

Business and Politics in the Muslim World

Afghanistan This Week

Report Number: 122

Week 29 May-4 June 2010

June, 7, 2010

Mohammad Amin

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Political Headlines Summary

Stern action sought over civilian deaths

KABUL (PAN): The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and members of affected families have called for serious action against NATO-led service-members involved in civilian killings.

85 runners blamed for links with illegal armed groups

KABUL (PAN): A special commission of the Electoral Complaints Commission on Sunday accused 85 parliamentary candidates of having links with illegal armed groups.

Taliban commander swapped for policemen

PUL-I-KHUMRI (PAN): An insurgent commander was freed in exchanged for five police officials in northern Baghlan province on Sunday, a local Taliban leader claimed.

NATO chopper crashes in Paktia

KABUL (PAN): A NATO- contracted helicopter crashed in southeastern Paktia province, killing a civilian and injuring three crewmembers, the Western military alliance said on Monday.

Students demand govt take action against proselytisers

KABUL (PAN): Hundreds of university students protested in Kabul on Monday, demanding the government stop international groups from converting Muslims to Christianity and Judaism.

Blast damages US military tank

KABUL (PAN): A US military vehicle was partially damaged in a bomb explosion in the restive central province of Maidan Wardak on Monday afternoon, an official said.

Al Qaeda number three believed killed

KABUL (PAN): Al Qaedas number three leader is believed to have been killed by a US drone in Pakistans tribal region of Waziristan.

Organisers say jirga to cost \$3m

KABUL (PAN): Organisers of the peace jirga say the event will cost around \$3m, rejecting media reports about massive spending on the traditional assembly.

Karzai takes proselytising allegations seriously: spokesman

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai is taking seriously the allegations that aid groups are trying to convert Afghan Muslims to Christianity, his spokesman said on Tuesday.

Abdullah to boycott jirga

KABUL (PAN): Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, President Hamid Karzai's principal political foe, on Tuesday announced he would boycott the much-anticipated Peace Advisory Jirga.

Senate wants proselytisers expelled

KABUL (PAN): The Meshrano Jirga or upper house of parliament on Tuesday called for an immediate expulsion of some foreign non-governmental organisations allegedly involved in converting Muslims to Christianity.

Heads of 28 committees elected

KABUL (PAN): Heads of 28 committees of the Peace Advisory Jirga were elected on Wednesday, a day behind schedule, an official said.

Key political figures conspicuously absent

KABUL (PAN): A number of key politicians and jihadi leaders, including President Karzai's principal rival Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, stayed away from the long-awaited peace jirga in Kabul.

98pc of those invited attending jirga: Omar

KABUL (PAN): About 98 percent of those invited to the peace jirga attended the assembly that got underway Wednesday in Kabul, a presidential spokesman said.

Rabbani stresses national unity in jirga talks

KABUL (PAN): Burhanuddin Rabbani, the chairman of the three-day peace jirga, on Wednesday urged participants to put aside their political, tribal and ethnic rivalries and seek a sustainable solution to decades of conflict in Afghanistan.

Blaze destroys six tankers in Kandahar

KANDAHAR CITY (PAN): At least one person was killed and over a dozen seriously wounded in an explosion at a private oil and logistic supply company in southern Kandahar province, an official said on Wednesday.

188 more included in list of poll candidates

KABUL (PAN): Of the 226 people initially excluded from a list of parliamentary poll candidates, 188 have since been reinstated, officials said on Wednesday.

Rabbani named as peace jirga head

KABUL (PAN): Former president Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani has been appointed head of the three-day Peace Advisory Jirga which got underway Wednesday in Kabul.

Much-awaited jirga gets underway

KABUL (PAN): A much-anticipated peace jirga aimed at finding a solution to decades of conflict in Afghanistan, got underway Wednesday morning.

Younger delegates could help speed up peace efforts

KABUL (PAN): The younger generation has an important role to play in Afghanistan's peace jirga as their views on how to prevent disaffected youth joining militants could speed up the peace process, officials and delegates said on Thursday.

Jirga members debate peace proposals

KABUL (PAN): Delegates of the Afghan peace jirga got down to work on Thursday, debating how to achieve long-elusive peace in a country that has been in the grip of an unrelenting Taliban insurgency.

NATO forces kill top Taliban chief in Kandahar

KABUL (PAN): A top Taliban commander has been killed in Kandahar province, NATO said on Friday, calling it a major blow in the Taliban's leadership in southern Afghanistan.

Zaeef, Motawakil stay away from jirga

KABUL (PAN): Two senior ex-Taliban officials declined an invitation to participate in the Peace Advisory Jirga which has been debating reconciliation with armed insurgents, one of the two said Friday.

Jirga ends with call for peace commission

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan's Peace Jirga ended on Friday with a call for a comprehensive process, including talks with militant groups, to extricate the country from an unrelenting Taliban insurgency and pave the ground for stepped-up reconstruction.

Geo-Strategic Headlines Summary

Barg-i-Matal district falls to Taliban

JALALABAD (PAN): Taliban militants captured a remote district of eastern Nuristan province, bordering Pakistan's northwestern Chitral valley, on Saturday, officials said.

Jirga a move towards peace: EU

KABUL (PAN): A top EU official said the upcoming peace jirga would be a step towards a peace settlement, but ruled out any overnight end to the stalemated conflict.

Afghan, foreign forces recapture Barg-i-Matal

JALALABAD/ ASADABAD (PAN): Afghan and international forces have recaptured Barg-i-Matal in eastern Nuristan province from the Taliban, officials said on Tuesday.

Jirga an excuse to prolong war: Taliban

KABUL (PAN): The Taliban militants on Tuesday warned participants of the Peace Advisory Jirga of harsh consequences in case unfair decisions were taken against the insurgent movement.

Governor asks for large scale operation in Barg-i-Matal

JALALABAD (PAN): The governor of Nuristan province on Wednesday asked for an influx of Afghan and foreign forces to prevent the Taliban retaking the district of Barg-i-Matal.

UN Security Council mission to visit Afghanistan

KABUL (PAN): A delegation of the United Nations Security Council would visit Afghanistan during the current month to evaluate the current situation on the ground, the president of the 15-member body announced on Wednesday.

EU, US welcome Peace Jirga's declaration

KABUL (PAN): The European Union and the United States have welcomed the conclusions of the three-day Afghan National Consultative Peace Jirga that ended in Kabul on Friday.

Analysts insist on presence of foreign troops

KABUL (PAN): Foreign troops are needed in Afghanistan and there should be no talk of them withdrawing until Afghan security forces are capable of protecting the country, experts said Friday.

Social Headlines Summary

Health ministry to receive \$50 million

KABUL (PAN): The World Bank will provide Afghans Ministry of Public Health \$50 million over the next three years, an official said on Saturday.

Contracts for 75 kilometres of roads signed

KABUL (PAN): Two private companies signed contracts with the Afghan government on Saturday to build 75 kilometres of roads.

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (PAN): Around 5,000 families would benefit from 22 development projects completed under the National Solidarity Program (NSP) in two districts of northern Sari-i-Pul province, an official said on Wednesday.

