

# **Business and Politics in the Muslim World**

## **Afghanistan This Week**

Report Number: 123

Week 5-11 June 2010

June 12, 2010

**Mohammad Amin**

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## **Political Headlines Summary**

### ***Karzai orders review of jailed Taliban***

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai has ordered a review of all suspected Taliban fighters imprisoned in Afghan jails and said those held for dubious reasons should be freed, a statement said on Sunday.

### ***Taliban rejects peace jirga declaration***

KABUL (PAN): The Taliban on Sunday rejected the outcome of a three-day peace jirga in the capital, saying it presented no new proposals for peace.

### ***Interior minister, intelligence head resign***

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan's interior minister and the head of the National Directorate of Security have both resigned over attacks that marred the opening day of the peace jirga last week, a presidential statement said on Sunday.

### ***INTERVIEW - Afghan ex-intel chief says opposed Karzai peace plan***

KABUL - The former head of Afghanistan's intelligence service quit after seeing himself as an obstacle to President Hamid Karzai's plan to reach out to insurgents for talks, he said on Monday, a day after his resignation.

### ***Karzai criticised for Atmar, Saleh resignations***

KABUL (PAN): Members of the Wolesi Jirga, or lower house of parliament, on Monday criticised President Hamid Karzai for accepting the resignations of the interior minister and intelligence chief.

### ***US: Sacking of Afghan officials an internal matter***

LONDON – U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates urged Afghan President Hamid Karzai on Monday to replace two top security officials with ministers of "equal caliber," and said the sacking of the pair does not signal trouble in Karzai's government over efforts to seek a peace deal with the Taliban.

### ***Resignations Of Top Afghan Security Officials Have Broad Implications***

Kabul is rife with speculations and rumors one day after two top security resigned from their posts after apparently losing the confidence of Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

### ***Obama's envoy looks to new Afghan security officials***

WASHINGTON (PAN): The US envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke, said he was looking forward to working with the successors of two top Afghan security

officials who stood down last week.

### ***Car bomb kills 40 at wedding in anti-Taliban village***

KANDAHAR CITY (PAN): A suicide bomber detonated his explosive-laden mini-van at a wedding party in southern Kandahar province on Wednesday evening, killing at least 40 people, including children, and wounding 87 others, officials said.

## **Geo-Strategic Headlines Summary**

### ***Afghan policy on track: Obama aide***

WASHINGTON (PAN): America's Afghanistan policy is not about seeking an exit strategy, but building a means by which the country is in control of its own affairs in a much faster timeframe, Obama's top national security aide said.

### ***Karzai leaves for Turkey to participate in CICA***

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai left Kabul on Monday for Istanbul where he was to participate in a conference on security and hold discussions with his Turkish counterpart, his office said.

### ***Joint military offensive begins in Ghazni***

GHAZNI CITY (PAN): An Afghan and international operation to clear Taliban from two districts of southern Ghazni province has begun, an official said on Monday.

### ***Karzai urges greater regional coordination on terrorism***

KABUL (PAN): Afghan President Hamid Karzai on Tuesday called for greater coordination between regional countries in the war on terror, his office said.

### ***Russia calls for crusade on Afghan drugs, U.S. tepid***

MOSCOW — Russia Wednesday rolled out a global initiative to stem Afghan drug trafficking to include a comprehensive crackdown on opium poppy growing, but the United States gave a cool reception to the plan.

***No more troops to Afghanistan: Britain***

KABUL (PAN): British Prime Minister David Cameron on Thursday ruled out sending any more troops to Afghanistan, emphasising the need to bolster Afghan forces to pave the ground for the withdrawal of foreign troops.

***Japan supports peace jirga decisions***

KABUL (PAN): Japan, a major donor to Afghanistan, has backed the outcome of a peace jirga in which delegates agreed to open talks with the Taliban, a statement said on Thursday.

***Karzai heads to Uzbekistan for regional conference***

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai left Afghanistan for neighboring Uzbekistan on Thursday to attend the 10<sup>th</sup> summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

***Cameron pledges 200m pounds over next four years***

LASHKARGAH (PAN): British Prime Minister David Cameron on Thursday said the United Kingdom will provide Afghanistan 200 million pounds over next four years, with a major part of the assistance will be used in southern Helmand province.

***Kandahar operation will take longer than thought: McChrystal***

WASHINGTON (PAN): The top NATO commander in Afghanistan has said the much-talked about US-led military operation to force the Taliban out of their southern stronghold within two months this summer would take longer than initially thought.

***Japan pledges \$422 million for Afghanistan***

KABUL (PAN): Japan will provide \$422 million to Afghanistan over next six months through United Nations agencies, the country's ambassador to Kabul said on Friday.

***SCO vows to help fight drug, terror in Afghanistan***

KABUL (PAN): The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, concerned at the deterioration of security, the increase in terrorism, drug trafficking and transnational organised crime in Afghanistan, on Friday reiterated its support for the UN in playing a mediation role.

## **Social Headlines Summary**

### ***Kabul the most polluted province***

KABUL (PAN): About 3,000 people lose their lives every year in Kabul due to pollution-related diseases, a top health official said.

### ***Christian group denies proselytising***

KABUL (PAN): A US-based Christian aid group suspended in Afghanistan for allegedly proselytising on Monday denied it had been trying to illegally convert Muslims to Christianity.

## **Economic Headlines Summary**

### ***Transit trade agreement with Uzbekistan near***

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan was expected to reach a transit trade deal soon with Uzbekistan that would allow thousands of fuel-carrying trucks stranded at the border into the country, an official said on Sunday.

### ***Islamic banking mulled in Afghanistan***

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan is drawing up a law to regulate Islamic banking in the country, the head of the country's central bank said.

## **Political Headlines**

### ***Karzai orders review of jailed Taliban***

Javed Hamim Kakar - Jun 6, 2010 - 19:08

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai has ordered a review of all suspected Taliban fighters imprisoned in Afghan jails and said those held for dubious reasons should be freed, a statement said on Sunday.

The team investigating the detentions would be led by the justice minister, and include representatives of the Attorney General's Office, the Peace Strengthening Commission, Supreme Court and members of the justice advisory board to the president, a statement from Karzai's office said.

At the end of their investigation, the team must submit a report to the president.

