

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

## **Afghanistan This Week**

**Report: 129**

**Week: 17-23 July, 2010**

**By: Mohammad Amin**

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## **Political Headlines Summary**

### **Obama will pull out of Afghanistan for economic reasons: former ISI chief**

A former director-general of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has said that U.S. President Barack Obama will pull out American troops from Afghanistan for economic reasons rather than for strategic ones because his administration would find the ongoing surge unsustainable.

### **NATO not winning Afghan hearts and minds: poll**

London - NATO is failing to win hearts and minds in Afghanistan, according to a poll released on Friday showing most people in Taliban heartlands view foreign troops negatively and believe the Taliban should join the government.

### **Americans torn over Obama strategy in Afghanistan: poll**

Some 44 percent of Americans disapprove of President Barack Obama's handling of the war in Afghanistan, a significant rise from earlier this year, according to a CBS news poll released Thursday.

### **Four NATO soldiers die in bomb attacks**

KABUL (PAN): Four NATO-led soldiers have been killed in three separate roadside bomb blasts in southern and eastern Afghanistan over the past 24 hours, the alliance said on Saturday.

### **Taliban attack Barg-i-Matal**

JALALABAD (PAN): Taliban militants launched a pre-dawn attack on Barg-i-Matal district in eastern Afghanistan on Saturday, sparking an intense battle with local Afghan forces, a top official said.

### **European Commission to donate 600 million euros**

KABUL (PAN): The European Commission will donate 600 million euros to Afghanistan following this week's Kabul conference, a European Union envoy said on Saturday.

### **Barg-i-Matal deadly clashes leave 70 militants dead**

JALALABAD (PAN): Nearly 70 Taliban militants, including foreign fighters, have been killed and 38 others wounded in deadly clashes in the lawless Barg-i-Matal district in eastern Afghanistan over the past two weeks, an official said Sunday.

### **ADB to pledges \$548m for Afghanistan's reconstruction**

KABUL (PAN): The Asian Development Bank (ADB) agreed on Sunday to provide more grant funds to Afghanistan to support essential reconstruction projects and economic

development.

#### **40 delegates arrive for Kabul Conference**

KABUL (PAN): Forty foreign dignitaries, including foreign ministers of France, Poland and Spain, have arrived in Kabul to participate in Tuesday's international conference, an official said on Monday.

#### **Ban to appeal for Afghan unity**

WASHINGTON (PAN): UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who is co-chairing the Kabul Conference along with President Hamid Karzai, will urge Afghans to unite in the interest of peace and development in their country.

#### **Corruption in Afghanistan Expanding at an Alarming Rate**

A recent survey by Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA) shows a sharp expansion in corruption in Afghan society. Most Afghans now see the payment of bribes as a routine part of obtaining government services.

#### **Afghan official blames ISAF for killing 3 civilians**

KABUL (PAN): (UPDATE 1) International forces launched a predawn raid on a village in the Musahi district of Kabul province, killing three civilians and arresting another, an Afghan official said on Tuesday.

#### **UN chief supports Afghan government's priorities**

KABUL (PAN): The UN secretary-general on Tuesday supported the Afghan government's new priorities and reaffirmed his pledge of long-term stay in the war-torn country.

#### **District chief seeks reinforcements**

PUL-I-KHUMRI (PAN): At least seven policemen have been killed in a fierce Taliban attack on the Dehna Ghorri district of northern Baghlan province, an official said on Tuesday.

#### **Reconciliation drive draws support**

KABUL (PAN): Foreign ministers of Canada, Czech Republic, Russia and Turkey Tuesday supported the Afghan government's efforts for reconciliation with militants.

#### **World Bank backs Afghan call to control more aid money**

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan has plenty of natural resources yet nine million people still face the threat of poverty, the managing director of the World Bank told an international conference on Tuesday.

#### **Karzai, Ban bill conference a success**

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Tuesday expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the daylong Kabul Conference, attended by delegates from 60 countries and a dozen international organisations.

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### **Afghan soldier killed two US trainers after an argument**

KABUL (PAN): An Afghan soldier opened fire on his American trainers after an argument, killing two and injuring a third, the defense ministry said on Wednesday.

### **Taliban shoot down NATO copter**

LASHKARGAH (PAN): The Taliban insurgents have shot down a helicopter of foreign forces in the lawless southern province of Helmand, residents said on Thursday.

### **US waives off \$108m debt payable by Afghanistan**

KABUL (PAN): The United States of America (USA) and Afghanistan signed on Thursday an agreement, forgiving a \$108 million debt payable by the conflict-torn country.

## **Geo-Strategic Headlines Summary**

### **Polish FM pledges assistance to Afghans**

GHAZNI CITY (PAN): The Polish foreign minister on Monday said his country's troops would stay in Afghanistan only until the mission was completed.

### **Pakistan ready to train Afghan forces**

KABUL (PAN): Pakistan expressed on Monday its willingness to train the nascent Afghan security forces, a key priority of the Karzai administration.

### **Regional bodies urge aid coordination**

KABUL (PAN): On the eve of the Kabul International Conference, representatives of six regional groupings on Monday called for better coordinating assistance to war-torn Afghanistan.

### **President sets out agenda for Afghan future**

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai, calling for more Afghan control over how aid money is spent, on Tuesday urged the international community to abandon "quick-impact" projects and focus instead on long-term sustainable programmes.

### **Afghanistan eyes full security control by 2014**

KABUL (PAN): The Afghan government is determined to take responsibility for security of the country within four years, President Hamid Karzai told the Kabul Conference on Tuesday.

### **China lends weight to Karzai's proposal**

KABUL (PAN): Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi on Tuesday supported the channeling of 50 percent of foreign aid to the Afghan government.

### **Afghan research unit says 2014 date too early**

KABUL (PAN): An independent research body in Afghanistan on Thursday said a 2014 deadline at which time Afghan troops would take the lead in securing the country was impractical.

### **NATO supports Karzai's 2014 transition plan**

KABUL (PAN): NATO's top official on Tuesday said the western alliance fully supported President Hamid Karzai's goal to have Afghan forces take charge of the country's security by 2014.

### **Historic Kabul conference a major step forward: Obama**

WASHINGTON (PAN): US President Barack Obama has given his support for President Hamid Karzai's handover plan, but warned that foreign troops would not leave before the insurgency was weakened .

## **Social Headlines Summary**

### **Govt urged to OK access to information law**

KABUL (PAN): A number of civil society organisations urged the government on Sunday to approve a draft law they have drafted to enable all Afghans to get access to information regarding administrative corruption.

### **Zakhilwal outlines Afghan work plan to create 5 million jobs**

KABUL (PAN): Afghan's finance minister on Tuesday urged the international community to invest in long-term, sustainable projects saying foreign aid money could not continue to solve the country's problems forever.

### **Buddha maintenance project completed**

BAMYAN CITY (PAN): A three-year reconstruction project, aimed at preventing further destruction of a Buddha statue in central Bamyan province, has been completed, officials said on Thursday.

### **\$100m grant agreement signed with US**

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan and the United States signed on Wednesday a \$100 grant agreement, aimed at enhancing farmers' access to credit.

### **USAID creates \$150m trust fund to boost agriculture**

KABUL (PAN): The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) will create a \$150 million trust fund for agricultural development in Afghanistan, its administrator, Rajiv Shah, said Wednesday during a visit to Kabul.

## **Economic Headlines Summary**

### **Govt revenue to jump by \$1bn in five years, says minister**

KABUL (PAN): The mining industry will help increase the annual revenue of the government to more than a billion dollars over the next five years, a remarkable swell from the current \$25m, the minister of mines said on Saturday.

### **Transit trade deal signed**

ISLAMABAD (PAN): Kabul and Islamabad have finalised a trade deal that will allow Afghanistan to export goods to India via Pakistan and use its neighbour's ports to trade with other countries.

### **Afghan Chamber of Commerce welcomes trade agreement**

KABUL (PAN): The Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce gave its support Monday to the transit-trade agreement between Pakistan and Afghanistan.