5,000 families to benefit from 22 projects in Sar-i-Pul

Political Headlines

Stern action sought over civilian deaths

Hadi Ghaffari & Javid Hamim Kakar - May 30, 2010 - 18:32

KABUL (PAN): The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and members of affected families have called for serious action against NATO-led service-members involved in civilian killings.

Twenty-seven civilians were killed and several others wounded in an air strike on civilian vehicles by NATO-led forces in central Uruzgan province in February. On Saturday, the US military admitted killing 23 civilians and injuring a dozen others.

The outcome of the investigation linked the flawed bombing to "several shortcomings in training, communication and decision-making".

The top commander of foreign troops in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, briefed President Karzai on the findings earlier this week.

As a result of the collateral damage, four senior officers were removed from their jobs while two others were issued warnings by the NATO command in Afghanistan.

Muhammad Zahir, a resident of Kajran district, said he had lost a brother, a nephew and a cousin in the bombing. He urged the government should force NATO officials to take stern action against the errant soldiers.

Hadi Rahimi, member of the provincial council from Daikundi, said all those killed in the bombing were civilians and the area where the air strike was carried out had been peaceful. He called for trial of the culprits.

Governor Qurban Ali Uruzgani said the people did not know why foreigners had bombed the civilians. He also sought strict action against the officials involved in the raid.

Head of the AIHRC Nadir Nadari said they had always asked for the protection of residents. Criminal investigations should be conducted into all such cases, he demanded.

The culprits should be subjected to serious punishment under the law, he suggested.

85 runners blamed for links with illegal armed groups

Frozan Rahmani - May 30, 2010 - 10:44

KABUL (PAN): A special commission of the Electoral Complaints Commission on Sunday accused 85 parliamentary candidates of having links with illegal armed groups.

The parliamentary aspirants came from 18 provinces, the ECC spokesman, Ahmad Shah Rafat, said, without revealing their identities.

He said they would have five days to provide a defence to the special commission, made up of representatives from the ministries of defence and interior affairs, the National Directorate of Security and Independent Election Commission (IEC).

"We do not want to say anything about the identities of the accused contenders until they provide their defence against the allegations," Rafat said.

He said those who have been accused of violating human rights, embezzlement and serious crimes and officially convicted by a court would not be allowed to stand in the September 18 poll.

A preliminary list of candidates was issued on May 12 and the period in which complaints can be made will run to June 10. As many as 310 complaints have so far been lodged with the ECC, 90 percent of them against the IEC.

Complaints against candidates have included having links with illegal armed groups, murdering, embezzlement and violation of human rights, ECC officials have said.

Around 2,680 aspirants have registered their names for 249 seats in the Wolesi Jirga, or lower house of parliament.

Taliban commander swapped for policemen

Habibur Rahman Sherzai - May 30, 2010 - 10:29

PUL-I-KHUMRI (PAN): An insurgent commander was freed in exchanged for five police officials in northern Baghlan province on Sunday, a local Taliban leader claimed.

But the provincial governor and top security officials, saying they were unaware of the commanders fate, denied the kidnapping of policemen by the fighters.

A purported spokesman for the Taliban in Baghlan, Mubarez, said Mullah Shah Wali, arrested in a May 16 operation, had been released as a result of a prisoner swap.

"We had captured five policemen in Dehna Ghori district and swapped them today for Mullah Shah Wali," Mubarez told Pajhwok Afghan News over the telephone from an undisclosed location.

Rejecting the rebel claim as groundless, the provincial police chief said no security official had been abducted in the district.

Abdul Rahman Rahimi said Shah Wali had been transferred to Kabul after being arrested. "We don't have any information about him," the police chief added.

Maj. Gen. Murad Ali Murad, commander of the 209th Shaheen Military Corps, branded Wali as a criminal, detained along with his aide, Abdul Rahman, after relentless efforts by the Afghan National Army (ANA).

As a result of the operation in the district, five UN workers were freed from Taliban's captivity, he recalled. Murad, too, was unaware of the prisoner exchange, saying such a deal would amount to a betrayal of the soldiers who laid down their lives while chasing the militant commander.

As Baghlan Governor Munshi Abdul Majeed said he had no information about the swap, the Interior Ministry in Kabul denied its involvement in the deal.

NATO chopper crashes in Paktia

Javed Hamim Kakar - May 31, 2010 - 13:43

KABUL (PAN): A NATO- contracted helicopter crashed in southeastern Paktia province, killing a civilian and injuring three crewmembers, the Western military alliance said on Monday.

The chopper hit a civilian vehicle, killing its driver, in the Zazai Maidan district of the province, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said in a statement.

The wounded crewmembers were shifted to a nearby hospital.

Although the alliance ruled out militant involvement in the crash, the Taliban insurgents claimed they had shot down the aircraft.

Separately, a NATO soldier was killed in a bomb explosion in volatile southern Afghanistan. ISAF neither disclosed the exact location of the incident nor the nationality of the service member in line with policy.

The fatality brings to 222 the number of foreign soldiers killed in Afghanistan in the first five months of the current year.

Students demand govt take action against proselytisers

Khwaja Baseer Ahmad - May 31, 2010 - 20:04

KABUL (PAN): Hundreds of university students protested in Kabul on Monday, demanding the government stop international groups from converting Muslims to Christianity and Judaism.

The protest came as the Ministry of Economy said that two non-governmental groups had been suspended for alleged proselytising, an act considered illegal in the Islamic country. The two groups were named as US-based Church World Service and Norwegian Church Aid.

The protesters demonstrated outside Kabul University for an hour and a half, chanting "death to America, death to Christianity, death to Judaism and death to the allies of America.

Muhammad Yousuf, a student of journalism, said the protesters had evidence there were missionaries in some parts of the city. "If missionaries are not stopped, we will continue to demonstrate on a larger scale," he said.

A student of Islamic Studies demanded the proselytising groups be shut down and punished.

The students issued a resolution urging the government to take steps against those groups found to be breaking the law. The resolution asked President Hamid Karzai, parliament and the Ministry of Justice to punish the perpetrators according to Islamic law.

Muhammad Siddiqu Amirkhel, a spokesman for the Ministry of Economy, said two organisations had been suspended for alleged proselytising. He said they had received reports showing the two groups - Church World Service and Norwegian Church Aid were involved in trying to convert Muslims.

"These two organisations have been accused of converting people to Christianity and Judaism," he said.

Amirkhel said a commission has been appointed to investigate the activities of the two groups, and if it was confirmed they were proselytising, they would be banned and the perpetrators sent to court.

Blast damages US military tank

Hakim Basharat - May 31, 2010 - 19:05

KABUL (PAN): A US military vehicle was partially damaged in a bomb explosion in the restive central province of Maidan Wardak on Monday afternoon, an official said.

But the roadside bomb, a weapon of choice for the Taliban insurgents against Afghan and foreign forces, caused no casualties, the governor's spokesman said.

Shahidullah Shahid told Pajhwok Afghan News the bomb went off as US forces patrolled the Zewlan neighbourhood of Jalrez district.

As usual, the Taliban claimed responsibility for the blast, with their mouthpiece Zabihullah saying three foreign troops had been killed in the attack.