Karzai's order follows a three-day peace jirga which ended on Friday with a 16-point declaration that included a call for militant suspects jailed on fraudulent or insufficient evidence to be freed.

"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 Qayyamuiddin Kashaf said, while reading out the declaration on Friday.

Karzai's order only refers to Afghans held in state prisons, not in US custody.

A statement issued by office of the president's spokesman said the review was the first step towards the execution of the declaration of the jirga, in which nearly 1,600 delegates and foreign guests participated.

### ***Taliban rejects peace jirga declaration***

Javed Hamim Kakar - Jun 6, 2010 - 16:14

KABUL (PAN): The Taliban on Sunday rejected the outcome of a three-day peace jirga in the capital, saying it presented no new proposals for peace.

More than 1,400 delegates participated in the jirga, representing different provinces, ethnicities, tribes and politics. On Friday they released a 16-article declaration calling for a ceasefire, a national strategy for peace, the removal of some Taliban from UN and US black lists and Taliban detained on insufficient evidence to be freed.

The Taliban said councils and jirgas were credible ways of resolving conflict among Afghans.

But there had been no achievement at the peace jirga, except for increasing the problems of the country and paving the way for the occupation by foreign troops, said Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid.

"There was nothing in the declaration that could be considered a solution to the problems," he said.

Unfortunately, the jirga did not mention withdrawing foreign troops from Afghanistan, but instead demanded they stay in the country for a long time, he said.

"We think it is a historical disloyalty to the freedom of the people and the religious and national interests of Afghanistan," he said.



Responding to a question about the removal of the names of some Taliban from black lists and the freeing of inmates from jails, Mujahid said they had already raised those issues over the past few years.

He criticised the tribal gathering as "symbolic" and said it was intended to seek favour with foreigners and cheat the Afghan people.

Another armed militant group, Hezb-i-Islami of Afghanistan led by Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, had rejected the jirga's declaration on Saturday.

The political opposition had also described the jirga as purely symbolic, even before it began.

### ***Interior minister, intelligence head resign***

Mohammad Wais Khetab - Jun 6, 2010 - 21:47

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan's interior minister and the head of the National Directorate of Security have both resigned over attacks that marred the opening day of the peace jirga last week, a presidential statement said on Sunday.

Interior Minister Mohammed Hanif Atmar and the head of the intelligence agency, Amrullah Saleh, offered to resign after they failed to prevent the violence on Wednesday, a statement from presidential palace said. Afghan president Hamid Karzai had accepted their resignations, it said

On the first day of the three-day peace jirga, three rockets were fired at the venue, a large marquee on the grounds of the Polytechnic University, disrupting Karzai's speech.

Three suicide bombers also tried to blow themselves up, but two were killed and one arrested.

There were no serious casualties, although the rockets injured one of Karzai's bodyguards.

The president had summoned the two officials on Wednesday to explain how the attacks happened, and when they did not have an answer, offered to resign, it said.

However, the statement did not mention when the officials presented their resignations.

The current deputy interior minister for security affairs, Munir Mangal, will become acting interior minister while Ibrahim Spinzada, a current member of the National Security Council, will act as head of the NDS, it said.

Mohammad Hanif Atmar was one of the most successful ministers of Karzai's government. He also served as minister of rural, rehabilitation and development and education ministries.

### ***INTERVIEW - Afghan ex-intel chief says opposed Karzai peace plan***

Reuters

06/07/2010

By Jonathon Burch, Hamid Shalizi

- \* Ex-intel chief saw self as obstacle to Taliban talks
- \* Says Karzai wanted to blame security lapse on police
- \* Accuses Pakistan of orchestrating Afghan attacks

KABUL - The former head of Afghanistan's intelligence service quit after seeing himself as an obstacle to President Hamid Karzai's plan to reach out to insurgents for talks, he said on Monday, a day after his resignation.

Amrullah Saleh — for six years a key figure in the anti-Taliban fight as head of the National Directorate for Security — said Karzai had already lost faith in his security forces before an attack on a peace conference last week.

Saleh resigned on Monday along with Hanif Atmar, who controlled the police as interior minister. Karzai's office said the two top security officials had quit because of lapses that led to an insurgent attack on last week's peace meeting.

In an interview at his home in the Afghan capital, Saleh described plans to negotiate with insurgents as a "disgrace", and said one of the main reasons he had quit was because Karzai had ordered a review of Taliban prisoners in detention.

He denied being forced out, saying he had contemplated quitting for a "very long time". Last week's attack on the peace "jirga" or tribal council meeting, was just the last straw.

"A number of reasons had accumulated and it needed a tipping point and the jirga was the tipping point," he said.

He also spoke out strongly about what he called Pakistani involvement in attacks in Afghanistan, describing Pakistani intelligence as "part of the landscape of destruction".

Insurgents fired at least four rockets at a giant tent holding the traditional jirga of 1,600 Afghan notables and elders last Wednesday, and then launched a commando raid involving three insurgents wearing suicide vests.

While there were no casualties apart from the attackers -- two were shot dead and one captured -- the incident was embarrassing for Karzai, who had called the jirga to discuss his proposals to make peace overtures to the Taliban.

Karzai summoned Saleh and Atmar to his palace in Kabul on Sunday to explain how the attack was able to take place despite a massive security blanket thrown over the capital. His office said both men had resigned on the spot when the president had not been satisfied with their accounts.

Saleh said that during the palace meeting Karzai tried to get him to pin blame for the lapse onto Atmar and the police.

"Our intent was to make the jirga peaceful. There was a breach and I don't want to blame my police comrades for the breach," he said. "So when there was an effort to have me put the blame on the police, I said no."

"The president of Afghanistan has lost trust in the capability of Afghan national security

forces. He thinks these forces are not able to protect him or the country," he added.

## OBSTRUCTION

Saleh is well liked by the West and was seen as a close ally of Karzai. Nevertheless, as an ethnic Tajik and prominent member of the guerrilla movement which fought the Taliban during the 1990s, he was seen as an obstruction to Karzai's plans to negotiate with the mainly ethnic-Pashtun insurgents.

At last week's peace jirga, elders and religious leaders agreed to support Karzai's plan to reach out to the insurgents to try to bring an end to nearly nine years of fighting.

In his first act since then, Karzai ordered a review of all insurgent prisoners in Afghan jails, a move Saleh said was a main reason for him quitting. Asked if he agreed that he had become an obstacle to Karzai's plan, Saleh said: "Absolutely".

