

**Bussiness and Politics in the Muslim World**

# **Afghanistan This week**

**Report: 132**

**Week: 7-13 August, 2010**

**Date: 15, August, 2010**

**By: Mohammad Amin**

**Business and Politics in the Muslim World**  
**Report: 132**  
**Week: 7-13 August**  
**Date: 15 August 2010**  
**Mohammad Amin**

---

---

## **Contents**

<b>POLITICAL HEADLINES SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>GEO-STRATEGIC HEADLINES SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>SOCIAL HEADILNES SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>ECONOMICAL HEADLINES SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>POLITICAL HEADLINES .....</b>	<b>8</b>
KARZAI TO DISSOLVE PRIVATE SECURITY COMPANIES .....	8
LACK OF CAPACITY SEEN AS A HURDLE TO DEVELOPMENT .....	8
8 FOREIGNERS, 2 AFGHANS FOUND DEAD IN BADA KHSHAN FOREST .....	9
DISSOLUTION OF PRIVATE SECURITY FIRMS SUPPORTED .....	9
3 NATO SOLDIERS DIE IN SOUTH .....	10
PRISONER KILLS TWO US MARINES IN MUSA QALA .....	11
OIC HELP SOUGHT IN PEACE RESTORATION .....	11
WORLD BANK TO PROVIDE \$40M FOR NSP III .....	11
CIVILIAN CASUALTIES UP BY 31PC: UN .....	12
'TALIBAN DO NOT REPRESENT THE POPULAR WILL OF AFGHANS' .....	13
FIVE KILLED IN 2 KABUL SUICIDE ATTACKS .....	14
SECURITY FIRMS TO BE ABOLISHED AT ANY COST: OMAR .....	15
UN URGED TO REMOVE AFGHANS FROM BLACKLIST .....	16
REDUCING CIVILIAN CASUALTIES A PRIORITY FOR THE US .....	17
HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS WANT AFGHAN NAMES OFF WILKLEAKS .....	17
ANALYSTS CRITICISE AMNESTY'S CALL TO PROSECUTE TALIBAN .....	18
UAE PROVIDES FOOD FOR FLOOD VICTIMS .....	19
TALIBAN INCREASINGLY RESPONSIBLE FOR CIVILIAN CASUALTIES: US .....	19
ISAF-FIRED ROCKET KILLS CIVILIANS IN HELMAND .....	19
<b>GEO-STRATEGIC HEADLINES .....</b>	<b>21</b>
KARZAI MEETS KAYANI, PETRAEUS .....	21
IRAN TO HOST REGIONAL SUMMIT ON AFGHANISTAN .....	21
U.S. ROLE EVOLVES AS ALLIES LEAVE AFGHANISTAN .....	21
IRAN'S REGIONAL CONFERENCE POINTLESS: ANALYSTS .....	23

**SOCIAL HEADILNES .....25**

FLOODS WREAK HAVOC IN SEVERAL PROVINCES .....25  
AL-AZHAR UNIVERSITY TO OPEN BRANCHES IN AFGHANISTAN .....26  
US BACKS WOMEN'S ROLE IN PEACE DRIVE.....26  
EGYPT TO TRAIN AFGHAN MIDWIVES .....27  
344 POLICE COMPLETE TRAINING.....28  
STATISTICS SHOW MORE AFGHAN WOMEN ATTEMPTING SUICIDE .....28  
AFGHAN CLERICS SEEK RETURN TO STRICT ISLAMIC LAW .....29  
SEVERAL HURT IN KOCHI-HAZARA CLASH .....31

**ECONOMICAL HEADLINES .....32**

BUMPER PISTACHIO CROPS THIS YEAR IN SAMANGAN .....32

## **Political Headlines Summary**

### **Karzai to dissolve private security companies**

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai was expected Saturday to issue an order dissolving all private security companies and announce a new anti-corruption strategy, an official said.

### **Lack of capacity seen as a hurdle to development**

KABUL (PAN): Inadequate institutional capacity is the main challenge to development programmes, government officials say. But development analysts accuse the government of failing to utilise even its current capacity.