Al Qaeda number three believed killed

Pajhwok Monitor - Jun 1, 2010 - 17:30

KABUL (PAN): Al Qaedas number three leader is believed to have been killed by a US drone in Pakistans tribal region of Waziristan.

Mustafa al-Yazid, alias Saeed al-Masri, an Egyptian, was killed about a year ago, along with his wife, three daughters and a granddaughter, a US intelligence group said late Monday, citing an Al Qaeda statement.

The statement said he was killed in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but did not give an exact date for his death.

Al-Yazid was Al Qaedas leader in Afghanistan, one of the terror networks founders and is believed to be the groups financial manager. The FBI believes he sent money to three of the September 11 plane hijackers, Mohammed Atta, Marwan al Shehhi and Wal al- Shehiri.

Al-Yazid was born Mustafa Muhammad Osman Abu al-Yazid, in 1955 in Egypt. He helped found the fundamentalist group Al-Jihad in Egypt.

Al-Yazid came to Afghanistan in 1988 to help fight against Soviet forces.

Another high ranked official, Abu Yahya Al-laibi, is among other Al- Qaeda members believed killed by US drone attacks in Waziristan.

Organisers say jirga to cost \$3m

Pajhwok Report - Jun 1, 2010 - 15:55

KABUL (PAN): Organisers of the peace jirga say the event will cost around \$3m, rejecting media reports about massive spending on the traditional assembly.

Some media reports suggested the expenses of the three-day jirga would exceed \$150m, an estimate that organisers said was inaccurate.

President Hamid Karzai has convened 1,400 tribal elders and other influential figures from different parts of the country to explore ways of ending the war.

The event starts on Wednesday amid tight security in the capital, with 12,000 policemen tasked with ensuring the gathering is held in a secure environment.

The expenses have been cut significantly as the participants have been provided accommodation in a hostel of the Kabul Polytechnic University, the venue of the jirga.

A big chunk of the money will be spent on food, the organisers said. Repairs of the hostel and provision of other facilities will also account for a huge part of the amount.

Karzai takes proselytising allegations seriously: spokesman

Frozan Rahmani - Jun 1, 2010 - 16:54

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai is taking seriously the allegations that aid groups are trying to convert Afghan Muslims to Christianity, his spokesman said on Tuesday.

Recently a private Afghan TV report showed people embracing Christianity in the conservative Muslim society. Later on, Afghan authorities suspended two Christian foreign aid groups on suspicion of proselytising.

"The issue is serious and would face serious reactions The president personally follows it up", Karzai's chief spokesman, Waheed Omar, told reporters.

An investigation panel of top security and intelligence officials has been formed to probe the allegations, he added.

The alleged effort of the American and Norwegian church aid groups has caused serious reactions in the Afghan parliament as well.

The lower house of the parliament on Monday summoned the interior minister, intelligence chief and the attorney general to respond to the allegations.

In support of the MPs call, the upper house decided that proselytising groups should be expelled from the country.

Abdullah to boycott jirga

Muhammad Jawad Sharifzada - Jun 1, 2010 - 09:50

KABUL (PAN): Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, President Hamid Karzais principal political foe, on Tuesday announced he would boycott the much-anticipated Peace Advisory Jirga.

He said he would not participate in a governmental assembly where delegates had been invited by governors and district chiefs.

In line with my partys decision, I have decided not to take part in the jirga, said the former foreign minister and head of a new opposition coalition called Change and Hope.

A week back, the opposition grouping announced a boycott of Karzais peace initiative, saying the tribal assembly had no legal basis.

Since the jirga had no specific goals, it could not bring peace and stability to the country, the former presidential candidate said.

He added the government, which had ignored several decisions of parliament, would not implement the suggestions of the three-day conference, scheduled to begin in Kabul on Wednesday.

However, Abdullah said he was not against efforts to stabilise Afghanistan, but believed the gathering could not help promote the cause of peace. He welcomed any substantive reconciliation drive, he said without giving details.

Responding to a question about why his coalition colleague, the former president and Jamiat-i-Islami head, Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani, was attending, Abdullah said that was his personal decision.

Aimed at bringing stability to the war-torn country, the US-backed jirga will evolve a mechanism for peace parleys with militants who renounce violence and accept Afghanistans constitution.

Participants include members of parliament and the ulema council, influential women, former senators, representatives from the nomadic Kuchi tribe, civil society, refugees from Pakistan and Iran, traders and non-governmental organisations.

Originally scheduled for May 2, the jirga was put back to May 29 due to Karzais four-day trip to the United States. It was delayed a second time for logistic reasons, to ensure the participation of all of those invited.

On the concluding day, committee members are to present a report to the traditional tribal assembly, which will evolve a mechanism for negotiations with anti-government forces.

Senate wants proselytisers expelled

Abasin Zaheer - Jun 1, 2010 - 11:34

KABUL (PAN): The Meshrano Jirga or upper house of parliament on Tuesday called for an immediate expulsion of some foreign non-governmental organisations allegedly involved in converting Muslims to Christianity.

The call from senators comes three days after a TV video report showed two Christian foreign aid group members proselytising to Afghans.

The 10 minute-film showed about 30 people, including women and children, being addressed by a disabled Afghan in Dari language saying: "Oh God give me the strength to follow the path of Jesus."

A second part of the film showed some Afghans being baptised.

The Upper House recommended a nine-member delegation investigate the matter in cooperation with authorities, and that the delegation send its report to the house for a collective decision.

Senate Chairman Sibghatullah Mujaddedi said the Afghan government should show a quick response and prevent such things happening in the future.

Senator Zabihullah Rajai suggested the matter be raised at the peace jirga, which starts on Wednesday, so that a joint decision could be made.

He said those NGOs found to be proselytising should be punished and then expelled.

Gulalay Akbar, a female senator from Badakhshan province, said a foreign NGO in her province had been found preaching Christianity.

Without naming the organisation, she said it had offices in Faizabad, Kabul and Bamyan provinces.

Another senator, Maulvi Mehmood Danishjo, warned that if the government did not take any action against the NGOs within 24 hours, it would be responsible for any untoward situation that arises. However, he did not elaborate.

A presidential spokesman on Tuesday told a press conference in Kabul that the government was serious in this regard. The interior minister and the National Directorate of Security chief had been assigned to thoroughly investigate the report, Waheed Omar said.

He said the president himself had been taking a keen interest in the investigation.

Meanwhile, the spokesman for the economic ministry, Muhammad Sadiq Amarkhel, said the operations of Norwegian Church Aid and US-based Church World Service had been suspended pending the investigation.

Heads of 28 committees elected

Rahmatullah Afghan - Jun 2, 2010 - 20:10

KABUL (PAN): Heads of 28 committees of the Peace Advisory Jirga were elected on Wednesday, a day behind schedule, an official said.

Chiefs, deputy heads and secretaries of the committees were elected by their members, said the jirga's spokesman, Gul Agha Ahmadi.

Some 1,400 delegates including 300 women and 200 foreign and Afghan guests are attending the tribal gathering that will discuss a framework for negotiations with anti-government forces.

Ahmadi said jirga proceedings on the first day were successfully completed. On Thursday, the second day, the process would go on in line with the agenda, he added.