"Negotiating with ... suicide bombers will disgrace this country," he added. He denied he was forced to resign, however.

"No. My conscious force made me to resign. When the moment came and I saw that there is a stain in that relationship (between him and Karzai), the morality of my profession pushed me to resign," he said.

During his tenure as intelligence chief, Saleh was known to accuse Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency of attacks on Afghan soil, a claim he made explicit in Monday's interview.

"It is no longer an issue whether ISI or not ISI. ISI is part of the landscape of destruction in this country, no doubt, so it will be a waste of time to provide evidence of ISI involvement. They are a part of it," he said.

Saleh said the Punjab-based Lashkar-e Taiba militant group responsible for the attacks in Mumbai, had also been behind several attacks on Indian targets in Kabul.

"Absolutely. We had the evidence. I'm no longer the chief, we had concrete evidence. And those who know Lashkar-e Taiba know it's a child of ISI," he said.

For its part, Pakistan has complained of links between the NDS under Saleh and its arch-foe India, which India denies.

### ***Karzai criticised for Atmar, Saleh resignations***

Abaseen Zaheer - Jun 7, 2010 - 20:18

KABUL (PAN): Members of the Wolesi Jirga, or lower house of parliament, on Monday criticised President Hamid Karzai for accepting the resignations of the interior minister and intelligence chief.

Interior Minister Muhammad Hanif Atmar and the National Directorate of Security chief, Amrullah Saleh, both resigned on Sunday, citing their failure to guarantee security at the peace jirga in Kabul last week.

On the first day of the assembly, three rockets were fired at the venue, a large marquee on the grounds of the Polytechnic University, disrupting Karzai's speech.

Three suicide bombers also tried to blow themselves up, but two were killed and one arrested.

There were no serious casualties, although the rockets injured one of Karzai's bodyguards Attaullah Ludin, a member of the Wolesi Jirga from Nangarhar, said many people were unhappy that Karzai had accepted the resignations of the two officials. He said Atmar and Saleh had been efficient and useful members of the government.

Shukria Barakzai, a member of the jirga from Kabul, said she thought foreign countries were involved and had forced Karzai to fire the two men. She did not say which country she thought was involved.

I don't know why the president accepted their resignations, she said.

Ahmad Behzad, an MP from Herat, also criticized the resignations saying he believed other influential forces wanted to get rid of the two officials.

Azeeta Riffat, a member of the jirga from Badghis province, said the removal of the most senior officials involved in securing the country would exacerbate the problem, not solve it. She said the two were forced to resign.

### ***US: Sacking of Afghan officials an internal matter***

The Associated Press

06/07/2010

LONDON – U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates urged Afghan President Hamid Karzai on Monday to replace two top security officials with ministers of "equal caliber," and said the sacking of the pair does not signal trouble in Karzai's government over efforts to seek a peace deal with the Taliban.

Gates stepped gingerly in answering questions about the significance of the abrupt resignations Sunday of the two men whom U.S. officials had often singled out by name as examples of competent leadership in a government riven by corruption and patronage.

"It's obviously an internal matter for the Afghans," Gates said.

He spoke to reporters in London, where the stepped-up military campaign in southern Afghanistan will be a major topic of talks with the new British government.

A Downing Street spokesman said Gates and Prime Minister David Cameron discussed the outcome of Karzai's peace conference, or jirga, last week. Karzai said the resignations of the intelligence and interior ministers followed a Taliban attack on the conference last week.

"The prime minister reiterated U.K. support for U.S. strategy," in Afghanistan, including the gradual transfer of security responsibility to the Afghan government and armed forces, the spokesman said.

The 8-year war is increasingly unpopular in Britain, and the new government is considered less invested in the conflict than the Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Britain has more than 9,000 soldiers in Afghanistan, most of them in volatile Helmand Province.

President Barack Obama and other U.S. officials have said they are not concerned that Britain's commitment will change. Gates said that based on conversations with the new defense chief, "I've had the sense the new British government is quite resolute with respect to Afghanistan."

The peace session laid groundwork for eventual settlement talks with the Taliban.

"There were some bombings associated with the peace jirga and maybe there was a need for accountability in that respect," Gates said.

Security officials have rarely faced punishment or resigned over previous major attacks, but Gates was being careful to suggest that Karzai, not the United States, calls the shots in matters of the Afghan government.

Also Monday, Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. special envoy to Pakistan and Afghanistan, said the U.S. held the two dismissed officials in high regard, but "we will work closely with whomever succeeds them." Holbrooke spoke in Spain.

### ***Resignations Of Top Afghan Security Officials Have Broad Implications***

RFE/RL  
06/08/2010

Kabul is rife with speculations and rumors one day after two top security resigned from their posts after apparently losing the confidence of Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Afghan intelligence chief Amrullah Salih and Interior Minister Mohammad Hanif Atmar resigned on June 6 after a three-hour meeting with Karzai. The move deprives the Karzai administration of capable managers familiar with Afghanistan's complicated security affairs at a time when the insurgency appears to be strengthening.

Speaking to RFE/RL, lawmaker Kabir Ranjbar cast doubt on international media reports that the two resigned because of key differences with Karzai over his peace overtures to the Taliban and other insurgent groups.

Ranjbar says their resignations could be linked to pressure from Pakistan and Iran, which he suggests were unhappy with the public pronouncements of Salih and Atmar. The two

often publically accused Islamabad and Tehran of interfering in Afghan affairs by supporting insurgent networks.

Ranjbar participated in the peace jirga last week, an event that some have said triggered the officials' resignations after it was targeted by rocket fire and suicide bombing attacks. He praised the performance of Afghan security forces in the aftermath of the attacks, noting that in the end two potential suicide bombers were killed and that another was arrested. At least three other similar attacks were prevented, he claims, with the arrest of planners and their associates.

'Among The Best Managers'

Now, Ranjbar predicts, the Karzai cabinet will struggle to repeat such a performance without two key members.

"It is a fact that they were among the best managers in the [Karzai] administration," Ranjbar says. "We are lacking 13 ministers in the cabinet now and the president says he cannot find suitable candidates for these posts. So this will have negative consequences. It will also have negative implications for our police force and national intelligence officials [who will be demoralized]."

