - May 26, 2010 - 20:43

SHIBERGHAN (PAN): More than 3,000 families in northern Jawzjan province have got access to clean drinking water with the completion of a project, an official said on Wednesday.

Around 80 wells, costing \$100,000, were dug in 40 villages of the province, said Rural Rehabilitation and Development (RRD) Department Director Muhammad Yousaf Auraz. He told Pajhwok Afghan News the scheme had been carried out with financial support from the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), a Christian organisation operating in the US and Canada.

Residents of the villages previously suffered from several water-borne diseases due to lack of potable water, he said. With the completion of the scheme, the issue would be resolved, the director hoped.

Juma Birdi, a resident of the Yanga Kinat village on the outskirts of provincial capital, Shiberghan, said: "From now on, we will be safe from all sorts of diseases."
Another resident, Wali Arab, called for the protection and maintenance of the wells. Irrigation Director Abdul Israr Bihzad said only 20 percent of residents of the provincial capital had access to clean drinking water.
Abdul Karim Fahimi, the regional head of ADRA, said another 400 wells had been dug in remote villages of the province.

400 families flee Helmand towns

Zainullah Stanikzai - May 26, 2010 - 11:20

LASHKARGAH (PAN): Hundreds of families, fearing the resumption of clashes between Taliban and security forces, have fled troubled districts of Marja and Nad Ali in southern Helmand province.

The fresh exodus of 400 families from the towns comes nearly three months after a massive counterinsurgency operation, involving thousands of Afghan and foreign troops. While concluding the offensive, the troops said the districts had been cleared of the Taliban militants, allowing thousands of families to return to their homes.

However, residents complain the security situation has further deteriorated in the wake of Operation Mushtarak. The people say they do not venture out of their houses to avoid being attacked by the fighters and security forces.

"We are under threat from the Taliban for cooperating with foreign troops," said Haji Aminullah, a Marja resident. He added they had never confronted such a situation over the past 30 years.

"We have trenches around us, set up by the rebels and foreign troops. As a result, we are confined to our homes," he said. The resident also grumbled about parched crops that could not be watered.

Another resident, Sahib Khan, who recently arrived in Lashkargah from Marja, said innocent people were being killed in clashes on a daily basis.

"Taliban are asking us why we are working on projects, funded by foreigners or the Afghan government," he said, accusing the fighters of carrying out attacks on troops from their houses. "In retaliation, international soldiers hit our houses."

An official of the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) accused the militants of attacking troops from civilian houses. Speaking to Pajhwok Afghan News on the condition of anonymity, he alleged foreign troops had also been targeting civilian houses. He went on to blame the NATO soldiers for failing to protect ordinary citizens during operations against militants. "Under these circumstances, a large number of families have fled their houses, migrating to Lashkargah," the official said.

ARCS provincial head Dr. Ahmadullah also confirmed the arrival of fresh families in the provincial capital. "We have registered 256 such families," he revealed.

The official explained most of the displaced families had been living with their relatives and a new call had been issued to the international community for assistance.

An official responsible for refugee affairs in the province, Haji Ghulam Farooq Noorzai, said 10 families arrived daily in Lashkargah. Linking the displacement to frequent clashes, bomb blasts, search operations and threats from the Taliban, he said they had so far registered 379 families.

The American troops based in the region had distributed cards to local people to

distinguish them from the Taliban, he said. But the guerrillas have warned the people against accepting the cards.

13,500 Nimroz families get electricity

Rameen - May 27, 2010 - 18:15

ZARANJ (PAN): About 13,500 families in the southwestern province of Nimroz are benefitting from electricity transferred from Iran, officials said on Thursday. Previously, the provincial capital of Zaranj only received eight megawatts of power and was subject to black outs. Iran was providing 10 megawatts to the province at a cost of 4.5 million afghanis, the director of the Energy and Water department, Zmaray Hilali, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

The cost was paid for by development councils in the province and tax revenue.

"If there is no power I face problems sewing clothes," said Parwez, a tailor, in Zaranj city.

The owner of an ice factory said he could not keep his product frozen without more electricity. "Electricity is needed for preparing ice, agricultural activities and operating machines. We hope our problems will be solved with the electricity," he said.