### **8 foreigners, 2 Afghans found dead in Badakhshan forest**

Three women were among the eight foreigners whose bodies were found with gunshot wounds in Koley forest, said Brig. Gen. Aqa Noor Kintoz, provincial police chief.

### **Dissolution of private security firms supported**

KABUL (PAN): The dissolution of private security companies would help improve the security situation in Afghanistan; believe some former service-members and experts.

### **3 NATO soldiers die in south**

KABUL (PAN): Three NATO-led soldiers have been killed in two separate militant attacks in southern Afghanistan, the alliance said on Sunday.

### **Prisoner kills two US Marines in Musa Qala**

LASHKARGAH (PAN): A prisoner killed two US Marines and as many inmates before he was shot dead by soldiers in the southern province of Helmand, an official said on Sunday.

### **OIC help sought in peace restoration**

KABUL (PAN): Religious leaders on Monday urged the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) to convene a meeting on bringing peace to Afghanistan.

### **World Bank to provide \$40m for NSP III**

KABUL (PAN): The Ministry of Finance and the World Bank signed on Tuesday a grant agreement worth \$40 million to support the Third National Solidarity Programme (NSP III), one of Afghanistan's most successful development schemes.

### **Civilian casualties up by 31pc: UN**

KABUL (PAN): The number of civilian casualties increased 31 per cent in the first half of 2010 compared to the same period last year, the UN said in its mid-year report on Tuesday.

### **'Taliban do not represent the popular will of Afghans'**

The Taliban do not represent the popular will of the people in Afghanistan, a top Obama Administration official has said, a day after a former ISI chief told a US news network that the

militant group represents the national resistance movement of that country.

### **Five killed in 2 Kabul suicide attacks**

KABUL - Two suicide bombers killed up to five Afghans in an attack on a residential area of central Kabul on Tuesday, Afghan police and security sources said, only hours after a U.N. report detailed a sharp rise in civilian casualties.

### **Security firms to be abolished at any cost: Omar**

KABUL (PAN): The Afghan government is serious about dissolving private security companies and a deadline for their closure would be announced soon, said a presidential spokesman on Tuesday.

### **UN urged to remove Afghans from blacklist**

KABUL (PAN): The Afghan National Security Council (ANSC) on Tuesday asked the United Nations for the removal of 47 names of Afghans citizens from its sanctions list.

### **Reducing civilian casualties a priority for the US**

WASHINGTON (PAN): The White House stressed that it is doing everything it can to protect the lives of civilians in Afghanistan but blamed much of the killings on the militants, a day after a UN report that said civilian casualties had shot up 31 per cent in the first half of this year.

### **Human rights groups want Afghan names off WikiLeaks**

KABUL (PAN): Human rights groups, including the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, have called on the online whistle blower WikiLeaks to censor the names of Afghan informants who they say could be at risk from Taliban reprisals.

### **Analysts criticise Amnesty's call to prosecute Taliban**

KABUL (PAN): Amnesty International's demand that the Taliban and other insurgents be tried for war crimes is one-sided and impractical, analysts here said on Thursday.

### **UAE provides food for flood victims**

KABUL (PAN): The United Arab Emirates on Thursday provided the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) with 30 tonnes of edibles for distribution to flood victims, an official said.

### **Taliban increasingly responsible for civilian casualties: US**

WASHINGTON (PAN): The United States has accused the Taliban of causing more civilian casualties in Afghanistan than NATO and US forces and not taking responsibility for the consequences.

### **ISAF-fired rocket kills civilians in Helmand**

LASHKARGAH (PAN): Several civilians were killed and wounded by a rocket fired into a house by NATO-led troops in southern Helmand province, residents claimed on Friday.

## **Geo-Strategic Headlines Summary**

### **Karzai meets Kayani, Petraeus**

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai met Pakistan Army chief, Gen. Parvaiz Ashfaq Kayani, and NATO Commander Gen. David Petraeus on Monday, his office said.

### **Iran to host regional summit on Afghanistan**

KABUL (PAN): Iran will soon host a regional summit on Afghanistan in which seven neighbouring countries will be invited, an Iranian official said on Tuesday.