On the concluding day, the traditional assembly will issue a final declaration based on recommendations of the 28 bodies.

Key political figures conspicuously absent

Frozan Rahmani - Jun 2, 2010 - 18:15

KABUL (PAN): A number of key politicians and jihadi leaders, including President Karzai's principal rival Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, stayed away from the long-awaited peace jirga in Kabul.

The three-day jirga, launched on Wednesday, is aimed at seeking solutions to end the war in the country through reconciliation with militant groups.

Abdullah had said on Tuesday he would not attend the jirga as it had no clear objectives. The delegates were chosen by provincial governors and district chiefs, he added.

A number of MPs, as well as members of the Bamyan provincial council, boycotted the traditional assembly to protest Karzai's failure to submit a list of the remaining cabinet picks to the Wolesi Jirga.

Muhammad Mohaqeq, the leader of Wahdat party, Gen Abdul Rashid Dostum, the head of Junbish-i-Millie Afghanistan, Balkh Governor Atta Mohammad Noor and another top political figure, Pir Syed Ahmad Gilani, were conspicuously absent.

"Although I don't expect any concrete result, we are not boycotting the jirga and a number of my party members are attend the gathering," Mohaqeq said in a statement.

Gen. Dostum and Gilani are currently abroad. Governor Noor said the security situation did not allow him to take part in the crucial event.

Ex-president Burhanuddin Rabbani, who was selected as the chair of the jirga on Wednesday, lashed out at a number of fellow parliamentarians for not attending the assembly.

98pc of those invited attending jirga: Omar

Rahmatullah Afghan - Jun 2, 2010 - 17:56

KABUL (PAN): About 98 percent of those invited to the peace jirga attended the assembly that got underway Wednesday in Kabul, a presidential spokesman said.

"Up to 1600 delegates are attending the jirga," Waheed Omar told a press conference. He said they expected a positive outcome and that the government would respect the decisions taken at the traditional gathering.

Omar added a large number of parliamentarians were participating in the peace conference, whose results would not be affected by the absence of a handful of invitees.

Burhanuddin Rabbani had been chosen as head of the Peace Advisory Jirga, the spokesman said, adding the government had no role in his election.

The much-awaited peace jirga, lasting three days, was inaugurated at 9am with a speech from President Hamid Karzai, who offered an olive branch to militants.

Rabbani stresses national unity in jirga talks

Zarghona Salehi - Jun 2, 2010 - 21:07

KABUL (PAN): Burhanuddin Rabbani, the chairman of the three-day peace jirga, on Wednesday urged participants to put aside their political, tribal and ethnic rivalries and seek a sustainable solution to decades of conflict in Afghanistan.

Some 1,400 delegates, including 300 women and around 200 foreign and Afghan guests are attending the tribal gathering in the Afghan capital, Kabul, which will discuss a framework for negotiations with anti-government forces.

Rabbani said jirgas were an important part of Afghan society and that the country had historically solved its problems through such assemblies.

He acknowledged it was impossible to solve all the problems of the country in three-days, but said it would provide a good start.

"Your discussions should be on the basis of the jirgas aims and important issues," he said, addressing the delegates who on Thursday will break off into 28 committees to discuss which militant groups to open talks with.

Rabbani urged the delegates to make suggestions that supported national unity and did not damage relations with neighbouring countries and the international community.

He pointed to the rocket attacks that had marred the opening of the conference and the attempted suicide attackers killed near the venue as evidence of a new low in violence among Afghans.

"Today, the peace advisory jirga was trying to bring peace to the country, but one Afghan wants to blow himself up so that these efforts would fail," he said.

Such infighting plays into the hands of Afghanistans enemies who want to see the country fail, he said.

While President Hamid Karzai was addressing the delegates, three explosions rocked the area followed by the sounds of gunfire.

Three suicide bombers on a building about 500 metres from the tent had fired rockets, but no one was killed.

Two of the attackers were later killed and another one was detained by security forces.

The Taliban claimed the three suicide bombers as their own fighters while the Gulbadin Hekmatyar-led Hezb-i-Islami Afghanistan said their rebels fired the rockets.

Blaze destroys six tankers in Kandahar

Bashir Ahmad Naadem - Jun 2, 2010 - 17:42

KANDAHAR CITY (PAN): At least one person was killed and over a dozen seriously wounded in an explosion at a private oil and logistic supply company in southern Kandahar province, an official said on Wednesday.

Six oil tankers were destroyed and 15 employees injured, one of whom later died, said Haji Mohammad Siddique, owner of the company called Tawazu.

At about 7pm on Tuesday night a powerful explosion caused one oil tanker to explode, he told Pajhwok Afghan News. Firefighters were able to put out the blaze within two hours he said.

However, at about midnight, a new fire started engulfing the entire building, destroying six tankers and wounding 15 staff members, he said.

Siddique did not apportion any blame. However, deputy police chief, Mohammad Shah Faruqi, blamed high temperatures in Kandahar for the blaze.

A doctor at Mirwais hospital, who did not want to be named, said 15 people had been injured in the fire. He said one of the wounded had died of his wounds while the rest were flown to India due to the seriousness of their burns.

As usual, the Taliban claimed responsibility for the act.

A spokesman, Qari Yusuf Ahmadi, said 12 tankers were destroyed in three explosions carried out by their fighters.

He said the company was chosen because they provided fuel and other logistic support to foreign forces.

188 more included in list of poll candidates

Frozan Rahmani - Jun 2, 2010 - 17:01

KABUL (PAN): Of the 226 people initially excluded from a list of parliamentary poll candidates, 188 have since been reinstated, officials said on Wednesday.

The 226 has been crossed off the list because their documents were incomplete. But the Independent Election Commission ordered they be given a second chance to reapply.

Some 203 had re-registered with the correct documents, but 15 failed to make it on to the list, spokesman of the Electoral Complaints Commission, Ahmad Zai Rafat, told Pajhwok Afghan News, without explaining why they were left out.

The preliminary list of candidates for the September 18 election was released on May 12. At that time, the IEC said the 226 candidates were not included as they did not submit 1,000 election cards to the commission.

The ECC has said Afghans can submit any complaint against the candidates between June 2 and 8.

Some 2,861 people have registered to stand for 249 seats in the Wolesi Jirga, or lower house of parliament, with 67 reserved for women.

Rabbani named as peace jirga head

Zarghona Salehi - Jun 2, 2010 - 16:56

KABUL (PAN): Former president Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani has been appointed head of the three-day Peace Advisory Jirga which got underway Wednesday in Kabul.

The chair was supposed to have been elected by the gatherings 1,400 participants, but Ghulam Farooq Wardak, the education minister and in charge of preparations, said a vote could take days.

Instead he asked senate speaker, Sibghatullah Muddedi, to take the role.

Mujaddedi refused and suggested Rabbani to be the head and Qayyamuddin Kashaf as his deputy.

Wardak then announced that the former opposition leader would assume the role.

Jafar Mahdoi was appointed secretary and Abdul Satar Darzabi as deputy secretary.

The decision sparked outrage among some delegates, who had been invited to Kabul to find consensus on a mechanism for reconciling decades of conflict in the country.

"This is injustice, the position should be decided through election," shouted Afzal Ahmadzai, a former senator.