## **Political Headlines**

### **Obama will pull out of Afghanistan for economic reasons: former ISI chief**

ANI

07/17/2010

A former director-general of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has said that U.S. President Barack Obama will pull out American troops from Afghanistan for economic reasons rather than for strategic ones because his administration would find the ongoing surge unsustainable.

Speaking in an interview to ANI, Hamid Gul, who was the ISI chief from 1987 to 1989, said: "I think by the end of the year Obama will come up with another policy, and they are going to pull out of Afghanistan because it is not sustainable economically, casualty-wise and Taliban are winning on every front."

Gul further opined that those fighting the presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan, should not be referred to as the Taliban, but as champions of a national resistance.

"They are not Taliban, this is Afghan national resistance, and any case, they have dropped the word Taliban already. They call it the Emirate of Islamic Afghanistan. So, that is what their official name is," he said.

So, when that thing happens, that monumental, historical event takes place, then we will be left with no choice, both India and Pakistan, to remove our friction and all these things," he added.

President Obama's AFGPAK strategy was announced in 2009, and the cornerstone of it is adopting a regional approach.

The strategy aims to treat Afghanistan and Pakistan as two countries, but with one challenge in one region.

The strategy focuses more intensively on Pakistan than in the past, and calls for more significant increases in U.S. and international support, both economic and military, linked to performance against terror.

It also intends to pursue intensive regional diplomacy involving all key players in South Asia and engage countries in a new trilateral framework as - at the highest levels of the countries, being Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States.

Together, this trilateral format hopes to enhance intelligence sharing, military cooperation along the border, and address common issues such as trade, energy and economic development.

From a military aspect, the strategy has approved the sending of an additional 17,000 troops

to Afghanistan, besides deploying approximately 4,000 more U.S. troops to help train the Afghan National Security Forces so that they can increasingly take responsibility for the security of the Afghan people themselves, which is Washington's ultimate goal.

### **NATO not winning Afghan hearts and minds: poll**

Reuters

07/17/2010

By Adrian Croft

London - NATO is failing to win hearts and minds in Afghanistan, according to a poll released on Friday showing most people in Taliban heartlands view foreign troops negatively and believe the Taliban should join the government.

However, 55 percent of Afghans surveyed by the International Council on Security and Development (ICOS) think-tank believed NATO and the Afghan government were winning the war against Taliban insurgents.

The survey was based on interviews last month with 552 Afghan men in Kandahar and Helmand provinces in southern Afghanistan, the scene of some of the most intense fighting.

"We are ... failing to explain ourselves or our objectives to the Afghan people. This provides clear opportunities for Taliban and al Qaeda propaganda against the West," ICOS President Norine MacDonald said in a statement.

The poll of Afghans in the two areas found:

-- 75 percent believe foreigners disrespect their religion and traditions

-- 74 percent believe working with foreign forces is wrong

-- 68 percent believe NATO forces do not protect them

-- 65 percent believe the Taliban and its leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, should join the Afghan government.

Seventy percent said recent military actions in their area were bad for the Afghan people and 59 percent opposed a new military offensive being built up by NATO forces in Kandahar.

Thousands of U.S., British and Afghan soldiers took part in an operation this year in the Marjah area of Helmand, a Taliban stronghold. NATO forces are now gearing up for a campaign to secure the Taliban's spiritual home of Kandahar.

Fifty-five percent of those polled believed that foreign troops were in Afghanistan for their own benefit, to destroy or occupy the country, or to destroy Islam.

In a blow to NATO's hopes of gradually transferring security responsibilities to Afghan forces, 71 percent believed the Taliban would return to areas cleared of insurgents if NATO

departed leaving the Afghan government in charge.

Sixty-one percent believed the number of Afghans joining the Taliban had increased in the past year and four-fifths said that if the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan, al Qaeda would return to the country.

Sixty-four percent believed government officials in their area were linked to the Taliban and large majorities thought both the Taliban and local government officials made money from drug-trafficking.

The survey was released before U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and dozens of other foreign ministers meet in Kabul next week to hear President Hamid Karzai's plans to boost governance, security and economic opportunity.

The war in Afghanistan has reached a critical stage despite the presence of about 140,000 foreign troops, with the Taliban at its strongest since the Islamist movement was overthrown in 2001 by the U.S.-led invasion.

### **Americans torn over Obama strategy in Afghanistan: poll**

AFP

07/17/2010

Some 44 percent of Americans disapprove of President Barack Obama's handling of the war in Afghanistan, a significant rise from earlier this year, according to a CBS news poll released Thursday.

In CBS's last poll in May, only 37 percent of those questioned disapproved of the president's approach to the conflict now in its ninth year.

Some 43 percent of those polled approve of Obama's policies, about the same as the 44 percent who said they approved in May. But the number of undecideds dropped from 19 percent to 13 percent.

A majority of Americans believe the war is going either "somewhat" or "very badly" (62 percent) jumped from 49 percent in May.

The poll questioned 966 people between July 7 and 12 and it comes as Obama has poured thousands of extra forces into the country with the aim of defeating a bloody rebellion by Taliban militants.

The administration has vowed that US forces will start withdrawing from this time next year.

### **Four NATO soldiers die in bomb attacks**

Pajhwok Report - Jul 17, 2010 - 19:53

KABUL (PAN): Four NATO-led soldiers have been killed in three separate roadside bomb blasts in southern and eastern Afghanistan over the past 24 hours, the alliance said on Saturday.

Two NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops were killed Saturday in separate improvised explosive device (IED) attacks in southern and eastern parts of the country, where foreign troops have been planning to step up their offensive in recent months. ISAF said in a brief statement two other service-members were killed on Friday in the volatile south. The statement neither disclosed the nationality of the soldiers nor the exact location of the incident.

The latest casualties take the death toll of foreign troops to 51 so far in July.

A recent UN report said Taliban insurgents had increased the use of homemade bombs by 94 percent in the first quarter of 2010 in comparison to the same period last year.

As many as 370 NATO-led troops have been killed in Afghanistan so far during the current year. The US and Britain have borne the brunt of the deaths.

### **Taliban attack Barg-i-Matal**

Abdul Moeed Hashimi - Jul 17, 2010 - 16:38

JALALABAD (PAN): Taliban militants launched a pre-dawn attack on Barg-i-Matal district in eastern Afghanistan on Saturday, sparking an intense battle with local Afghan forces, a top official said.

The Taliban attacked the district in remote Nuristan province bordering Pakistan at 2am in an attempt to capture the town, said provincial governor, Jamaluddin Badr. Fighting was still continuing about a kilometre from the district centre, he said.

At least five militants have been killed in the clash and another six wounded, Badr told Pajhwok Afghan News. Three policemen were also wounded, he said.

Bodies were strewn on the ground as a fierce exchange of gunfire has made it impossible to remove them, he added.

Militants were firing heavy weapons at the centre of the district, he said.

Earlier this week, the governor warned that hundreds of militants had crossed from the Pakistan border and were planning to attack the district.

The top police official in eastern Afghanistan, Gen. Muhammad Zaman Mamozai, confirmed the fighting, ruling out any casualties suffered by the border police who are resisting the assault.

The Taliban, who had vowed to intensify their attacks nationwide, have not made a comment so far.

### **European Commission to donate 600 million euros**

Abdul Qadeer Siddiqui - Jul 17, 2010 - 19:19

KABUL (PAN): The European Commission will donate 600 million euros to Afghanistan following this week's Kabul conference, a European Union envoy said on Saturday.

The pledge will be released over three years with half of it to be part of the government budget, Vygaudas Usackas, chairman and special representative of the European Commission, told Pajhwok Afghan News. The amount represents a 25 percent increase on previous annual pledges.

The Kabul conference will bring representatives from 64 donor countries to the Afghan capital on July 20 to discuss how best to spend the billions of dollars that have been pledged to Afghanistan.

The Afghan government has suggested a focus on the economy and infrastructure, agriculture, governance, security and human resources.