Delegates listen to a speech by Afghan President Hamid Karzai on the concluding day of the three-day peace jirga in Kabul on June 4.

Thomas Ruttig, a former UN and European diplomat and the director of the Afghanistan Analysts Network, tells RFE/RL that the resignation of key Afghan officials with close ties to Western donors suggest that Karzai is reasserting his independence.

"[Karzai] is probably tired about being told who to keep as a minister and who not to keep as a minister, which has happened quite often," Ruttig says. "On the other hand, Karzai showing independence from his donors does not necessarily mean that it is for the good of Afghanistan when the result is only strengthening his own patronage networks and relations. Still, we are waiting for criteria about why ministers are appointed and sacked."

Sensitive Peace Negotiations

Sensitive Saleh, in his late 30s, has been director of Afghanistan's premier intelligence agency, the National Security Directorate, since 2004. He was a close associate of the anti-Taliban Afghan leader Ahmad Shah Massud and served as his liaison with the CIA in the late 1990s.

Afghan observers suggest that Saleh's past association with anti-Taliban factions made it difficult for the Taliban to trust him in sensitive peace negotiations. In his opening speech to the peace jirga, Karzai noted that many Taliban were pushed into fighting by the past excesses of Afghan security forces who harassed them even after they had dropped their

weapons after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001.

Atmar, a British-educated former aid worker, served as Karazi's development and education minister before being appointed interior minister in October 2008. Seen as a tough reformer, Atmar brought discipline to the rank-and-file of the fledgling Afghan bureaucracy. Western officials see his removal as a setback to their plans to train Afghan police -- a main objective of the ongoing U.S. troop surge.

Munir Mangal, the interim interior minister  
Karzai has temporarily appointed General Munir Mangal and Ibrahim Spinzada as interior minister and intelligence chief. Both were deputies to Atmar and Salih.

'Not A Good Start'

Speaking to RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan, Kabul University Professor Najib Mahmud emphasized that sacking key security officials will not resolve Afghanistan's complex security challenges.

"In my opinion, this will not be a good start [for seriously reforming the security institutions] because both the men who stepped down tried hard to get acquainted with the current security situation in the country. They went after terrorist groups and networks," Mahmud says. "It will take time for the new people to get acquainted with the situation."

In their press conferences on June 6, both Atmar and Salih said that they were voluntarily resigning after losing the trust of the president.

"[The] president of Afghanistan has lost trust in our capability to protect national events," Salih told journalists. Without elaborating, he said that there were "tens of other reasons" for his resignation.

But their resignations have so far given little reason to Afghans and the international community to expect improved security. Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell said that Washington favored Atmar as the interior minister. "Both the ministers of interior and intelligence are people we admire and whose services we appreciate," he said.

In a statement, Stanley McChrystal, the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, expressed confidence in Karzai's "ability to appoint credible replacements to lead these critical organizations."

### ***Obama's envoy looks to new Afghan security officials***

Lalit K Jha - Jun 9, 2010 - 16:26

WASHINGTON (PAN): The US envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke, said he was looking forward to working with the successors of two top Afghan security officials who stood down last week.

The Afghan interior minister, Muhammad Hanif Atmar, and the head of intelligence, Amrullah Saleh, resigned from their positions last week to after President Hamid Karzai found their justification for a security lapse during the peace jirga unconvincing. "I'm not going to reach any personal judgment on that kind of thing. It's an internal matter," Holbrooke told the popular National Public Radio in an interview on Tuesday. "Both Interior Minister Atmar and Intelligence Chief Saleh are people I've worked with closely, as have many of my colleagues in the US government. But people come and go."

The Taliban fired multiple rockets at the venue of the peace jirga while Karzai was delivering his keynote speech, calling on the Taliban to renounce violence. None of the rockets hit the marquee, where the 1,600 delegates had gathered from across the country. The ex-intel chief told Reuters news agency that he chose to resign rather than blame police for the attack which was what Karzai had asked him to do.

"Nobody is indispensable and we look forward to working with their successors," Holbrooke said when asked about the resignation of the two ministers. Afghanistan had plenty of strong candidates to replace them, he said.

Holbrooke is currently in Madrid to attend the meeting of the special representatives to Afghanistan and Pakistan from various countries. He said he was struck by the "degree of commitment" made by the international community, including some Islamic states such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

"None of them were concerned about the departure of the two ministers. They felt that was the kind of thing that happens," he said.

In response to a question on reconciliation and reintegration, Holbrooke said anyone associated with Al Qaeda is outside the negotiating table. "They must disassociate and repudiate Al Qaeda," he said. There is no negotiation with Al Qaeda possible nor with anyone who is part of their support network or continues to support them," he added.

### ***Car bomb kills 40 at wedding in anti-Taliban village***

Bashir Ahmad Naadem - Jun 10, 2010 - 18:53

KANDAHAR CITY (PAN): A suicide bomber detonated his explosive-laden mini-van at a wedding party in southern Kandahar province on Wednesday evening, killing at least 40 people, including children, and wounding 87 others, officials said.

The deadly incident occurred in the Arghandab district, 15 kilometres north of the provincial capital, Kandahar city, where up to a thousand people had gathered to celebrate a wedding, the Kandahar governor, Torkyalay Weesa, told reporters on Thursday.

Officials said that the village was vehemently against the Taliban, which was why it was attacked.

President Hamid Karzai strongly condemned the blast saying it contravened Islamic values.

"This is against our religion to attack a ceremony where people are celebrating their happiness."

He has ordered an investigation and urged Kandahar officials to bring the perpetrators to justice.

The Taliban have denied any involvement in the attack, saying the ceremony was bombed by jet fighters of foreign troops.



"It was a suicide attack," insisted the Kandahar governor, who showed ball bearings which he said had been taken out of dead bodies, an item widely used in homemade explosives in order to maximise casualties.

The groom, whose father is a government employee, was one of the 87 wounded, Weesa said.

The village was attacked because it did not support the Taliban and ran its own semi-official militia, the governor's spokesman, Zalmay Ayubi, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

"They are peaceful people who do not believe in the violence of the Taliban."

Ayubi said the Taliban were also unhappy as the village received money via several foreign-funded, government implemented aid projects, including a cash-for-work programme in which villagers were paid to work on agriculture or construction projects.