### **U.S. Role Evolves As Allies Leave Afghanistan**

Amid the continuing violence in Afghanistan, the shape of the NATO alliance is changing.

At the beginning of August, Dutch troops left the restive province of Uruzgan, and Canadian soldiers appear set to depart next year. At the same time, the U.S. forces surging into Afghanistan are finding new ways to work with their NATO counterparts.

### **Iran's regional conference pointless: analysts**

KABUL (PAN): A regional conference on Afghanistan to be hosted by Iran is just another way of Tehran exerting its influence in the country, several analysts said on Wednesday.

## **Social Headlines Summary**

### **Floods wreak havoc in several provinces**

KABUL (PAN): Scores of people were killed and injured and thousands of acres of crops destroyed by flash floods in three central and two eastern provinces, officials and residents said on Saturday.

### **Al-Azhar University to open branches in Afghanistan**

KABUL (PAN): The Egypt-based Al-Azhar University would open its branches in Nangarhar and Herat province of Afghanistan and award 200 scholarships to Afghan students every year, an official said on Monday.

### **US backs women's role in peace drive**

KABUL (PAN): The US ambassador-at-large for global women's issues Tuesday supported demands of Afghan women that their rights should be protected in the reconciliation process. Melanne Verwee, who met in Kabul a number of women, including representatives of rights organisations, said they wanted the peace process to be carried forward in a way that did not undermine women's rights.

### **Egypt to train Afghan midwives**

KABUL (PAN): With support from the United States, the number of midwives, who would receive training abroad, would increase from 2,600 to 6,000 over the next four years, the acting minister of public health said on Tuesday.

### **344 police complete training**

KANDAHAR CITY (PAN): Hundreds of police officials completed a six-week training course at the Kandahar Police Training Centre on Thursday, an official said.

### **Statistics show more Afghan women attempting suicide**

Government statistics in Afghanistan have raised concerns that a growing number of Afghan women are attempting suicide.

### **Afghan Clerics Seek Return to Strict Islamic Law**

KABUL - Afghanistan's largest gathering of clerics, who met to discuss reconciliation with the Taliban, has called for the revival of strict Islamic law as the country seeks ways to win militants away from a growing insurgency.

### **Several hurt in Kochi-Hazara clash**

KABUL (PAN): Amid conflicting claims of casualties, a fierce clash is ongoing between members of Kochi and Hazara communities in the 13th police district of Kabul, officials said on Friday.

## **Economical Headlines Summary**

### **Bumper pistachio crops this year in Samangan**

AIBAK (PAN): Pistachio farmers in northern Samangan province have had a bumper crop, harvesting 900 tonnes of the nut compared to just eight tones last year, an agricultural official said on Saturday.

## **Political Headlines**

### **Karzai to dissolve private security companies**

Abasin Zaheer - Aug 7, 2010 - 17:24

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai was expected Saturday to issue an order dissolving all private security companies and announce a new anti-corruption strategy, an official said. Karzai would announce his anti-corruption strategy, dissolve private security companies and put some legal limitations on the Major Crimes Task Force during a press conference on Saturday, a credible source at the presidential office told Pajhwok Afghan News on condition of anonymity. A delegation had already been appointed by Karzai to investigate the activities of the Major Crime Task Force, in which US and British law enforcement officers oversee the work of Afghan police.

Attorney General Muhammad Ihsaq Aloko; the head of the judicial board of the presidential palace, Nasrullah Stanakzai; observation department head of the anti-corruption department, Muhammad Yasin Osmani; and deputy head of the Security Council, Abdul Hakim Noorzai, were among those who released a report on Thursday which accused the Major Crime Task Force and Sensitive Investigation Unit of violating human rights and national interests.

Karzai needs to do more than just promise to take action, a member of the Wolesi Jirga from Kandahar, Khalid Pakhtun, said.

As well as posing a security threat to the country, private security companies consume a lot of foreign aid, he said.

If Karzai was serious about stamping out corruption and took concrete action, the government would gain the trust of people and the international community, he added.