The Kabul conference the first time the country has hosted such an international event will also help to improve the relationship between the international community and the Afghan government, Usackas said.

Two senior EU officials are expected to give a speech at the conference, he said, without saying who.

The European Commission has made an annual donation of 150 million euros over the past few years, with about one billion euros total since 2001, he said.

The EU also donates more than one billion euros separately for areas such as agriculture, rural development, health and administration, he said.

### **Barg-i-Matal deadly clashes leave 70 militants dead**

Abdul Moeed Hashmi - Jul 18, 2010 - 20:04

JALALABAD (PAN): Nearly 70 Taliban militants, including foreign fighters, have been killed and 38 others wounded in deadly clashes in the lawless Barg-i-Matal district in eastern Afghanistan over the past two weeks, an official said Sunday.

Taliban militants have recently launched multiple attacks on the district of the Nuristan province which had led to intense battles with local security forces.

More than two dozens of insurgents were killed over the past three days, said Nuristan Police Chief Gen. Muhammad Qasim Paiman. The dead bodies of the insurgents were recovered in the battle scene and evacuated by local residents, he added.

Chechen and Punjabi militants were among the 70 killed in recent battles. Two policemen were also killed and six others wounded in the clashes, the police chief further said.

"The Saturday fighting was a tough one, in which police and the militants were fighting in a close distance," Paiman told Pajhwok Afghan News.

Seventeen militants were killed in the overnight clash and eleven bodies were found from the battleground, said border police chief in eastern Afghanistan, Gen. Muhammad Zaman Mamozai. Six police were also wounded in the gunfire.

A purported Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, has rejected the claims, saying police has suffered heavy casualties in the recent clashes in the Barg-i-Matal.

### **ADB to pledges \$548m for Afghanistan's reconstruction**

S. Mudassir Ali Shah - Jul 18, 2010 - 13:50

KABUL (PAN): The Asian Development Bank (ADB) agreed on Sunday to provide more grant funds to Afghanistan to support essential reconstruction projects and economic development.

At a meeting, the ADBs Board of Directors temporarily suspended a planned phase-out of exceptional allocation of its Asian Development Fund (ADF), the bank's concessional financing facility, to Afghanistan in 2011 and 2012.

In order to help Afghanistan address cost overruns linked to a national ring road and some irrigation and energy projects, the ADB promised to provide \$548 million in financing for

2011-2012, as compared to \$386 million under the planned phase-out.

A statement from the Manila-based bank said its assistance to Afghanistan was centered on three multi-tranche financing facilities covering transport, energy and irrigation.

Along with a ring road, ADB is aiming to complete the construction of a railway line connecting Mazar-i-Sharif to the border town of Hairatan and to make further improvement in electricity transmission and distribution over the next two years.

Juan Miranda, director-general of ADB's Central and West Asia Department, was quoted as saying: "A significant drop in assistance from ADB has been avoided. We are one of the largest development partners in Afghanistan.

"This will cancel out the potentially disruptive effects on ADB operations, which are so important for the reconstruction and development of the country," said Juan Miranda, Director General of ADB's Central and West Asia Department."

#### **40 delegates arrive for Kabul Conference**

Khwaja Baseer Ahmad - Jul 19, 2010 - 20:36

KABUL (PAN): Forty foreign dignitaries, including foreign ministers of France, Poland and Spain, have arrived in Kabul to participate in Tuesday's international conference, an official said on Monday.

Representatives of about 52 countries and 12 international organisations are scheduled to take part in the conference. Special arrangements have been put in place to ensure security for the major event.

A senior government official, who did not want to be named, told Pajhwok Afghan News about 40 foreign guests had already reached Kabul, with the rest expected to arrive later in the day or Tuesday morning.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who is currently in Islamabad, are among the participants. Clinton will fly into Kabul in the evening.

Ahead of the conference, the Afghan government has gone into overdrive, beautifying the capital, stepping up security and installing welcome signboards and national flags at all intersections.

Although stringent security measures have been taken, a suicide bombing jolted the Macro Ryan neighbourhood of Kabul on Sunday, killing three people and wounding more than 40 others.

#### **Ban to appeal for Afghan unity**

Lalit K Jha - Jul 20, 2010 - 09:28

WASHINGTON (PAN): UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who is co-chairing the Kabul Conference along with President Hamid Karzai, will urge Afghans to unite in the interest of peace and development in their country.

"He will appeal to the Afghan people to come together to achieve peace through reconciliation and build a future based on economic development and mutual cooperation, with full respect for their nation's sovereignty," the secretary-general's spokesperson said.

Martin Nesirky told reporters at the UN headquarters in New York: "He will deliver a message to the Afghan people to unite in the national interest." Donors will align their programmers behind the plans and commit to the principles of aid effectiveness.

Ban is scheduled to meet President Karzai and other senior officials attending the conference. He would also participate in a joint press conference with Karzai, his spokesman said.

Asked whether NATO and other forces in Afghanistan should talk to the Taliban, he said reconciliation among the Afghans was indispensable and inevitable.

He added the insurgents, who joined the reconciliation process, needed to recognise the Afghan constitution, renounce violence and lay down their arms.

"The secretary-general's message on reconciliation is essentially the same as the message that came out of the London conference, which is that reconciliation is indispensable, unavoidable and inevitable.

"It's the form that it takes that is obviously very important here, and that means those insurgents or others who are to take part in any reconciliation process need to make sure that they are going to adhere to the Constitution"

## **Corruption in Afghanistan Expanding at an Alarming Rate**

ISN Security Watch

07/20/2010

By Aunohita Mojumdar

A recent survey by Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA) shows a sharp expansion in corruption in Afghan society. Most Afghans now see the payment of bribes as a routine part of obtaining government services.

In the three years since IWA came out with its previous corruption survey, the amount paid in bribes more than doubled, the watchdog group found. Afghans paid an estimated \$1 billion in bribes in 2009, whereas IWA pegged the figure in its 2006 survey at \$466 million. More worryingly, so-called commission-kars, or fixers, are seen increasingly as a permanent part of the social landscape. These middlemen are believed to be involved in up to 40 percent of bribery transactions.

Though international attention has focused primarily on high-level corruption, it is the day-to-day graft involved in the provision of basic government services that impacts most Afghans. Overall, 28 percent of Afghan households had to pay a bribe to receive some sort of public service that, under different conditions, should have been easily accessible. One in seven Afghans was directly involved in a corrupt transaction in some manner, either paying or receiving, IWA found.

IWA's National Corruption Survey 2010 sampled 6,500 Afghans in 32 of the country's 34 provinces. The results were released July 8.

Contrary to the image of the Afghan government and its institutions being inefficient and lacking capacity, 70 percent of respondents said they were certain they could get services if they paid a bribe.

The most impoverished Afghans – those with an income of less than \$60 per month – appear to be the hardest hit by corruption. This portion of the population felt that corruption, rather than insecurity, is the biggest problem facing Afghanistan.

The polling data painted a mixed picture for President Hamid Karzai's administration. Somewhat surprisingly, 84 percent of those surveyed perceived the presidential

administration as offering the best potential check against corruption. Yet 51 percent of those polled said Karzai's team was not efficiently dealing with graft.

Interpreting the apparently contradictory findings, IWA Co-Director Lorenzo Delesgues said that Afghan people still had hope for their government, though their expectations were diminishing as they turn in growing numbers to non-state actors to solve their day-to-day problems. "Corruption threatens the legitimacy of state-building" the IWA stated in its report, adding that it was feeding "frustration and support for insurgency" and spurring social conflict.

Half the poll's respondents indicated that corruption was undermining their faith in the government, and was tacitly serving to enhance the Taliban's image. At the same time, only 14 percent believe the Taliban is capable of tackling graft.

"It is petty corruption that is eroding people's trust very slowly," said Delesgues, adding that even if people do not see the Taliban as a solution, the Islamic militants are still able to capitalize on the perception of government corruption.