"They had received many night letters warning them to cut their contacts with the government and the foreigners," Ayubi said. "This was the number one reason for the attack."

The attack comes as NATO forces are rethinking their strategy on clearing militants from Kandahar province, a Taliban spiritual stronghold. Earlier, they had announced plans for a major military push sometime in June, although that now seems to be on hold.

"I was in the hospital until 2am to manage the medical teams in order to make sure the patients get immediate treatment," Weesa said. "I thank the residents of Kandahar city and our security personnel who donated blood to the wounded."

An eyewitness, Rahmatullah, said he saw a fire inside the mini-van moments ahead of the explosion. He said he was the only survivor among a small gathering in a corner of the party.

"I was unconscious and when I woke up, I saw body parts around me," he said. "It was a terribly powerful explosion."

NATO has condemned the attack, calling it an "indiscriminate" act of violence.

This ruthless violence brought to the Afghan people at what should have been a time for celebration demonstrates the Taliban's sickening and indiscriminate tactics to try to intimidate the citizens of Afghanistan, said Lt. Gen. Nick Parker, deputy commander of the NATO-led forces in Afghanistan.

The blast was also widely condemned by the international community and UN organisations in Afghanistan. Both the US and Canadian embassies expressed grief for villagers who had lost their loved ones and criticised the attack as against the norms of war.

## **Geo-Strategic Headlines**

### ***Afghan policy on track: Obama aide***

Lalit K Jha - Jun 6, 2010 - 16:16

WASHINGTON (PAN): America's Afghanistan policy is not about seeking an exit strategy, but building a means by which the country is in control of its own affairs in a much faster timeframe, Obama's top national security aide said.

We are not looking for ways out of Afghanistan. We are looking for means by which Afghans can take charge of their own destiny perhaps in a shorter time frame and not so that we can leave, but so we can move on and bring the relationship to a different phase, National Security Advisor James Jones told Pajhwok Afghan News.

Barack Obama, the US president, announced his Afghan policy six months ago, including an extra 30,000 American troops to reverse the momentum of the Taliban. That would lead to the start of a withdrawal in July 2011. Jones said that policy strategy was "on track".

"There are lots of things happening simultaneously, Jones said.

"We have security operations that are cohesively going on with economic development and better governance and rule and law in areas of the country where there has been nothing to show for several years. We have a recommitted and dedicated international security force.

There was also a lot more confidence in what the government of President Hamid Karzai was doing with regard to good governance and anti-corruption efforts following the Afghan leader's four day trip to Washington last month, Jones said.

"Its clear that the cabinet of President Karzai is diverse and varied and effective and doing more than has been done in my seven years of observation, Jones said.

"We had very successful meeting here in Washington, which I think, motivated and encouraged everyone. So I think that its moving in the right direction," he said.

But there are lots of moving parts to it and they are moving simultaneously and that includes our efforts in Pakistan also to make it more difficult for terrorists and insurgents that operate in Afghanistan, he said.

Last week, Jones met visiting Indian Foreign Minister, S M Krishna, and Afghanistan was one of the major topics of discussion. He appreciated Indias roe in development of Afghanistan.

I think that the current economic development effort (by India) is really appropriate and more than enough. I think that if we can get the economic piece going to show the Afghans that there is possibility of better life under this type of government, under President Karzais government, then I think the rest of the things will be much easier. And I think the role that India plays in that context is very important, he said.

### ***Karzai leaves for Turkey to participate in CICA***

Khalil Ahmad Fitri - Jun 7, 2010 - 18:36

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai left Kabul on Monday for Istanbul where he was to participate in a conference on security and hold discussions with his Turkish counterpart, his office said.

Karzai was to address delegates at the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, initiated by Kazak President Nursultan Nazarbayev in 1992. The CICA -- which comprises 20 member nations including Afghanistan, Iran, Russia, China, South Korea and Turkey -- would discuss security in the region.

Karzai would also hold meetings with Turkish President Abdullah Gul, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and leaders of the participant countries, the statement said.

Karzai is accompanied by Foreign Minister Dr. Zalmay Rasoul and national security adviser to the president, Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta.

The meeting in Istanbul is the third such summit. The first was in 2002 and the second in 2006, with ministerial-level meetings taking place in the interim.

### ***Joint military offensive begins in Ghazni***

Mirwais Himmat - Jun 7, 2010 - 17:41

GHAZNI CITY (PAN): An Afghan and international operation to clear Taliban from two districts of southern Ghazni province has begun, an official said on Monday.

The joint operation, codenamed Thunder Dabara (the thunder stone), would last 20 days and involve members of the Afghan National Army (ANA), coalition troops, national police and intelligence operatives, said Brig. Gen. Rajab Ali Rashid, commander of the 203 Thunder Military Corp.

It would cover the districts of Zanakhan and Deh Yak, about 20 to 23 kilometres east of the provincial capital, which had recently become precarious due to insecurity.

ISAF aircraft would also be called in if needed, Rashid said, adding that the operation could also extend to the neighbouring districts.

A similar offensive was also ongoing in Zurmat district of neighbouring Paktia, Rashid said.

A provincial council member urged soldiers to take care of civilians.

### ***Karzai urges greater regional coordination on terrorism***

Syed Abbas Sadat - Jun 8, 2010 - 14:23

KABUL (PAN): Afghan President Hamid Karzai on Tuesday called for greater coordination between regional countries in the war on terror, his office said.

Addressing the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in Istanbul, Karzai said: "Terrorism is our common enemy who knows no border or nation."

"Terrorists have killed people from Moscow to New York, Istanbul to Mumbai and from Kabul to Islamabad," Karzai said, according to a statement from the presidential palace in Kabul.

The Afghan leader said terrorists wanted to reach their targets by infusing fear among millions of people.

Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan,

Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Palestinian Territories, South Korea, Russia, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan are members of the conference.

In his address, Karzai called upon the member states to strengthen their efforts and coordination to deal with the scourge in a better way.

He emphasised the need for a greater role on the part of Islamic countries in bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan. He thanked Abdullah bin Aziz Al Saud, the King of Saudi Arabia, for his efforts, adding that he hoped the king would continue to play such a role until a lasting peace was restored in Afghanistan.

Karzai also praised Turkey's role in building an atmosphere of confidence between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

He stressed the need for continued efforts at bringing the neighbours closer.