However, Muhammad Younus Fakoor, a political analyst, warned that Afghanistan could face a crisis if Karzai did not discuss the issue first with the international community.

If Karzai closes all private security companies, who will provide that service, he said.

There are 52 private security companies in the country, half of which are foreign owned.

### **Lack of capacity seen as a hurdle to development**

Frozan Rahmani - Aug 7, 2010 - 12:52

KABUL (PAN): Inadequate institutional capacity is the main challenge to development programmes, government officials say. But development analysts accuse the government of failing to utilise even its current capacity.

The government's ability to handle foreign aid, especially after last month's Kabul Conference, in which President Hamid Karzai urged the West to channel 50 percent of reconstruction funds through his administration, has generated a heated debate among aid groups.

Karzai's economic advisor, Sayed Ishaq Naderi, recently acknowledged the government's inability to spend the budget and foreign aid properly.

He identified the lack of capacity as a key challenge to the implementation of development projects, saying that honouring the commitments held out at the Kabul Conference would take time.

Naderi opined the homecoming of Afghan experts from foreign countries would boost the government's capacity.



"There is no dearth of resources, but there is a lack of knowledge -- how to make use of them," said Sayed Massoud, professor of economics at the Kabul University.

Another university lecturer, Saifuddin Saihun, urged the government to develop a mechanism for using its current capacity.

Afghan experts had carried out several projects for foreign organisations, which indicated their capacity, he pointed out. Saihun believed the government had the capacity to implement long-term projects and handle foreign aid.

But the government has failed to use their entire annual budget, raising questions about its ability to prepare and execute development schemes.

The government spent 40 per cent of its budget in 2008 and 46 per cent in 2009, said the spokesman for the Ministry of Finance, Aziz Shams.

The figures would further increase with time, he hoped, saying World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) studies showed Afghanistan's financial management was getting better. Shams revealed the government had launched a new programme aimed at building the capacity of civil servants. Dozens of Afghan and foreign experts would be hired under the programme, he added.

Insecurity in some provinces was the main obstacle to the government's ability to spend its development budget, said Deputy Finance Minister Mustafa Mastoor. He acknowledged the lack of professionals as a problem.

The Ministry of Finance has drawn up elaborate developments plans for most ministries. The plans, including capacity-building of government servants, were presented to participants of the Kabul Conference on July 20.

Mastoor said the control of 50 percent of aid, as promised by the global fraternity, would not be given to the government at once, but gradually -- 20 percent during the current year, 36 percent in 2011 and 50 percent in 2012.

### **8 foreigners, 2 Afghans found dead in Badakhshan forest**

Jafar Tayar - Aug 7, 2010 - 10:10

Three women were among the eight foreigners whose bodies were found with gunshot wounds in Koley forest, said Brig. Gen. Aqa Noor Kintoz, provincial police chief.

The foreigners and two Afghans were returning from Karan and Menjan district in the province, bordering Pakistan, he added.

It is unclear whether the foreigners were civilians or soldiers and what the purpose of their trip to the region was.

A local resident, who asked not to be named, said he saw six armed men open fire on the group. The witness informed district officials who removed the bodies from the forest.

One of the attackers has been identified, said Kintoz, but added that the suspect had fled to Pakistan.

Kintoz blamed the foreigners for taking such a risky trip without informing provincial security forces.

### **Dissolution of private security firms supported**

Abdul Qadir Siddique - Aug 7, 2010 - 20:19

KABUL (PAN): The dissolution of private security companies would help improve the security situation in Afghanistan; believe some former service-members and experts.

President Hamid Karzai on Saturday asked the United States and United Nations to stop supporting private security companies in the war-torn country.

During a visit to the Afghan Civil Service Institute in Kabul, where thousands of civil servants are being trained, Karzai accused the security firms of creating a parallel force.

"The Afghan government has the capability of handling security issues, and we don't need such companies anymore. The men associated with these companies wield guns day and night and have created a structure of security that undermines the Afghan army and police," he said.

However, workers of the companies asked the government to provide them jobs in security forces. An interior ministry official, Col. Syed Afandi Babagai, revealed 26,000 people were working for 27 foreign and 25 Afghan security firms.