Perhaps most unsettling for international actors involved in the stabilization process, the IWA survey found that the justice and security sectors are perceived as the most corrupt in Afghanistan. However, IWA also found that corruption was widespread in state-run health and education services, two areas often seen by donors as the cleanest state sectors. Meanwhile, among government bureaucrats, 29 percent said they had to pay to keep their jobs.

### **Afghan official blames ISAF for killing 3 civilians**

Rahmatullah Afghan - Jul 20, 2010 - 12:44

KABUL (PAN): (UPDATE 1) International forces launched a predawn raid on a village in the Musahi district of Kabul province, killing three civilians and arresting another, an Afghan official said on Tuesday.

Soldiers from the International Security Assistance Force raided the village of Kata Sang, southeast of the capital, without alerting police, Qazi Solaiman, the district chief, told Pajhwok Afghan News. He said three civilians were killed and another was arrested. However, ISAF said they had launched a joint-operation with Afghan forces in the village to catch a Taliban figure planning attacks on an international conference in Kabul. They said several insurgents were killed when a gun battle broke out between militants barricade inside a building and the security forces.

After the compound was cleared and secured, the combined security force detained two suspected insurgents, recovered arms and ammunition, a statement from the alliance said. A resident of the village, who requested anonymity, said NATO-led troops raided the house of a teacher at about 1:30am, and then entered the house of a farmer, where they killed two brothers, Muhammad Qasam and Sur Gul, and their cousin, Muhammad Gul.

According to the source there was no Afghan soldier with the forces during the operation. The operation came as delegates from more than 70 countries and international and local organisations gathered in Kabul for a landmark international conference on charting a way forward for Afghanistan.



Security has been tight in the capital, where on Sunday, two days before the conference, a suicide bomber blew himself up near a market killing three people and wounding dozens more.

### **UN chief supports Afghan government's priorities**

Pajhwok Report - Jul 20, 2010 - 13:03

KABUL (PAN): The UN secretary-general on Tuesday supported the Afghan government's new priorities and reaffirmed his pledge of long-term stay in the war-torn country.

"This gathering marks a milestone in a journey begun in Paris in 2008, with the Afghan National Development Strategy," Ban Ki-moon said in his address to the Kabul Conference. After meetings in Moscow, The Hague and London, the Karzai government was becoming an increasingly effective partner of the world community, he said, praising Afghan ministers for meeting important short-term commitments.

He acknowledged the government had taken lead in designing programmes that the international community would support. The plans could be implemented despite the security challenges, he believed.

Ban urged the government to take essential steps to deliver on the needs of its people, and said the event marked the beginnings of a true fundamental transition.

In a message to the Afghan people, Ban said: "We here today share your aspirations and we understand your frustrations. We are aware the government and its international partners have sometimes sought to achieve peace, security and development without sufficient engagement of the Afghan people."

He appealed to the Afghans to come together to achieve peace through reconciliation and build a future based on economic development and cooperation with full respect for Afghanistan's sovereignty.

"The United Nations and I personally will do all we can to help build a brighter future for you and your children," he said while stressing an inclusive intra-Afghan dialogue and stronger regional cooperation.

He praised the recently concluded Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement as promising example of regional cooperation. The agreement was signed amid a dense political calendar that included preparations for parliamentary polls and the Peace Jirga.

"We continue to see a rise in indiscriminate, disproportionate and deliberate attacks by anti-government elements against civilians and government representatives. Too many Afghans see their basic human rights violated again and again."

He explained that improving security for Afghans was not just a matter of physical protection; it also required accountability for serious violations of human rights, including those committed in the past.

### **District chief seeks reinforcements**

Habibur Rahman Sherzai - Jul 20, 2010 - 14:09

PUL-I-KHUMRI (PAN): At least seven policemen have been killed in a fierce Taliban attack on the Dehna Ghorri district of northern Baghlan province, an official said on Tuesday.

The town might fall to the insurgents if reinforcements were not dispatched soon, warned Noorul Haq, administrative head of Dehna Ghorri district.

Four Taliban fighters had been killed and another three wounded in the ongoing fighting, he said, adding one police man had been missing as a result of the fighting that erupted early Tuesday morning.

The Shahr-i-Jadid area of the district is already under Taliban's control. District police commander, Muhammad Daud, told Pajhwok Afghan News the fighting was triggered by a rebel assault at 4am.

Mubarez, introducing himself as Taliban spokesman in Baghlan, said they had already captured Shahr-i-Jadid and were eying the district headquarters as well. He said nothing about the casualties resulting from the clash.

### **Reconciliation drive draws support**

Amanullah Eman - Jul 20, 2010 - 17:47

KABUL (PAN): Foreign ministers of Canada, Czech Republic, Russia and Turkey Tuesday supported the Afghan government's efforts for reconciliation with militants.

In a speech to participants of the Kabul Conference, Canadian Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon said his country would not leave Afghanistan.

While lending his weight to the ongoing reconciliation process, the minister stressed there should be no discrimination against any group.

He praised President Karzai's efforts for improving the human rights situation in the country. Cannon asked the international community to cooperate with Kabul in overcoming the current challenges.

Similarly, Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg also backed plans for transferring the security responsibility to the Afghan forces. He assured his country would continue assisting Afghanistan.

On the reconciliation campaign, he suggested the process should move forward gradually without undermining the achievements made over the past few years.

The Russian foreign minister said Moscow was ready to help Afghanistan within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Sergei Lavrov called drugs produced in Afghanistan a big threat to international security.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu pledged to provide \$2 million for the second post-Taliban parliamentary elections, set for September 18. He said talks with armed groups should be an Afghan-led campaign.

### **World Bank backs Afghan call to control more aid money**

Abasin Zahir - Jul 20, 2010 - 16:33

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan has plenty of natural resources yet nine million people still face the threat of poverty, the managing director of the World Bank told an international conference on Tuesday.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala told delegates at the Kabul Conference that despite the support of the international community and aid organizations, who have channeled about US\$40 billion into the country in the past nine years, people in insecure areas still lack the most basic necessities.

"Afghanistan has a lot of resources; it should not remain a poor country," she said, suggesting that the international community fund infrastructure and fundamental projects in Afghanistan.

She said there have been vast improvements in Afghanistan, but gave her support for President Hamid Karzai's call for more development money to be channeled through the Afghan government.

The World Bank has granted US\$5 billion to Afghanistan over the past few years.

She said the Kabul Conference important was an important event to resolve issues surrounding Afghanistan. The international event began on Tuesday morning, drawing representatives from 70 countries and organisations.

### **Karzai, Ban bill conference a success**

Abasin Zaheer - Jul 20, 2010 - 15:14

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Tuesday expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the daylong Kabul Conference, attended by delegates from 60 countries and a dozen international organisations.

"I'm pleased that you have renewed your positions on aid coordination and effectiveness," Karzai told a joint news conference with the UN chief at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul.

All of the issues they wanted to discuss came up for consideration at the gathering, said the president, who welcomed participants' support for his priorities, including the reintegration of militant groups that were willing to renounce ties to the Al Qaeda.

Just like the reconciliation campaign, Karzai's call for the global community to channel 50 percent of development aid money through the Afghan government also evoked a positive response from the delegates attending.

The UN secretary-general, calling the conference an achievement for Afghanistan, urged the international community to support the war-devastated nation as long as it needed foreign help. He also asked to donors to keep in mind Afghan priorities while designing development projects.

Beginning at 9.39am and concluding at 3.17pm, the conference passed off peacefully, though minor security-related incidents happened in the heavily-fortified capital.

Delegates agreed Afghan security forces should start taking security responsibility in some areas this year and aim to take the lead in all provinces by the end of 2014.

The Afghan government and NATO-led forces will examine conditions to launch the security transition by the end of 2010, according to a communique issued at the end of the event.

Donors promised they would work over the next two years to channel up to 80 percent of aid to priority projects designated by the Afghan authorities.

In six months, the government will establish a legal committee to review Afghan laws for compliance with UN corruption conventions.