Karzai said Afghanistan could be a bridge between central and South Asia and the Middle East, citing the example of the extension of a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

### ***Russia calls for crusade on Afghan drugs, U.S. tepid***

Reuters

06/09/2010

By Alexei Anishchuk

MOSCOW — Russia Wednesday rolled out a global initiative to stem Afghan drug trafficking to include a comprehensive crackdown on opium poppy growing, but the United States gave a cool reception to the plan.

Russia, the world's largest per capita heroin consumer with an estimated 30,000 people dying of abuse annually, has tried to take the lead to combat a flow of drugs from Afghanistan.

Moscow believes U.S.-led NATO forces fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan are reluctant to uproot local drug output, which has surged after their invasion in 2001 and now accounts for 90 percent of all heroin produced globally.

The U.S. said eradicating poppy plantations would push disgruntled Afghan farmers into the hands of insurgents.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said the world community must work out a joint approach to combat Afghan drugs.

"We see drug addiction as a significant, the most severe threat to the development of our country, to the health of our people," Medvedev told a forum on Afghan drug production.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called for a binding United Nations resolution on Afghan drugs.

"We are confident there is a need for the U.N. Security Council to call the Afghan drug

threat as a threat to international peace and security," he said.

Russia's anti-drugs czar, Viktor Ivanov, said the adoption of such a resolution by the U.N. would create a legal basis for an international fight against Afghan drugs.

The plan drafted by Moscow envisages eradication of no less than 25 percent all those areas growing opium poppies, from which heroin is derived, up from last year's 3 percent.

Moscow also wants the destruction of poppy fields to form part of the remit of NATO forces operating in Afghanistan.

"We should act at least as decisively fighting drug production in Afghanistan as it is done when fighting cocaine production in South America," Lavrov said, referring to the effort the U.S. puts into combating the cocaine trade.

#### U.S. COOL TO PLAN, NATO TRANSIT TO CONTINUE

Patrick Ward, acting deputy director for supply reduction at the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, warned the forum of the dangers of pushing poor peasant farmers into the hands of the militants.

"This will further undermine the rule of law and reinforce the nexus between drugs and terrorism," he said.

In March NATO rejected Russian calls for it to eradicate opium poppy fields in Afghanistan, saying it cannot be in a situation where it removes "the only source of income of people who live in the second poorest country of the world."

The Russia plan envisages job creation schemes.

NATO and Afghan forces conducted 56 anti-drug operations in the first three months of 2010, which led to the destruction of 16.3 metric tons of opium, Ward said.

Seventy metric tons of heroin worth \$13 billion is consumed in Russia every year, according to U.N. estimates.

Any rift between Moscow and Washington over the drugs issue would not affect the transits of cargo for NATO troops in Afghanistan via Russia, Moscow's envoy to NATO Dmitry Rogozin said on the sidelines of the forum.

"We're interested in the transit ourselves, so that the coalition acts without disruptions," he said. "We're not going to shoot ourselves in the foot merely to spite them."

#### ***No more troops to Afghanistan: Britain***

Frozan Rahmani - Jun 10, 2010 - 17:45

KABUL (PAN): British Prime Minister David Cameron on Thursday ruled out sending any more troops to Afghanistan, emphasising the need to bolster Afghan forces to pave the ground for the withdrawal of foreign troops.

Speaking at a joint press conference with his Afghan counterpart, President Hamid Karzai, in Kabul, the new British leader called the next two years critical for Afghanistan to take the lead.

"The issue of UK troops is not remotely on the agenda," Cameron said during his surprise trip to Afghanistan and his first official trip abroad since he took office last month. He had visited Afghanistan a couple of times as the head of the British opposition party. More than 9,500 British troops are stationed in Afghanistan, with most of them in southern Helmand province. The UK contributes the most troops to the US-led NATO mission after the United States .

The US has said it wants to start withdrawing troops from 2011.

Karzai thanked the British government for its long-term commitment to his government. Kabul, London and Washington, Karzai said, have a common strategy to fight terrorism in Afghanistan.

Cameron said Afghanistan was his number one priority. He supported Karzai's peace initiative, saying the Afghan war was not winnable through the force alone, but a political solution was as crucial.

In a long-awaited political move, the Afghan government held a peace jirga last week during which some 1,600 delegates agreed to open talks with the Taliban. However, the militants responded by launching rocket attacks on the venue of the gathering.

Karzai blamed his minister of interior and the spy chief for failing to curb the assault which he described as "unacceptable". Interior minister Muhammad Hanif Atmar and the intelligence chief, Amrullah Saleh, both stood down last weekend, accusing Karzai of losing trust in his security services.

In his first conference after the resignation of his two key cabinet members, Karzai said the officials can contribute to their country in a different way, but not through his administration.

The Afghan president said their successors would be announced soon, however, he declined to set a deadline.

Cameron, meanwhile, announced a 67 million (\$97.4 million) package to be spent on countering improvised explosives devices, the biggest killer of foreign and Afghan troops

### ***Japan supports peace jirga decisions***

Abdul Qadeer Siddiqui - Jun 10, 2010 - 13:24

KABUL (PAN): Japan, a major donor to Afghanistan, has backed the outcome of a peace jirga in which delegates agreed to open talks with the Taliban, a statement said on Thursday.

Japan considers the traditional assembly a "positive step towards peace, stability and reconstruction" in the war-torn country, a statement from Japan to the foreign ministry said.

Japan also reiterated its commitment towards reconstruction in the country and said it would continue its assistance.

In 2009, Japan pledged \$5 billion in non-military aid to Afghanistan over five years.

"Japan fully supports the Afghan government measures for ensuring lasting peace in the country," the statement said.

The jirga was marred on its first day when three rockets were fired towards the venue, injuring at least one of President Hamid Karzai's bodyguards.

Three suicide bombers also attempted to sabotage the event but two of them were killed by security forces and the other blew himself up. There were no casualties except for the attacker.

### ***Karzai heads to Uzbekistan for regional conference***

Pajhwok Report - Jun 10, 2010 - 12:11

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai left Afghanistan for neighboring Uzbekistan on Thursday to attend the 10<sup>th</sup> summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The president was to address leaders at the summit in the Uzbek capital, Tashkent, on Friday, a statement from his office said.

The statement said the president would emphasise the need for greater cooperation in economic development and in the fight against terror.