Another member, Haji Abdul Aziz Achakzai from Kandahar, told Pajhwok Afghan News that if the jirga sought a realistic solution for the security problem, then its head should be impartial. He believed Rabbani was not impartial.

"Rabbani fought the Taliban and Hekmatyar himself. How can he convince them to renounce fighting? he said, referring to Gulbadin Hekmatyar, the leader of Hezb-i-Islami Afghanistan (HIA).

Mujaddedi, who also heads the National Reconciliation Commission, said a lot had been achieved in terms of bringing many Taliban and HIA members back to normal life.

He said peace negotiations with Taliban and other insurgent outfits should be held in light of Quranic teachings.

However, he said the positions of the Taliban and HIA remain unclear and that he did not know what they were fighting for.

He said the Taliban's proposal that foreign forces withdraw prior to peace talks was illogical. An early pullout of international troops would be disastrous for the country, Mujaddedi said.

During the first hours of the gathering, three rockets landed around the tent where the delegates have assembled. One of Karzais bodyguards was reportedly injured by flying shrapnel.

Much-awaited jirga gets underway

Rahmatullah Afghan - Jun 2, 2010 - 13:12

KABUL (PAN): A much-anticipated peace jirga aimed at finding a solution to decades of conflict in Afghanistan, got underway Wednesday morning.

Some 1,400 delegates and around 200 foreign and Afghan guests were expected to attend the three-day tribal gathering at a massive tent in the Afghan capital, Kabul.

The twice-delayed event started at 9am with a recitation from the Holy Quran, followed by a speech from President Hamid Karzai, broadcast live from the event.

The delegates have been divided into 28 committees, each with 40 to 50 members, and will discuss proposals for ending the Taliban-led insurgency and stabilising the country, devastated by three decades of conflict.

They will debate Karzai's 36-page Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme and produce a blueprint for talks with low-level rebels who renounce violence and respect the constitution.

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

Participants include members of parliament, ulema council, influential women, former senators, representatives from the nomadic Kuchi tribe, civil society, refugees from Pakistan and Iran, traders and non-governmental organisations.

Originally scheduled for May 2, the jirga was put back to May 29 due to Karzais four-day trip to the United States. It was delayed a second time for logistic reasons, to ensure the participation of all of those invited.

A key opposition leader, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, has said he will boycott the event. There has also been criticism that the delegates invited do not truly reflect the Afghan people.

The Taliban, which has not been invited to the talks, has dismissed the conference as serving the interests of "foreign invaders", warning the participants of harsh consequences should unfair decisions be taken against the insurgent movement.

They vowed to continue their armed struggle against the Afghan government until foreign forces were made to accept a real resolution of the crisis. They did not elaborate on the real solution, but have previously said they would not accept a peace deal while foreign troops remained on Afghan soil.

Younger delegates could help speed up peace efforts

Muhammad Jawad Sharifzada - Jun 3, 2010 - 10:17

KABUL (PAN): The younger generation has an important role to play in Afghanistan's peace jirga as their views on how to prevent disaffected youth joining militants could speed up the peace process, officials and delegates said on Thursday.

The three-day traditional gathering, aimed at seeking solutions to end the war through peace deals with insurgent groups, opened Wednesday with 1,400 delegates, nearly a quarter of them women.

On Thursday, delegates broke off into 28 committees with the aim of providing a list of suggestions to the government the following day on reconciling armed opponents of the government.

The younger generation had been given a greater role in the jirga as they could help shape the future of their country, said a jirga spokesman, Gul Agha Ahmadi.

The jirga is a traditional Afghan event in which tribal elders and influential figures get together, seeking to resolve a local dispute or a national challenge. In the past, the views of the younger generation had not been taken into consideration, Ahmadi said.

This year, however, listening to the younger generation about ways to prevent disaffected youth from joining militant groups could speed up efforts at achieving peace, said Masuma Muhammadi, 30, a Kabul representative in the jirga.

"Education, jobs and a better life should be provided for the young to prevent them from joining armed groups," she said.

Another woman, Anahita Sarwary, 37, who travelled from Iran to represent Afghan immigrants across the border, said the participation of the younger generation alongside elders was vital to restoring peace.

"It's important to listen to how the young people think about building a sustainable peace in Afghanistan," she told Pajhwok Afghan News.

Sarwary said most of the youth who sought refuge in Iran are waiting for the end of the war and a job, a factor she believed was vital to distance the youth from seeking employment with insurgent groups.

The young generation of the country has suffered the most from the fighting and they are more concerned about their future, therefore their input in the peace plan is significant, a Kabul professor, Nasim Gul Totakhel, said.

Jirga members debate peace proposals

Javed Hamim Kakar - Jun 3, 2010 - 16:45

KABUL (PAN): Delegates of the Afghan peace jirga got down to work on Thursday, debating how to achieve long-elusive peace in a country that has been in the grip of an unrelenting Taliban insurgency.

The Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami Afghanistan, two major groups that are currently fighting against Afghan and foreign troops, have scorned the traditional tribal gathering saying it is aimed at hoodwinking the people.

On Wednesday, militants fired a volley of rockets at the jirga venue and sent three suicide attackers to the capital. No one was killed in the rocket attacks, and security forces killed two of the three bombers. The third was arrested.

Regardless, a large number of delegates to the three-day council remain convinced that substantive negotiations with militant outfits remain central to lasting stability in the country, devastated by three decades of conflict.

They believe that peace parleys and the release of rebels could go a long way towards creating the conditions necessary for peace and the homecoming of more than two million Afghan refugees presently living in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran. They also want several high ranking Taliban and other militants to be removed from UN and US terror lists.

Divided into 28 committees, the jirga members are discussing the steps the government and its armed opponents should take to end the ongoing trail of death and destruction and speed up the reconstruction effort.

The committees were debating which groups should be selected for peace talks and their characteristics, said the head of committee number 19, Maulvi Ataullah Ludin.

The delegates also discussed the security guarantees for anti-government groups should they accept the offer of peace talks, he said.

Organisers say the US-led international community is firmly behind the Karzai administration's latest peace initiative. Saudi Arabia's king is also hugely interested in the success of the conference, according to Burhanuddin Rabbani, chairman of the jirga.

The event has three main objectives: to create an understanding between the government and the people on peace, develop a mechanism for dialogue with the fighters and implement any jirga decisions.

The committees are scheduled to finalise their recommendations on Thursday and present their reports to participants on Friday, before the adoption of a final declaration.

The chairman of the jirga, Burhanuddin Rabbani, visited all the committees before they started their debates on Thursday.

The conference is being attended by 1,400 people including parliamentarians, tribal elders, religious scholars, civil society representatives, female activists and 200 foreign and Afghan guests.

However, a number of key politicians and jihadi leaders, including President Hamid Karzai's principal political rival Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, are staying away from the jirga. Abdullah had

said on Tuesday he would not attend the assembly, stacked with individuals of the government's choice.

Some MPs, as well as members of the Bamyan provincial council, boycotted the traditional assembly to protest Karzai's failure to submit a list of the remaining cabinet picks to the Wolesi Jirga.