The government also agreed to work over the next 12 months to make tribal judicial practices consistent with the formal justice system.

Asset declarations of all senior government officials would be verified and published annually, a process that will begin this year and acknowledged the "paramount importance" of transparent and credible parliamentary elections.

The delegates also stressed the "centrality of women's rights".

The government pledged to develop within six months a strategy for enforcing a law eliminating violence against women and providing assistance to victims.

In addition to making efforts at boosting domestic revenues by about 0.7 percent of GDP by March 2011, Kabul pledged to draw up plans for expanding regional transport and energy networks.

The government will to engage with the UN Security Council in an "evidence-based and transparent process" for striking the names of militants off a UN blacklist.

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### **Afghan soldier killed two US trainers after an argument**

Javed Hamim Kakar - Jul 21, 2010 - 16:01

KABUL (PAN): An Afghan soldier opened fire on his American trainers after an argument, killing two and injuring a third, the defense ministry said on Wednesday.

The incident happened on Tuesday at a training centre near the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, just as President Hamid Karzai was outlining his plan for Afghan forces to take the lead in securing the country within four years.

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said two American trainers, two Afghan soldiers, including the attacker, were killed and that another two Afghan National Army (ANA) troops were injured at the centre in northern Balkh province.

ISAF and the Ministry of Defense promised to investigate.

The ministry said the ANA soldier got into an argument with a US trainer brought in to improve Afghan marksmanship and turned his weapon on the American, killing two and injuring a third.

When allied troops returned fire, another Afghan soldier was killed.

Gen. Zahir Azimi, a spokesman for the defence ministry, expressed his concern about the incident.

It is not the first time Afghan security forces have fired on their international counterparts. Two US soldiers were killed by police in Maidan Wardak province and an Afghan soldier killed three British soldiers in Helmand province earlier this month.

Weeks earlier, ISAF forces killed five Afghan soldiers in Kunduz province and also a NATO air strike killed six Afghan soldiers in Ghazni, both of which the western alliance put down to "miscommunication".

ISAF spokesman, Brig. Gen. Joseph Blotz, said such incidents are very rare. "We have started a joint investigation to find out the reasons (behind the killings). In spite of such incidents our forces trust and rely on each other."

Gen. Blotz said the investigation should help to prevent a repetition of such incidents.

"We are working very closely on the issue and when such incidents happen among soldiers we should stand together and concentrate on war against the insurgents and terrorists."

### **Taliban shoot down NATO copter**

Zainullah Stanikzai - Jul 22, 2010 - 20:15

LASHKARGAH (PAN): The Taliban insurgents have shot down a helicopter of foreign forces in the lawless southern province of Helmand, residents said on Thursday.

The alliance said two of its soldiers were killed in the crash in southern Afghanistan. "The cause of the crash is under investigation," the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said in a brief statement.

The chopper was brought down in the Taliban-infested Nawa district at 3.30pm, tribal elder Haji Atiqullah told Pajhwok Afghan News. However, he provided no more details of the incident.

Resident Hidayatullah said the copter fell in the Ainak area after being hit by the fighters.

"Right now I can see flames rising from it," he added. Foreign forces have cordoned off the area and planes are flying over the site, according to him.

A spokesman for the provincial governor also confirmed the crash. However, Daud Ahmadi said they had yet to receive complete details.

As usual, the Taliban claimed responsibility for shooting down the chopper. A rebel mouthpiece, Qari Yousaf Ahmadi, said the fighters hit with a rocket the aircraft that was flying from Marja to Nawa.

He added six international troops were killed in the crash in Helmand, where four foreign soldiers died in a similar incident on June 9.

## **US waives off \$108m debt payable by Afghanistan**

Abdul Qadir Siddique - Jul 22, 2010 - 10:49

KABUL (PAN): The United States of America (USA) and Afghanistan signed on Thursday an agreement, forgiving a \$108 million debt payable by the conflict-torn country.

Coming two days after the Kabul International Conference, the agreement was inked between US Ambassador Karl Eikenberry and Afghan Minister of Finance Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal.

"Debt relief is crucial to Afghanistan's broader poverty reduction programme, as it will allow the government to spend more of its future resources in such sectors as health and education which improve the lives of the Afghan people," Eikenberry said.

For his part, Zakhilwal said: "On behalf of our people, I would like to thank the United States for its generous assistance to Afghanistan. This cancellation frees us from the burden of debt, allowing us to focus our resources on providing security and development to our people."

He said the loan had been granted to the government of Afghanistan in the 1960s. "If we had to repay the debt, we would have had to abandon some development projects," the minister said, urging Washington to continue helping Kabul.

Currently, Afghanistan has to repay loans obtained from Russia, Germany, Iran and Czechoslovakia, according to Zakhilwal, who revealed that Moscow and Berlin had also pledged to write off \$45 million and \$17 million debts respectively.

Once those pledges were translated into action, Afghanistan's debt burden would be reduced to \$60 million, the minister explained.

The agreement represents the culmination of a process that began in 2007, when Afghanistan first launched its debt relief programme under the IMF/World Bank Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative.

Afghanistan completed its HIPC initiative in January, marking an important step on the country's road to economic sustainability and reflecting the international community's acknowledgment of its progress in economic reform.

Debt relief under HIPC is an important element of a broader international loan write-off programme that will ultimately forgive approximately \$11 billion (96%) of Afghanistan's external debt.

## **Geo-Strategic Headlines**

### **Polish FM pledges assistance to Afghans**

Mirwais Himmat - Jul 19, 2010 - 21:01

GHAZNI CITY (PAN): The Polish foreign minister on Monday said his countrys troops would stay in Afghanistan only until the mission was completed.

Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski, speaking to Polish troops stationed in southern Ghazni province, said soldiers would not stay a day more than they were required.

However, in a joint news conference with provincial Governor Musa Khan Akbarzada, Sikorski said Poland would continue to support the people of Ghazni province.

During his meeting with Akbarzada, the two officials agreed to twin Ghazni City, the provincial capital, with a Polish town.

Sikorski is in Afghanistan to attend the Kabul conference, scheduled to be held on Tuesday.

Poland contributes 2,100 troops to NATOs counter-insurgency mission in Afghanistan.

Around 1,200 of those are stationed in Ghazni as part of the provincial reconstruction team (PRT).

As many as 19 Polish soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan since late 2001.

Governor Akbarzada praised the assistance extended by the Polish government to the Afghan people and the Afghan security forces.

### **Pakistan ready to train Afghan forces**

Syed Abbas Sadat - Jul 19, 2010 - 23:19

KABUL (PAN): Pakistan expressed on Monday its willingness to train the nascent Afghan security forces, a key priority of the Karzai administration.

The Pakistani foreign minister, following his arrival in the heavily-fortified Afghan capital, told a news briefing that Islamabad had already conveyed its readiness to Kabul.

Leading a Pakistani delegation to the Kabul Conference, Shah Mahmud Qureshi said the Afghan authorities had not yet responded to the proposal.

He added trained Afghan army and police forces would be central to the war-torn country's security after the withdrawal of US and NATO-led troops.

Pakistan would enhance its support to Afghanistan after the pullout of international forces, he promised, saying they had conducted a series of military operations against terrorists on their soil.

Relations between the two countries had considerably improved, claimed the visiting minister, who cited the signing of the long-delayed Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) as an example of the upturn in ties.

Qureshi went on to renew Pakistan's keen desire for bringing enduring peace to Afghanistan and said stability on this side of the border was in the interest of its neighbours.

### **Regional bodies urge aid coordination**

Niamatullah Zafarzai - Jul 19, 2010 - 23:20

KABUL (PAN): On the eve of the Kabul International Conference, representatives of six regional groupings on Monday called for better coordinating assistance to war-torn Afghanistan.



Meeting at the picturesque Intercontinental Hotel in the capital, the participants stressed a framework to ensure an integrated regional approach to cooperation with the impoverished nation.

Representatives of India and Turkey took part as guests in the session, which was attended by Asian Development Bank, World Bank and Islamic Development Bank officials, as well as others.