Karzai is accompanied by foreign minister, Dr Zalmay Rasool, presidential adviser for national security, Rangin Dadfar Spanta and presidential spokesman, Waheed Omar.

The president is also expected to meet presidents of several SCO member states on the sideline of the summit and would talk about strengthening cooperation among regional countries.

The SCO was founded in 2001 in [Shanghai](#) by the leaders of [China](#), [Kazakhstan](#), [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Russia](#), [Tajikistan](#), and [Uzbekistan](#) for enhancing security cooperation in the Central Asia region.

### ***Cameron pledges 200m pounds over next four years***

Zainullah Stanikzai - Jun 10, 2010 - 20:37

LASHKARGAH (PAN): British Prime Minister David Cameron on Thursday said the United Kingdom will provide Afghanistan 200 million pounds over next four years, with a major part of the assistance will be used in southern Helmand province.

As his first official trip abroad since he took office last month, Cameron arrived on a surprise visit to Kabul on Thursday.

In Kabul, the British leader addressed a joint press conference with President Hamid Karzai. He ruled out sending more troops to Afghanistan and emphasised the need to bolster Afghan forces to pave the ground for the withdrawal of foreign troops.

Arriving in Lashkargah, Cameron was received by governor Gulab Mangal and commanders of British troops stationed in the province.

He held meetings with provincial officials including the governor Gulab Mangal and British troops.

Talking to reporters after his meeting with Mangal, Cameron said his country wanted to provide best training to Afghan police to enable them to take the responsibly of security. He said his visit to the province was aimed at assessing the security situation in Helmand and discussing agriculture projects with the governor.

"Our troops are based in Helmand, where we should work more," he said.

The governor said the British prime minister assured him assistance in the areas of agriculture, security, good governance and equipping and training the Afghan forces.

### ***Kandahar operation will take longer than thought: McChrystal***

Lalit K Jha - Jun 11, 2010 - 12:10

WASHINGTON (PAN): The top NATO commander in Afghanistan has said the much-talked about US-led military operation to force the Taliban out of their southern stronghold within two months this summer would take longer than initially thought. Speaking to Pentagon journalists from Brussels via a video link up, Gen. Stanley McChrystal said a year ago there were about 7,300 forces in Kandahar City and its environs. By August of this year, there will be about 20,300, most of them Americans. Initially, the joint Afghan and NATO push into Kandahar was expected to have started sometime in June with the area to be cleared of militants before the start of the holy month of Ramadan, in mid-August. But McChrystal said that would now happen at a much slower pace.

"We haven't changed the focus of what we intend to produce around Kandahar, nor have we changed the basic force structure. What we do is we continue to modify it. I do think that it will happen more slowly than we had originally anticipated," McChrystal said. The top general also acknowledged that public support was lacking and that Hamid Karzai, the Afghan president, was expected to meet with elders and civilians in Kandahar to discuss the strategy with them.

"The president of Afghanistan is going to conduct another in a series of shuras in Kandahar in the next few days. I'll be there with him. And he'll be focusing on all things to improve in Kandahar -- security, governance, reducing corruption, increasing capacity of Afghan governance there and development," he said.

Gaining support has proved hard in the wake of Taliban attacks on Kandahar City and villages in the province. At least a dozen government officials have been assassinated, as well as religious leaders and tribal elders seen to be cooperating with the government and foreign forces in the province. On Wednesday night, a Taliban suicide bomber detonated his explosives-laden van at a wedding party in a village that was reportedly anti-Taliban, killing between 40-60 people and injuring nearly 100.

The White House believes gaining public support and moving forward slowly is crucial to ensuring long-term success in Kandahar and Afghanistan, press secretary, Robert Gibbs said on Thursday.

"Kandahar is an important region given its importance to the Taliban," he said, but added that was a process, by which US military leaders along with NATO allies are working to secure cooperation from and understanding from local populations on how best to move forward.

Ultimately, it is about handing the area back to the Afghan government and the Afghan people to control, he said.

### ***Japan pledges \$422 million for Afghanistan***

Abasin Zaheer - Jun 11, 2010 - 17:17



KABUL (PAN): Japan will provide \$422 million to Afghanistan over next six months through United Nations agencies, the country's ambassador to Kabul said on Friday. Shigioki Hiroki said the amount would be used in the areas of security, the National Solidarity Programme, health, education, parliamentary elections and good governance. He said the Japanese assistance would be channeled through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) over the next six months.

Hiroki said the amount was part of the Japan's pledge last year of US\$5 billion in assistance to Afghanistan over five years.

Speaking at the same press conference, the UNICEF representative to Afghanistan, Peter Crowley, praised the Japanese government for its assistance, saying Japan had made a contribution to UNICEF for several years.

He said Japan had pledged \$26.5 million in assistance to the children's organisation this year which would be used for vaccinations and primary education.

Japan had spent nearly \$ 1 billion on reconstruction in Afghanistan since 2002.

### ***SCO vows to help fight drug, terror in Afghanistan***

Khawaja Basir Ahmad - Jun 11, 2010 - 10:33

KABUL (PAN): The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, concerned at the deterioration of security, the increase in terrorism, drug trafficking and transnational organised crime in Afghanistan, on Friday reiterated its support for the UN in playing a mediation role. The 10th annual summit of the SCO that concluded Friday in the Uzbek capital, Tashkent, was attended by heads of the six member states, including China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, as well as presidents of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The participants discussed key regional and global issues.

In its declaration, the summit agreed that peace and stability in Afghanistan was conducive to the region's continued social and economic development.

"The SCO member states believed 'military means alone' cannot solve the country's problems," the declaration said.

The SCO called on the international community to intensify the fight against all sections of drug production and circulation in Afghanistan. The declaration added the member states would like to coordinate with other international and regional institutions on the drug issue. It called on the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to cooperate with SCO members in combating the drugs trade.

The declaration said the organisation supports its member states in working with international institutions and other parties to take part in the economic reconstruction programmes in Afghanistan.

Addressing the summit, Afghan President Hamid Karzai said the ongoing conflict in his country and the issue of drug smuggling could not be resolved without sincere cooperation from neighbouring countries.

He urged Afghanistan's neighbours to help his government stop the import of chemicals being used in processing drugs.