Muhammad Mohaqeq, leader of Wahdat party, Gen Abdul Rashid Dostum, head of Junbish-i-Millie Afghanistan, Balkh Governor Atta Mohammad Noor and another top political figure, Pir Syed Ahmad Gilani, are conspicuously absent.

NATO forces kill top Taliban chief in Kandahar

Pajhwok Report - Jun 4, 2010 - 18:09

KABUL (PAN): A top Taliban commander has been killed in Kandahar province, NATO said on Friday, calling it a major blow in the Taliban's leadership in southern Afghanistan.

Mullah Zergay was killed last week in a joint NATO and Afghan operation in the increasingly volatile Zharay district, on the outskirts of the provincial capital, Kandahar City, the alliance said in a statement.

"Zergay directed insurgent activities in the Arghandab and Zharay districts, including Kandahar City," the statement said. "He used explosives in nearly all of his operations and was directly responsible for multiple deaths in Kandahar City alone."

The death comes in a week NATO had vowed to intensify its attacks against the Taliban leadership in their birthplace of Kandahar.

Mullah Zergay rose to power through "leading kidnappings and executions of government employees and village elders" in the province, where target killing has increased.

The top commander was killed after the joint force moved inside his safe haven to capture him, but "Zergay and several members of his security detachment were killed" in the fight.

Zaeef, Motawakil stay away from jirga

Syed Abbas Sadat - Jun 4, 2010 - 19:06

KABUL (PAN): Two senior ex-Taliban officials declined an invitation to participate in the Peace Advisory Jirga which has been debating reconciliation with armed insurgents, one of the two said Friday.

Maulvi Abdul Salam Zaeef, the former Taliban ambassador to Pakistan, told Pajhwok Afghan News that he and ex-foreign minister Maulvi Wakeel Ahmad Motawakil had been invited to attend the assembly.

But they decided to stay away for "sensitive reasons", which he did not explain. "I'm in a position where I can represent none of the parties (to the ongoing conflict)," he added.

He asked international forces to respect the decisions of the consultative conference to ensure the success of the jirga; otherwise the effort would be wasted.

Approached for comments, Motawakil said the delegates including lawmakers, notables, tribal elders and religious scholars to explore new ways of bringing peace to the country.

The ex-minister called for the abolition of the blacklist and substantive peace talks with armed opponents of the government without any preconditions. He stressed the implementation of jirga decisions.

Motawakil and Zaeef, who spent years in US-controlled prisons at Bagram and Guantanamo Bay following the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, are currently living in Kabul.

Jirga ends with call for peace commission

Pajhwok Report - Jun 4, 2010 - 17:28

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan's Peace Jirga ended on Friday with a call for a comprehensive process, including talks with militant groups, to extricate the country from an unrelenting Taliban insurgency and pave the ground for stepped-up reconstruction.

Wrapping up three days of deliberations, around 1,600 participants, representing different provinces, ethnicities, tribes and politics, agreed on the need for sustained dialogue with Afghan rebel outfits that had no links to Al Qaeda and other international terrorist networks.

In a final declaration adopted at the end of the traditional gathering, the delegates demanded the release of all individuals arrested on the basis of flawed intelligence or without compelling evidence of involvement in any crime.

"We ask the government and foreign troops to free all those who have been detained as a result of wrong intelligence," the jirga's deputy chairman said while reading out the declaration. Such a step would spur the proposed reconciliation campaign, Qayyamuddin Kashaf said.

However, the declaration ignored calls from several jirga committees to set a timetable for the withdrawal of nearly 150,000 international troops from the country -- a key demand of the Taliban and the Hezb-i-Islami Afghanistan.

All those involved in the peace effort were urged at the start to put aside their tribal, regional and political differences, in order to preserve national unity.

Also suggested was the formation of a high-level commission, comprising members of

parliament, provincial councils, tribal elders and other public representatives, to mediate between the government and Afghan militant groups.

The council should have both male and female delegates, religious scholars, tribal elders, two members from parliament and those who have shunned violence, it said.

The council's responsibility would be to establish a special committee that will have access to inmates, secure their release and bring them back to the mainstream.

However, peace negotiations should take place only if Taliban and their close ally, the Hezb-i-Islami Afghanistan, led by former prime minister Gulbadin Hekmatyar, cut ties to Al Qaeda and other terrorist group, the declaration said.

"We want all parties to the conflict to retract preconditions for dialogue ... The government, without misusing this traditional dispute settlement mechanism, should take seriously the jirga's decisions," the declaration said.

As was expected, the United Nations was urged to remove the names of Taliban leaders who had been subjected to an asset freeze and a travel ban, from the Security Council's blacklist.

The government was asked to guarantee the security of militants during peace talks, help them return to normal life, create employment opportunities, take measures to alleviate poverty, promote Islamic education and end encroachments on state-owned land.

While seeking the inclusion of their recommendations in the agenda for the upcoming Kabul Conference, slated for July 20, the delegates agreed that actions that ran counter to the Afghan constitution or threatened national unity would not be tolerated.

"We want the international community to take concrete steps for training, equipping and strengthening Afghan forces so as to enable them to better shoulder the responsibility for the security of the country and its people," the document added.

The declaration asked all religious scholars and national media outlets to play a proactive role in promoting peace in the country.

Tribal elders, youth and women would also be called on to promote the message of peace adopted at the jirga and share the declaration with people in their home towns.

Finally, the delegates vehemently condemned Israel's raid on a flotilla of humanitarian aid ships bound for the Gaza Strip that killed a dozen human rights activists, many of them Turkish.

Calling it "a brutal act of the Zionist Israeli regime", the declaration asked the United Nations to force Israel to immediately lift the economic blockade it has imposed on the Palestinian enclave.

Geo-Strategic Headlines

Barg-i-Matal district falls to Taliban

Abdul Mueed Hashimi - May 29, 2010 - 11:50

JALALABAD (PAN): Taliban militants captured a remote district of eastern Nuristan province, bordering Pakistans northwestern Chitral valley, on Saturday, officials said.

At least two policemen were wounded in the attack Saturday morning, which came after days of fighting, the provincial police chief, Gen. Qasim Paiman, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

"We have lost contact with the district centre," he said, adding police units had made a tactical retreat to the Shandul village, where a "defence line" had been set up.

The fighting in the increasingly volatile border town began a week back when hundreds of Pakistani and Afghan Taliban stormed it, forcing provincial authorities to seek help from the Interior Ministry in Kabul.

A top provincial official, who wished not be named, accused the ministries of defence and interior affairs of being failing to provide reinforcements despite requests from the governor.

A purported Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said 28 policemen were killed in the fighting, a claim rejected by local officials. He also admitted the loss of one fighter and injuries to four others in Saturdays clash which lasted several hours.

On Friday, Governor Jamaluddin Badr said 20 Taliban had been killed and four captured alive as a result of a NATO air strike in Barg-i-Matal.

Jirga a move towards peace: EU

Pajhwok Report - May 30, 2010 - 19:33

KABUL (PAN): A top EU official said the upcoming peace jirga would be a step towards a peace settlement, but ruled out any overnight end to the stalemated conflict.

President Hamid Karzai has convened a 1,400-member jirga that would from Wednesday start discussions on urging the Taliban and other militant groups to renounce violence. The Taliban have said any peace deal is conditional on the withdrawal of all foreign troops.