Officials of Asian Economic Cooperation Organisation, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, Security Cooperation Organisations, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia-Pacific and other bodies were present on the occasion.

Inayatullah Nabil, an official of the Afghan foreign ministry, said Kabul wanted foreign aid to be coordinated in a way that avoided overlapping projects in one particular sector.

He added the foreign ministry, which sponsored the gathering, urged the participants to synchronise their plans in a manner that efforts of one regional body complemented the work of another.

Staffan de Mistura, the UN mission chief in Afghanistan, called the meeting a good opportunity for the country to muster support from regional organisations.

He said the restoration of peace in Afghanistan would be possible only when it had effective political and economic links with regional countries.

He will co-chair the Kabul Conference, to be attended by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, NATO chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen, US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, delegations from more than 60 nations and diplomats.

The Ministry of Finance says 77 percent of the \$29 billion international aid spent in Afghanistan over last eight years has been disbursed on projects with little or no input from the Afghan government.

At the event, Afghanistan will seek increased aid through government channels from the current 20 percent to 50 percent, outline plans for expanding its army and police and boosting domestic revenue collection to 9.4 percent of GDP by March 2011.

### **President sets out agenda for Afghan future**

Jawad Sharifzada - Jul 20, 2010 - 17:46

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai, calling for more Afghan control over how aid money is spent, on Tuesday urged the international community to abandon "quick-impact" projects and focus instead on long-term sustainable programmes.

Speaking at the Kabul conference the first high-profile international event to be held in Afghanistan Karzai said such quick-fix projects were not providing any visible results for the people of Afghanistan, the majority of whom still live in abject poverty nine years after the Taliban was toppled.

"Let us together focus less on short-term projects we term 'stabilization' efforts, whose effects are often not lasting, and concentrate more on the programmes that deliver long-term sustainable economic development," he told delegates from 70 countries and international organisations attending the one-day conference. Among those attending are US secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, the UN secretary-general, Ban Ki-moon and NATO Secretary-General Andres Fogh Rasmussen.

The conference is being billed an opportunity for the Afghan government to set the agenda for reconstruction and reconciliation efforts in their country.

Karzai said the process was about realigning the international community behind an Afghan national programme which included channeling more foreign aid through the Afghan

government, creating transparent methods of awarding contracts, moving away from quick fix projects to more sustainable ones, supporting agricultural value chains that outperform opium poppy production and setting up of a One UN Programme, that would eliminate shadow projects.

Currently, about 20 percent of international aid, estimated at \$14 billion a year, is spent by the Afghan government, according to officials of the finance ministry. The rest is expended directly by foreign agencies.

The key international meeting on charting the future of Afghanistan, devastated by decades of conflict, got under way at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul, amid tight security.

The conference will also evaluate progress on the benchmarks set at a similar gathering in London earlier this year.

US Secretary Hillary Clinton said her government was encouraged by Karzai's fight against corruption. However, she believed more efforts were needed to put in place a transparent system.

Clinton called on the Afghan government to remain accountable to the international community for the dollars it spends.

Participants are also likely to support the Afghan government's initiatives, including reconciliation with the Taliban, new legislation for a major crimes task force, an anti-corruption tribunal and commitments to protecting women's rights.

NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen said the world wanted to see Afghanistan as a country where terrorism had no safe haven, fundamental human rights were protected and the Afghans had a greater say in running their affairs.

The conference represented an important step towards reaching those goals, he said, recalling the mutual commitments on security, governance and development made in London in January. "Today, we start turning those commitments into action."

Hamid Ilmi, a spokesman for the president, told Pajhwok Afghan News, that the three-and-a-half hour event was being covered by 700 foreign journalists.

Hundreds of security personnel have deployed across the city to prevent a repeat of the insurgent attacks that marred the holding of a peace jirga last month.

On Sunday, two days before the conference, a suicide bomber blew himself up in Kabul, killing three people and injuring dozens more.

### **Afghanistan eyes full security control by 2014**

Jawad Sharifzada - Jul 20, 2010 - 17:52

KABUL (PAN): The Afghan government is determined to take responsibility for security of the country within four years, President Hamid Karzai told the Kabul Conference on Tuesday.

The US secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, said the transition of responsibility in 2014 would be conditional on the strength of the Afghan security forces at that time. The US has set a deadline of July 2011 for the first troops to start leaving Afghanistan, although it is not clear how many will leave on that date.

"The July 2011 date captures both our sense of urgency and the strength of our resolve," she said of US plans to accelerate the process of turning over security to Afghanistan's police and military. "The transition process is too important to push off indefinitely.

"But this date is the start of a new phase, not the end of our involvement," Clinton told the conference.

The West, however, has expressed concern that Afghan forces lack sufficient training and

would be unable to take charge of the country within four years.

Representatives of nearly 70 countries and international and local organisations are attending the one-day event in which the Afghan government is setting out its priorities.

The road ahead is not easy, Clinton warned, adding some progress has been made by the Afghan government.

She said the deployment of an additional 10,000 NATO-led troops is underway to turn the tide of the insurgency and help strengthen Afghan forces.

Iran's foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, who was also attending the conference objected to more allied troops on Afghanistan soil, encouraging the international community and the Afghan government to seek political solutions instead of military to the nine-year war.

Mottaki also supported an Afghan-led process, saying Afghanistan should take charge of how its country develops.

He said the Afghan problem is a regional one, which affects the country's neighbours including Iran to the west.

Pakistan's foreign minister, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, agreed that military action alone was not a solution to Afghanistan's current problems.

"We continue to believe and advocate that the reconciliation and reintegration process has to be broad-based, inclusive, Afghan-owned and Afghan-led."

Qureshi characterised last month's Consultative Peace Jirga as a significant endeavour of Karzai to evolve domestic political consensus on stability and peace.

He called Afghanistan Pakistan's leading trade partner. "We are committed to increase the bilateral trade from the present \$2 billion to \$5 billion by 2015."

There were a number of regional mechanisms in place working for the stabilisation of Afghanistan and regional cooperation, he said. "They are making a significant contribution to the peace and stability in Afghanistan."

### **China lends weight to Karzai's proposal**

Khwaja Baseer Ahmad - Jul 20, 2010 - 15:59

KABUL (PAN): Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi on Tuesday supported the channeling of 50 percent of foreign aid to the Afghan government.

President Hamid Karzai in his opening remarks at the Kabul Conference had asked the international community to increase to 50 percent the proportion of foreign aid money that flows through the Afghan government. He said the event was a "milestone in deepening foreign partnership".

Talking to ministers and representatives of about 70 countries and international organizations, Yang said more than 50 percent of the foreign aid money should be spent by the Afghan government.

The Chinese government and the international community had been struggling to ensure a stable and democratic Afghanistan, he said.

He said there had been challenges as well as developments in Afghanistan, but the global community should stay committed to bringing peace and stability to the country.

European Union foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, said the EU supported the reintegration of those Taliban fighters who accept the constitution of Afghanistan and give up links with the Al Qaeda network.

"The European Union is committed to its promises and will spend its funds according to the priorities of Afghan government," she said.

The first ever international conference held in the capital of the war-devastated country of Afghanistan, began at about 9:30am.

### **Afghan research unit says 2014 date too early**

Frozan Rahmani - Jul 22, 2010 - 19:14

KABUL (PAN): An independent research body in Afghanistan on Thursday said a 2014 deadline at which time Afghan troops would take the lead in securing the country was impractical.

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit said the date announced by President Hamid Karzai at the Kabul Conference on Tuesday was too early.

The body was also dismissive of the conference in general, saying that it brought no new ideas to the table nor did it set out benchmarks for improving security or the lives of ordinary Afghans.

Karzai had addressed representatives of more than 70 countries and international organizations at the July 20 conference, saying his security forces would take over from foreign troops in 2014.

The deadline was given full backing by delegates at the conference who also supported his demand that at least 50 percent of aid be channeled through the government. In return, Karzai promised to tackle corruption and improve good governance.