Karzai warned its neighbours that if they did not cooperate in fighting drugs and terrorism in his country, the entire region would soon be gripped by the two menaces. The president also urged the SCO member states to join hands against drug trafficking and terrorism in his country.

Karzai also met his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, at the summit and briefed him on the outcome of the peace advisory jirga in which delegates agreed to open talks with the Taliban and other militants, the presidential palace said in a statement.

The Russian president assured Karzai of his country's continued support for efforts to bring peace and security to Afghanistan, the statement said.

## **Social Headlines**

### ***Kabul the most polluted province***

Zarghona Salehi & Abdul Moeed Hashmi - Jun 6, 2010 - 09:43

KABUL (PAN): About 3,000 people lose their lives every year in Kabul due to pollution-related diseases, a top health official said.

Respiratory, heart and lung diseases were the most common illnesses associated with pollution, said Dr. Amanullah Hussaini, who heads the environmental safety department at the Ministry of Health.

Pollution was a problem across the entire country but in Kabul it was more severe because of the huge number of people living in the province, which includes the capital city, said Najeebullah Yameen, who is the deputy head of the Afghanistan National Environmental Protection Agency.

"Kabul bears the brunt more than other provinces due to its huge population of five million people." He said Kabul was originally built for 500,000 people.

The country also does not have the financial resources to cope with pollution and other environmental-related problems, he said.

In Nangarhar province, 250,000 people suffer from diarrhoea, typhoid, malaria and respiratory problems, said the health director, Dr Ajmal Pardes.

He blamed the large number of brick kilns of "deliberately polluting" the environment.

Agriculture director, Mohammad Hassan Sapi, said that over the past three years, Nangarhar had made huge strides in agriculture, but sometimes at a cost.

While more than 22,500 acres of land had been cultivated with gardens, many forests had been chopped down, he said.

Shah Mahmood Miyakhel, who heads the environmental protection agency in the province, said they had been trying to raise awareness about environmental degradation.

Some factories had been given machines to reduce their output of carbon dioxide, one of the key greenhouse gases heating up the planet and causing climate change.

However, he said he was concerned about the continuous deforestation in Kunar, Nuristan and Nangarhar provinces.

### ***Christian group denies proselytising***

Zarghona Salehi - Jun 7, 2010 - 17:10

KABUL (PAN): A US-based Christian aid group suspended in Afghanistan for allegedly proselytising on Monday denied it had been trying to illegally convert Muslims to Christianity.

Church World Service and Norwegian Church Aid were both suspended last week by the Ministry of Economy pending an investigation into the allegations.

Church World Service said it was involved in humanitarian aid and not religious services.

An employee of the nongovernmental group said that they would make an official reaction after the investigation had been concluded.

"We know we did not do such acts and the investigation would also show the same, so we cannot show our reaction before due time," he told Pajhwok Afghan News, requesting anonymity.

Church World Service works in more than 80 countries and has been active in Afghanistan for more than a decade providing health, education and food services in the capital Kabul and the eastern provinces of Nangarhar and Laghman.

Officials at Norwegian Church Aid have refused to talk to the media since their suspension.

"Their case is under investigation," said a spokesman for the Ministry of Economy, Muhammad Sadiq Amarkhel.

The investigation is underway by representatives of the ministries of interior, economy, intelligence agency and Attorney General's Office.

"The groups would be introduced to the judicial departments if the allegations are true," Amarkhel said.

Norwegian Church Aid is based in the Norwegian embassy in Kabul and its 50 employees operate in the provinces of Bamyan, Faryab, DaiKundi and Uruzgan.

The issue of conversions arose last week when a private TV channel aired a programme, showing Muslims converting to Christianity.

## **Economic Headlines**

### ***Transit trade agreement with Uzbekistan near***

Zainab Muhammadi - Jun 6, 2010 - 21:28

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan was expected to reach a transit trade deal soon with Uzbekistan that would allow thousands of fuel-carrying trucks stranded at the border into the country, an official said on Sunday.

About 3,500 trucks carrying fuel to Afghanistan have been stranded in Uzbekistan over the past week.

The agreement would help bring down the prices of petroleum products in the country, said the chief executive of Afghanistan's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), Muhammad Qurban Haqjo.

He told a press conference in Kabul that due to the delay in the import of fuel to Afghanistan, the rate of one litre of diesel had jumped from 42 afghanis to 46 afghanis and a same amount of petrol sold for 53 afghanis against the previous week's price of 48 afghanis.

Haqjo said the problem was due to a lack of a transit trade agreement with Uzbekistan, adding that he hoped it would facilitate the import of the fuel trucks on Friday, June 11. Afghanistan imports some 10,000 tonnes of fuel on a daily basis, 3.4 million tonnes annually, with around 80 to 85 percent being imported through the Hairatan port from Uzbekistan, the official said.

He called on the Afghan government to step up its efforts for signing the agreement that could help traders solve their problems.

The new standards imposed by the Afghanistan National Standardization Authority had also affected fuel prices, said Haqjo, who called for a review of the standards. He said the new standards matched those applied in Europe and the US while Afghanistan was importing fuel from neighbouring counties, not from Europe.

However, customers blame businessmen for the increasing fuel prices, saying traders used to stock fuel and wait for increased prices. But Haqjo dismissed that accusation.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said an official delegation would soon visit Uzbekistan to resolve the issue of the stranded trucks.

Farhad Afghanzozi said the team would review the current issues and would discuss the prevention of such problems in the future.

### ***Islamic banking mulled in Afghanistan***

Abdul Qadir Siddiqi - Jun 9, 2010 - 12:31

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan is drawing up a law to regulate Islamic banking in the country, the head of the country's central bank said.

A draft of the law was being worked on and would be sent to the Justice Ministry for approval, Abdul Qadir Fitrat, governor of Da Afghanistan Bank, told reporters on Tuesday.

He said the promotion of Islamic banking in the country was important as many Muslims

did not want to invest their money in conventional financial institutions, which charge and pay interest which is against Islamic laws.

He said Islamic banking branches had been opened in eight banks in Afghanistan. Among those, seven were private and one was a government bank.

He said Islamic banking had been introduced in many countries, including the United States, over the past 40 years.

He said that of the 300 major international banks, 250 offered Islamic financial services. Islamic banking was an \$822 billion industry, he said.

Meanwhile, a two-day seminar opened in Kabul on Tuesday to discuss various aspects of Islamic banking in the country.