The jirga members, nearly a quarter of whom are women, were unlikely to make a "bland statement" such as calling on NATO forces to leave the country as an effort to pave the ground

for talks, the European Union's special envoy to Afghanistan, Vygaudas Usackas, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

However, he said he believed that any agreement reached after the three-day gathering would not be enough to encourage anti-government forces to lay down their arms.

"I don't think that any conference or gathering or the consultative national peace jirga by itself will produce end of the conflict," Usackas said. "It will enable the ball throwing towards a peace settlement. That is what I expect."

He insisted the jirga, an event he described "a step towards a peace process", has to take the constitution of Afghanistan and human rights law into account.

The peace jirga is first of three major events Afghanistan is planning this year. It would be followed by the Kabul Conference in July and the parliamentary election in mid September.

The Kabul Conference, an event in which the UN secretary general and foreign ministers of many Western countries would attend, would review benchmarks set during the London Conference in January this year for the Afghan government to build its institutions and tackle corruption.

The EU ambassador, a former foreign minister of Lithuania, said the international community would act as a watchdog on progress made by Karzai's government to fight corruption.

The EU is a major donor to the upcoming parliamentary election, and Usackas said he was pleased by reforms made in the leadership of the election bodies, the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission.

"We are supporting it financially and we also support IEC and ECC with training", to avoid a repeat of last year's fraud-tainted election.

The EU and the United Nations had reportedly warned the Afghan government that the only way to secure the international community's fund for the national process was to replace key election officials.

"We have achieved very important progress in that respect about their willingness to do the election in the best way possible, what is feasible in the circumstances of Afghanistan at the moment," he said.

Afghan, foreign forces recapture Barg-i-Matal

Abdul Moeed Hashmi & Khan Wali Salarzai - Jun 1, 2010 - 18:52

JALALABAD/ ASADABAD (PAN): Afghan and international forces have recaptured Barg-i-Matal in eastern Nuristan province from the Taliban, officials said on Tuesday.

The district was recaptured Monday night at 9pm, governor of Nuristan, Jalaluddin Badar, told Pajhwok Afghan News. He said security personnel were now at district headquarters, and that the insurgents had fled.

Hundreds of Taliban overran the district three days ago, taking control of the area after fierce fighting.

On Monday, helicopters belonging to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) bombed the district, killing more than 60 Taliban fighters and wounding another 80, said border police commander, Gen. Muhammad Zaman Mamuzai.

He said border police were in the area under the command of Col. Shams-ur-Rahman, and with the assistance of international troops would mop up any remaining militants.

"This successful operation by Afghan forces will return governance to Barg-i-Matal," said Zemarai Bashary, the spokesman for the Ministry of Interior.

"This operation shows the improved planning and operational capabilities of our joint forces in response to serious incidents even in the most remote locations of Afghanistan," he said.

A Taliban local commander said on Monday that three fighters were killed in an ISAF airstrike.

Barg-i-Matal is an eastern district of Nuristan province, which has long border with Pakistans Chatral district and officials often complain about the lack of security in the mountainous province.

Taliban fighters seized the district last year, but security personnel pushed them back after three days.

Jirga an excuse to prolong war: Taliban

Pajhwok Report - Jun 1, 2010 - 10:25

KABUL (PAN): The Taliban militants on Tuesday warned participants of the Peace Advisory Jirga of harsh consequences in case unfair decisions were taken against the insurgent movement.

Supporters and members of the three-day traditional tribal gathering, scheduled to begin on Wednesday, were responsible for Afghanistans tragedy, the Taliban said in a statement on their website.

They vowed to continue their armed struggle against the Afghan government until foreign powers were forced into accepting a real resolution of the crisis. However, they did not elaborate on the real solution.

The jirga -- a brainchild of US Special Representative Richard Holbrooke -- is an abortive attempt at deceiving Afghans and the world at large, according to the statement, which said that the event had to be delayed twice for security reasons.

It added: The so-called peace jirga is being organised at a time when Afghan and foreign forces are announcing a huge military push in Kandahar.

Asserting their respect for jirgas and dialogue, the rebels said Afghans had always settled their issues through this traditional mechanism of conflict resolution.

But holding such an assembly at the behest of foreigners was an affront to Afghanistan's history and traditions, they believed, asking the people not to pin hopes for peace and prosperity on the jirga.

Convening this jirga, sponsored by outsiders, is not a peace initiative but an excuse for prolonging the war in Afghanistan, the Taliban said, claiming the US-chosen participants had no public support.

Aimed at bringing stability to the war-torn country, the jirga will evolve a mechanism for peace parleys with militants who renounce violence and accept Afghanistan's constitution.

Participants include members of the national assembly, ulema council, influential women, former senators, representatives from the nomadic Kuchi tribe, civil society, refugees from Pakistan and Iran, traders and non-governmental organisations.

Originally scheduled for May 2, the jirga was put back to May 29 due to President Karzai's four-day trip to the United States. It was delayed a second time for logistic reasons, to ensure the participation of all of those invited

Governor asks for large scale operation in Barg-i-Matal

Abdul Moeed Hashmi - Jun 2, 2010 - 18:19

JALALABAD (PAN): The governor of Nuristan province on Wednesday asked for an influx of Afghan and foreign forces to prevent the Taliban retaking the district of Barg-i-Matal.

Taliban militants overran the remote district along the border with Pakistan on May 29. At least two policemen were wounded in the attack that came after days of fierce fighting. On Monday, Afghan and international forces recaptured the district.

But Jamaluddin Badar, the Nuristan governor, told Pajhwok Afghan News he was concerned the

Taliban would be back, bringing reinforcements from Pakistan, across the disputed Durand Line. "If a large-scale, joint offensive is not conducted, the Taliban may increase their fighters from the other side of the Durand Line and recapture the district."

He said he had also asked the Ministry of Defence to recapture the remote Kamdesh district that fell to Taliban fighters a few months back.

Badar said residents of Nuristan had suffered due to the presence of the Taliban.

The insurgents had raided 400 homes in the district, stealing the belongings of residents.

He also said the insurgents blockade of the Kunar-Nuristan Highway over the past two years had created immense travel problems. Residents now had to take a three-hour detour through northeastern Badakhshan province, he said.

"Despite the tribesmen having helped the Afghan government in attacks against the militants, they have received no support in response," he said.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid rejected the governors allegations as baseless. He said officials were trying to turn the people against them.

Badar demanded the government and the international community bring immediate relief to the area.

Barg-i-Matal is an eastern district of Nuristan province, which has long border with Pakistan's Chatral district and officials often complain about the lack of security in the mountainous province.

Taliban fighters seized the district last year, but security personnel pushed them back after three days.

UN Security Council mission to visit Afghanistan

Pajhwok Report - Jun 3, 2010 - 11:02

KABUL (PAN): A delegation of the United Nations Security Council would visit Afghanistan during the current month to evaluate the current situation on the ground, the president of the 15-member body announced on Wednesday.

While the exact focus of the trip was still being discussed, Mexican Ambassador to UN Claude Heller said: "The main proposal will be to have an evaluation of the current situation in political, economic, social terms and also on security matters."