However, Paula Kantor, director of the AREU, said that there had been no discussion about reintegration of the Taliban and other militants, a key outcome of the peace jirga held in Kabul last month.

Such a reconciliation and reintegration plan needs a political agreement which was not adopted at the event, she told reporters in Kabul.

### **NATO supports Karzai's 2014 transition plan**

Muhammad Jawad Sharifzada - Jul 20, 2010 - 18:55

KABUL (PAN): NATO's top official on Tuesday said the western alliance fully supported President Hamid Karzai's goal to have Afghan forces take charge of the country's security by 2014.

"I share the ambition with Karzai," Anders Fogh Rasmussen told reporters at the Kabul Conference, which brought representatives from 72 countries and international institutions to the Afghan capital for discussions on how to spend billions of dollars in aid money. The NATO chief said the conference was a very positive step to determine the priorities of the Afghan people and to oversee the progress made on benchmarks set at the London Conference last January.

Rasmussen said the handing over of security in Afghanistan's 34 provinces would be conditional, based on the growth and capability of national security forces.

NATO and the Afghan government have not yet decided which provinces Afghan forces would first take the lead in, a move that could begin at the end of this year or early 2011, he added.

US President Barack Obama had already said that he wanted to bring the first US troops home in July 2011, with that date setting the start of the American drawdown.

Rasmussen stressed that the transition plan did not mean NATO would leave Afghanistan before the job was done, saying the alliance "would never allow the Taliban to return". More than 140,000 international troops are stationed in Afghanistan. At least an additional 10,000 extra troops, most of them American, will be deployed over the next two months. Insufficient training and a lack of capability among the Afghan forces has caused serious concerns within the international community that the army and police will be able to take on the Taliban.

### **Historic Kabul conference a major step forward: Obama**

Lalit K Jha - Jul 21, 2010 - 17:37

WASHINGTON (PAN): US President Barack Obama has given his support for President Hamid Karzai's handover plan, but warned that foreign troops would not leave before the insurgency was weakened .

Karzai's plan sets out a deadline of 2014 for Afghan forces taking the lead in securing their country, and a gradual drawdown of foreign combat troops. He presented it at a meeting of foreign donors in Kabul on Tuesday.

Obama said the Kabul Conference, which drew representatives from 60 countries and a dozen international funders, was a historic step forwards for Afghanistan as it was a chance for the Afghans to set out their own priorities for the distribution of aid .

"The Afghan government presented its peace and reconciliation plan, which the United States firmly supports. Agreement was reached on a plan in which responsibility for security in Afghan provinces will transition to Afghan security forces," he added. Also, he praised a recent trade deal between Afghanistan and Pakistan that would increase economic opportunities for people on both sides of the border.

However, he warned that the 2014 handover date would depend on realities on the ground .

"This is not an easy fight. But it is a necessary one," Obama said .

Terrorists who have trained in Afghanistan and the tribal regions along the Pakistani border have killed innocent civilians in both of the countries, he said .

An even wider insurgency in Afghanistan would mean an even larger safe haven for Al Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates to plan their next attack. "We are not going to let that happen," he said.

Speaking at a joint press conference with Britain's visiting prime minister, David Cameron, on Tuesday, both leaders reiterated their long-term commitment to Afghanistan. Cameron was making his first trip to Washington since becoming prime minister in May.

"After the United States, Great Britain is the largest contributor of combat forces in Afghanistan, and British troops and civilians have served and sacrificed in some of the most dangerous parts of the country," Obama said. Britain has recently upped its contribution by 300 bringing the total number of UK troops in Afghanistan to 10,000. It has lost 322 troops since the start of the war .

Cameron said that there was no clearer, no more tangible illustration of Britain and America standing shoulder to shoulder in their national interest than the mission in Afghanistan. "We have British troops working to an American commander in Helmand, and we have American troops working to a British commander in Kandahar," he said.

Cameron said he and Obama had reviewed the progress made in Afghanistan and also their shared strategy .

"A key part of that is training the Afghan national army and police so they can provide security for their country and our troops can come home," he said.

"We also agreed on the need to reinvigorate the political strategy for Afghanistan. Insurgencies tend not to be defeated by military means alone. There must also be political settlement. To those people currently fighting, if they give up violence, if they cut themselves off from Al Qaeda, if they accept the basic tenets of the Afghan constitution, they can have a future in a peaceful Afghanistan," Cameron said.

"There is real progress. Last weekend, the first Afghan-led military operation took place successfully in Helmand, Afghans defending themselves," he said .

H also congratulated Karzai for hosting the Kabul Conference which appeared to pass off with minimal security incidents.

## **Social Headlines**

### **Govt urged to OK access to information law**

Rahmatullah Afghan - Jul 18, 2010 - 20:55

KABUL (PAN): A number of civil society organisations urged the government on Sunday to approve a draft law they have drafted to enable all Afghans to get access to information regarding administrative corruption.

A joint statement released by 17 organisations said the draft Act of Access to Information had been prepared over the past 18 months by the Civil Society and Human Rights Network to grant Afghan citizens their constitutional right under Article 50.

Speaking on behalf of the civil society organisations, Yama Turabi, co-director of the Integrity Watch Afghanistan, said the move was supported by more than 200 groups across the country and all of them wanted the government to approve the law within a year.

According to a survey in 2010, bribery has doubled over the last three years and amounts close to one billion dollars. The lack of information provides a prosperous environment for corruption, bribery and deprives citizens of access to public services.

Yama said one reason behind the increasing corruption was that people did not have access to information. As a result, they were unable to get their rights to health, education, justice and other services.

Another civil society actor, Wazir Ahmad Khurmi, stressed clauses ensuring access to information should be part of the law. He hoped it would enable the people to get information about the key plans being implemented by the government.

Due to lack of information, women had limited access to public services and complaint mechanisms, according to the joint statement.

"Vulnerable individuals and poor households encounter corruption in procedures and nepotism in appointments, which worsens their living conditions and limits their contribution to their own development..."

### **Zakhilwal outlines Afghan work plan to create 5 million jobs**

Abaseen Zaheer - Jul 20, 2010 - 17:44

KABUL (PAN): Afghan's finance minister on Tuesday urged the international community to invest in long-term, sustainable projects saying foreign aid money could not continue to solve the country's problems forever.

"Afghanistan will no more be a poor country if work on infrastructure and mining projects is carried out," Omar Zakhilwal told participants at the Kabul Conference held in the fortified capital.

Afghanistan is estimated to have between \$1 and \$3 trillion worth of untapped mineral wealth, although it does not have the infrastructure or means to mine it.

Zakhilwal outlined the Afghan government's five-year work plan to the delegates of more than 60 countries and 12 organisations attending the first international conference in Kabul. Although the plan was Afghan-led, the support of the international community was crucial, he said. It would play an important role in strengthening the Afghan economy and bringing enduring stability.

The economic programme includes projects in the agriculture and rural development sectors which would create 300,000 job opportunities across the country over the next three years, he said. In all, the plan will provide 5 million people with jobs over five years.

It is being supported by the International Monetary Fund and was worked out in coordination with the civil society, the human rights commission, the global community, private sector, academic centres, youth, elders and women, Zakhilwal said.

The Kabul Conference begun at 9:30am and ended at about 3:15pm, with a communique in which the donors supported President Hamid Karzai's demand for Afghan security forces to be in control of the country by 2014.

They also backed his call for at least 50 percent of foreign aid money to be channeled through the Afghan government, compared to 20 percent at present.

Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state, and Ban ki-Moon, the UN secretary general, also attended the conference.

### **Buddha maintenance project completed**

Hadi Ghafari - Jul 22, 2010 - 11:05

BAMYAN CITY (PAN): A three-year reconstruction project, aimed at preventing further destruction of a Buddha statue in central Bamyan province, has been completed, officials said on Thursday.

Jointly funded by Germany and Japan, the project was implemented by a team of German archeologists and a ceremony marking its completion was held in a bazaar -- a major tourist draw -- near the Taliban-dynamited statues.