Economical Headlines

Kabul to seek funds for railroad project

Abdul Qadir Siddiqui - May 23, 2010 - 21:00

KABUL (PAN): The government would seek assistance from the international community for the construction of a railroad linking northern Kunduz province with western Herat at the July 20 Kabul Conference, a minister said on Sunday.

Minister of Mines Wahidullah Shahrani told a press conference here the 1,200-kilometre rail track would cost up to \$5 billion.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who is scheduled to attend the event, will brief participants on plans for the implementation of the decisions taken at London Conference in January.

In London, Afghanistan sought assistance for improving its war-devastated economy, rule of law and human rights situation, boosting the agriculture sector, developing rural areas and human resources and tightening security.

Shahrani said the railway line would connect the Sher Khan Port in Kunduz with western Herat province and Afghanistan with Turkmenistan and Iran. The railroad will pass through Samangan, Balkh, Jawzjan, Faryab and Badghis provinces.

The minister called the project vital for the economy of the country, hoping donors would provide funds for the proposed railway line.

He said construction work on a 75-kilometre railway line between Balkh capital, Mazar-i-Sharif, and Hairatan Port would be completed three months ahead of the scheduled time.

The Asian Development Bank-funded scheme, costing \$129 million, was expected to be completed in August instead of November, he concluded.

Kabul to seek \$14b in assistance

Syed Abbas Sadat - May 23, 2010 - 13:34

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan would seek 14 billion US dollars in assistance from the international community over the next three years at the Kabul Conference, scheduled for July 20, the finance minister said on Sunday.

Addressing a news conference, Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal said 16 ministers, 15 deputy ministers, the Kabul mayor, a number of advisors and renowned economist Dr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai met in Bamyan to discuss the preparations for the event.

About 40 percent of preparations had been made, he said, adding the remaining groundwork would be done after receiving proposals from different ministries.

At the three-day meeting in Bamyan, the minister said provincial officials were promised 39 million US dollars for development projects. An amount of \$30 million was pledged by the US embassy alone.

Dr. Ghani said he would play the role of an advisor at the Kabul Conference. He said one achievement of their three-day visit to Bamyan was the strengthening of civil society and human resource development.

On the occasion, he added the Ministry of Mines released for the first time a report, saying Afghanistan had mineral reserves worth 3000 billion dollars.

Minister of Mines Wahidullah Shahrani said long-term projects were also discussed in Bamyan. The construction of Kabul-Herat highway and a railway line connecting Afghanistan with Turkmenistan and Iran also figured at the meeting. A follow-up to the London meeting in January, the Kabul Conference will be attended by representatives of 50 countries, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and top-ranking Afghan officials.

Eastern zone set to produce 900 tonnes of fruit

Abdul Mueed Hashmi - May 24, 2010 - 22:13

JALALABAD (PAN): Orchards grown with the assistance of the United States in eastern Afghanistan would produce 900 tonnes of fruit this year, an official said on Monday. The orchards have been established with the help of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) over 300 hectares of land.

Amanullah Atal, in charge of the programme, told Pajhwok Afghan News the peach, pomegranate, apple and almond orchards had been planted in Nangarhar, Kunar and Laghman provinces.

With fruit harvests already underway in some areas, he said the project would help 200 families earn 27 million afghanis this year.

The Fruit Growers Association head in the eastern zone, Haji Ghulam Siddiq Zaheer, said orchard growers had been trained over the past few months. He added the farmers would earn much if proper markets were found for their fruits.

Key railroad project to be completed in four months

Zainab Muhammadi - May 25, 2010 - 19:24

KABUL (PAN): The construction of a 50-kilometre railroad, connecting Afghanistan to its northern neighbour of Uzbekistan, would be completed in the next four months, a top official said on Tuesday.

One of the important development schemes, the railway line -- linking Afghanistan with Central Asia -- would boost international trade, Minister of Finance Hazrat Omar Zakhelwal told a news conference.

Asian Development Bank (ADB) head Haruhiko Kuroda was also present on the occasion. The construction of the ADB-funded project, costing \$165m, was launched four months ago.

While praising the ADB as one of the major donors to Afghanistan, Zakhelwal awarded its director an appreciation certificate for funding a number of infrastructure projects in the country.

The ABD, which has provided about \$2b to Kabul over the past eight years, would make building Afghanistan's infrastructure a centrepiece of its efforts, Kuroda said, adding it was crucial to develop the economy of the war-torn country.