Heller announced no dates for the trip, but UN diplomats indicated it would likely begin around June 19. The mission will be led by Turkey's Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan, whose country has primary responsibility for Afghan matters in the Security Council.

The UN mission in Afghanistan has a mandate to head international civilian efforts to provide aid, promote reconstruction and combat corruption. Last year, the council authorised the mission to strengthen and expand its presence throughout the country to promote good governance and rule of law.

EU, US welcome Peace Jirga's declaration

Musa Zai - Jun 4, 2010 - 19:48

KABUL (PAN): The European Union and the United States have welcomed the conclusions of the three-day Afghan National Consultative Peace Jirga that ended in Kabul on Friday.

The message for peace forwarded from Kabul by the Jirga would be heard and embraced by all people in Afghanistan and across the region, hoped head of the EU Delegation and the EU Special Representative to Afghanistan Vygaudas Uackas.

The ambassador noted that the three day event has been an important step toward stabilisation and peace in Afghanistan. "I look forward to working closely with the Afghan people and their government to support a peace process in Afghanistan," Usackas said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the United States welcomed the discussions held at the Peace Jirga over the last three days. "These discussions are the beginning of a process that we believe can help bring stability to Afghanistan and long-desired peace to its people," the US embassy in Kabul said in a statement on Friday.

The United States again offers its support for an Afghan-led process of reconciliation and reintegration.

"We will support the peace process that seeks to bring back into society those who cease violence, break ties with al-Qaeda and affiliated terrorist groups, and live under the Afghan Constitution, including provisions that protect the rights of all Afghan men and women," the statement said, pledging to continue encouraging and supporting the Afghan governments efforts to foster national dialogue on the most critical issues Afghanistan faces.

Analysts insist on presence of foreign troops

Khwaja Baseer Ahmad - Jun 4, 2010 - 18:53

KABUL (PAN): Foreign troops are needed in Afghanistan and there should be no talk of them withdrawing until Afghan security forces are capable of protecting the country, experts said Friday.

Militants have said they will not engage in any peace talks until all foreign troops have left Afghanistan, but analysts said national forces were unable to control the country alone, and that cooperation with international soldiers was still needed.

Until Afghan soldiers are properly trained and equipped, withdrawal of the 150,000 NATO-led international troops would be a step backwards, a retired officer, Lt. Gen. Baba Jan, said.

The attacks on the peace jirga in Kabul that wrapped up its discussions on Wednesday with a declaration to try to reintegrate the Taliban, showed that Afghan soldiers were unable to secure the country alone, he said.

He said neighbouring countries had nuclear weapons while Afghan soldiers lacked even new weapons. Both India and Pakistan are nuclear states.

He said the withdrawal of foreign soldiers would be more appropriate when there is peace and stability across the entire country.

Over the past three decades, Afghanistan had been the stage for fighting between different countries and different intelligence agencies, so in order to bring peace and stability, those intelligence agencies should be removed, he said. He did not name which intelligence agencies.

Another retired general said the withdrawal of foreign troops would not improve the security situation.

Brig. Gen. Ali Shah Ahmadzai said that since Afghanistan was a safe haven for Al Qaeda, there would still be conflict in Afghanistan after international troops left. He said Afghan soldiers must be trained, equipped and their capabilities increased to maintain security.

At least six of the 28 committees which spent Thursday debating proposals for bringing peace to the war-weary country, insisted on a deadline for the withdrawal of foreign troops, according to the proposals seen by Pajhwok Afghan News.

Zia Bomya, a delegate from Maidan Wardak province, said there was a need for foreign troops, but called on foreigners to respect the sovereignty and constitution of Afghanistan.

Muhammad Afzal Ahmadzai, a delegate from Kabul, said foreigners were needed in the country to work on development issues.

However, he criticised the three-day peace jirga as orchestrated to meet the proposals agreed between President Hamid Karzai and his Western backers.

"It was a pre-planned assembly, organised according to suggestions of President Hamid Karzai's advisers, and no plan of the jirga will be implemented," he said.

The Peace Advisory Jirga begun on Wednesday and ended Friday afternoon. Around 1,400 delegates and nearly 200 foreign and Afghan guests participated.

Social Headlines

Health ministry to receive \$50 million

Zarghona Salehi - May 29, 2010 - 19:16

KABUL (PAN): The World Bank will provide Afghans Ministry of Public Health \$50 million over the next three years, an official said on Saturday.

The money would be spent on providing basic health facilities, welfare for women and children and the opening of Jumhoriyat hospital in Kabul, said Julie McLaughlin, the World Banks head of health, nutrition and population for South Asian countries.

Jumhoriyat hospital was built last year but has not yet started operating.

Despite noticeable achievements in the health sector over the past eight years, Afghanistan still faces various health related problems, McLaughlin said at a press conference with the health minister, Dr Suraya Dalil.

Lack of health centres, high mortality rate both for children and mothers and low quality of health facilities were the main challenges, McLaughlin said.

Dalil thanked the World Bank for its contribution over the years and said that with the banks help, Jumhoriyat hospital would receive state of the art medical equipment.

The World Bank has poured \$150 million into Afghanistans health sector since 2003.

Contracts for 75 kilometres of roads signed

Rahmatullah Afghan - May 29, 2010 - 19:16

KABUL (PAN): Two private companies signed contracts with the Afghan government on Saturday to build 75 kilometres of roads.

The contracts were signed by the acting minister of public works, Sohrab Ali Safri, and German Afghan and Haiwadwal construction companies, a spokesman of the Ministry of Economy, Muhammad Saddique Amarkhel, said.

The Asian Development Bank is providing \$75 million for the two roads; a 50-kilometre stretch linking Jablussiraj district in central Parwan province with Najrab in the neighbouring province of Kapisa, and a 25-kilometre road connecting Bagرامي and Sarobi districts in Kabul province.

German Afghan Company will build the Najrab-Jabalussiraj road over the next three years, while the road between Bagrami and Sarobi would be built by Haiwadwal over two years, Noor Gul Mangal, the deputy public works minister, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

The Bagrami-Sarobi road is the second road along the Jalalabad-Kabul Highway, he said.

5,000 families to benefit from 22 projects in Sar-i-Pul

Zabihullah Ehsas - Jun 2, 2010 - 15:08

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (PAN): Around 5,000 families would benefit from 22 development projects completed under the National Solidarity Program (NSP) in two districts of northern Sari-i-Pul province, an official said on Wednesday.

The projects included 27 wells with water pumps, two water reservoirs, the construction of 18 kilometres of road and 41 small bridges in Gusfandi and Sancharak districts of the province, a spokesman at the NSP regional office, Farid Ahmad Sadaat, said.

The projects, implemented with the help of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), also included 500 metres of supportive walls, two flour mills and a tailor training programme for 19 women, he said.

The projects were completed at a cost of 25.1 million afghanis, Sadaat added.

A resident of Qalacha village in Gusfandi district, Sardar Wali, said the 40 metre supportive wall in their village would keep them safe from destruction caused by flash floods.

According to Sadaat, work on some 1,429 developmental projects had been started in the northern provinces and around 1,355 had been completed.