A number of foreign officials, including German, Japanese and French professors, as well as Afghan archeologists, attended the ceremony.

"We could repair the holes caused by the (Taliban) bombing and no further risk of gradual destruction is there," said one of the German archeologists, Mujtaba Mirzayee.

Nearly 20 local workers, employed during the three years project, have become capable of reconstructing monuments. The bazaar which hosted the ceremony was built in the seventh century.

"I feel having travelling 1,500 years back in time, when Buddhists were gathering here in the bazaar and offering prayers," said a Japanese professor, who attended the event. Huge lamps were installed in the historic bazaar that hosted about 80 guests.

Two of the statues -- built 1,600 years ago and regarded as a major achievement of Buddhists -- were destroyed in March 2001. The Taliban said they were contrary to Islamic teachings.

The biggest Buddha, known as Salsal, has a 55 metres height and the smaller one, called Shamama, is 33 metres high. They were built on the outskirts of Bamyan City.

### **\$100m grant agreement signed with US**

Pajhwok Report - Jul 21, 2010 - 15:46

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan and the United States signed on Wednesday a \$100 grant agreement, aimed at enhancing farmers' access to credit.

The Agricultural Development Fund that will help expand farm production will be financed through the United States and the Afghan government.

The agreement was signed at a ceremony, attended by USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah, US Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, Minister of Agriculture Asif Rahimi, Minister of Finance Omar Zakhilwal and USAID Mission Director Earl Gast.

The grant would lend money to financial and non-financial institutions, such as banks, microfinance institutions, farm stores, agricultural depots and food processors, a USAID statement said.



The loans will then be extended to farmers for necessary equipment, seed and other materials to expand agricultural production.

A second \$50 million programme, called the Agricultural Credit Enhancement, will manage the Agriculture Development Fund lending operation and provide technical assistance to improve the competitiveness of agricultural value chains.

The Agriculture Development Fund would lend a minimum of \$20 million by the end of the first year of activities, helping more than 12,000 borrowers, the statement added.

"Access to credit is one of the main obstacles small commercial farmers encounter when trying to expand their production," said USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah.

Ambassador Eikenberry described the grant signing ceremony as an example of the US commitment to help Afghan farmers increase their production.

"I look forward to visiting farms and agricultural businesses around the country that have expanded their enterprises with financing obtained from the new Agricultural Development Fund," he added.

### **USAID creates \$150m trust fund to boost agriculture**

Zainab Muhammadi - Jul 21, 2010 - 16:28

KABUL (PAN): The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) will create a \$150 million trust fund for agricultural development in Afghanistan, its administrator, Rajiv Shah, said Wednesday during a visit to Kabul.

While signing an agreement with the Afghan ministers of agriculture and finance, Shah said the trust fund would benefit more than 60,000 farmers and agriculture entrepreneurs across the country.

Two thirds of the budget would be used to provide loans while the remainder would be spent on facilities to run the project, said Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock Mohammad Asef Rahimi.

Reactivating the country's Agricultural Development Bank to help farmers with proper financial management was a part of the project, he added.

The trust fund would begin its operation in two months and would eventually turn into a sustainable bank to serve farmers, according Rahimi.

The fund would provide easily accessible loans to farmers and entrepreneurs to boost agrobusiness in the country as well as increase the export of agricultural products.

The US has invested \$1.5 billion in the agriculture sector in Afghanistan over the past eight years, said the US ambassador to Kabul, Karl Eikenberry.

Nearly 80 per cent of Afghans are involved in agriculture.

## **Economic Headlines**

### **Govt revenue to jump by \$1bn in five years, says minister**

Zainab Muhammadi - Jul 17, 2010 - 12:36

KABUL (PAN): The mining industry will help increase the annual revenue of the government to more than a billion dollars over the next five years, a remarkable swell from the current \$25m, the minister of mines said on Saturday.

Addressing representatives of civil society organisations in Kabul, Wahidullah Shahrani said his ministry estimated mining projects would create about 200,000 job opportunities in five to seven years.

In a decade and a half, the minister believed, the government's revenue could reach \$3.5 billion a year -- a boom to the economy that would lessen Afghanistan's heavy reliance on foreign aid.

A recent US study projected the value of Afghanistan's untapped minerals at a trillion dollars, but the government in Kabul insists the deposits' worth is much higher.

Under an ambitious five-year plan, the Ministry of Mines prioritised projects to extract copper, iron gas, oil, precious stones, Shahrani told the gathering.

Reserves of iron, copper, gold, oil, gas, marble, lithium and other metals, as well as precious stones, exist across the country, according Shahrani. They are not confined to any particular province.

In an attempt to attract foreign investment in the mining industry, the Afghan government had been focusing on a transparent process for awarding contracts, he concluded.

### **Transit trade deal signed**

Pakhtun Shinwari - Jul 19, 2010 - 18:50

ISLAMABAD (PAN): Kabul and Islamabad have finalised a trade deal that will allow Afghanistan to export goods to India via Pakistan and use its neighbour's ports to trade with other countries.

Under the agreement, Pakistan will also be able to use Afghan territory for its exports to central Asian countries.

However, the Afghan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APPTA) will not allow India to transit through Pakistan to send goods to Afghanistan, a minister said on Monday.

The agreement has been 46 years in the making and was signed by Afghan commerce and trader minister, Dr. Anwaul Haq Ahadi and the Pakistani commerce minister, Makhdoom Amin Fahim in presence of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and US special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke on Sunday night.

"Signing the agreement is an example of a closer relationship between the two nations," commerce minister, Ahadi, said. It would also strengthen bilateral ties, he added.

The two countries had signed a memorandum of understanding early last year and were to sign before December 31, 2009 a revised trade agreement to let Afghanistan-Pakistan-India trade through land route.

But the issue of allowing India to travel across the Wagah route evoked strong opposition in Pakistan, and the December 2009 deadline was not met.

Holbrooke said the US had been attempting to bring the countries closer together and that the signing of the APTTA was a result of that.

Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai also termed the agreement an important step for promotion of ties in the region. He also hopes the agreement will improve the economic situation in Afghanistan and so weaken the lure of joining the Taliban for monetary reasons. For a period of three years, Afghan trucks will be allowed to travel across the Wagah route instead of reloading into Pakistani trucks at the border. The cargo will need to be transported in internationally acceptable and verifiable standards of sealable trucks. Indian goods for Afghanistan will not be allowed to transit through Pakistan, minister for information and broadcasting, Qamar Zaman Kaira, told a news conference after the signing of the agreement.

### **Afghan Chamber of Commerce welcomes trade agreement**

Abdul Qadir Siddiqi - Jul 19, 2010 - 20:59

KABUL (PAN): The Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce gave its support Monday to the transit-trade agreement between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The agreement was signed by the trade ministers of the two countries in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad on Sunday following two years of heated discussions.

Deputy head of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce, Khan Jan Alokozay, told Pajhwok Afghan News that the agreement would bring positive changes to trade and commerce between the two countries.

Briefing journalists about the agreement, Minister for Trade Dr. Anwarul Haq Ahadi said the agreement would enable Afghan traders to transport their goods to Karachi port, from where they could send or receive goods.

Earlier, Afghan traders were allowed to take goods in their own trucks only to Peshawar.

However, Afghans would be allowed to export items to India only through the Wahga border of Pakistan.

Ahadi said dispute over visas for truck drivers and the quantity of goods to be transported had stopped the agreement from being signed earlier. However, under the newly signed agreement, there would be no limit to the items imported or exported by the Afghan traders. Nor would Afghan truck drivers need visas to transport goods to Karachi, he said.

He said the Pakistani authorities had wanted Afghan traders to pay for the goods via banks and use standard containers for shipping, neither of which was acceptable to Afghanistan.

Later on, the Pakistani side accepted the Afghan demands, he said.

Afghan traders would be able to ship their goods without using containers for the next three years. After that, standard containers would be needed.