The companies worked under the Council of Ministers and were obliged to abide by the law of the land, said Babagai, who did not comment on Karzai's concerns.

But a number of military experts say the dissolution of private companies would prove helpful in controlling the security situation.

"These companies are fuelling insecurity and should be shut down," said Shah Nawaz Tanai, defence minister during the Dr. Najibullah government and leader of the National Peace Movement.

"It is known to all that armed men of the companies commit crimes, including extortion and murder, on the pretext of maintaining security," he alleged. The companies had created a situation in which it was impossible to differentiate between militants and private security guards.

"Such companies have been in contact both with the government and the opposition," he added. He believed Karzai being an elected president should have dissolved the companies by issuing a decree.

Another military expert, Gen. Abdul Wahid Taqat, said he had been opposed to the creation of the private security companies. He accused the firms of promoting insecurity in the country.

"We have seen private guards moving in cars without number plates. In a number of security incidents, these vehicles are used," he added.

He suggested instead of funding such companies, the Afghan forces should be strengthened to enable them to take the responsibility of security. He also said the president should have issued a decree in this regard.

Former deputy interior minister, Gen. Hilaluddin Halal, also a member of parliament, supported Karzai's stance on the dissolution of private security companies. He alleged a number of people, who worked for these firms, had been involved in criminal activities in the past. However, he did not name anyone.

He claimed the companies responsible for providing security to logistic convoys were paying taxes to the Taliban. He said the companies were a source of fundraising for militant groups.

### **3 NATO soldiers die in south**

Pajhwok Report - Aug 8, 2010 - 12:31

KABUL (PAN): Three NATO-led soldiers have been killed in two separate militant attacks in southern Afghanistan, the alliance said on Sunday.

Two International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) soldiers were killed in an insurgent attack on Saturday, ISAF said in a brief statement.

The third soldier was killed by a homemade bomb, which the military refers to as an improvised explosive device (IED), in the same region, according to a different ISAF statement.

The 42-member alliance has neither disclosed the nationality of the soldiers nor the exact location of the incidents in line with its policy.

### **Prisoner kills two US Marines in Musa Qala**

Zainullah Stanikzai - Aug 8, 2010 - 20:48

LASHKARGAH (PAN): A prisoner killed two US Marines and as many inmates before he was shot dead by soldiers in the southern province of Helmand, an official said on Sunday.

The incident took place late Saturday evening, when the inmate snatched gun from a guard and killed two prisoners in the Musa Qala district, a security official confided to Pajhwok Afghan News.

Moments later, the man gunned down two US Marines soon after they entered the district jail, the source revealed. None of prison officials was harmed in the overnight shooting. The attacker was later killed by US Marines, the official said.

Helmand governor's spokesman, Daud Ahmadi, confirmed the incident. However, he had no further information. Ahmadi said an investigation had been launched.

Without commenting on the shooting, NATO said five foreign soldiers, including three Americans, had been killed in different incidents in the south.

### **OIC help sought in peace restoration**

Rahmatullah Afghan - Aug 9, 2010 - 19:05

KABUL (PAN): Religious leaders on Monday urged the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) to convene a meeting on bringing peace to Afghanistan.

The call was made during a three-day seminar organised by the Ministry of Hajj in Kabul.

Around 350 religious scholars from all parts of the country attended the event.

A declaration issued at the end of the seminar supported the decisions taken during the Advisory Peace Jirga. It asked the government and its armed opponents to respect the decisions.

The participants urged the Muslim world to take steps to find a lasting solution to the problems in Afghanistan.

OIC Secretary-General Akmal Din Ihsan Oghlo, during his address at last month's Kabul Conference, said the grouping was ready to convene a meeting on the Afghan imbroglio. He announced appointing an OIC special representative for Afghanistan.

The declaration said non-implementation of Islamic laws and violations of human rights were grave crimes. The participants also asked the government to take steps to curb corruption.

### **World Bank to provide \$40m for NSP III**

Abdul Qadir Siddiqui - Aug 10, 2010 - 18:43

KABUL (PAN): The Ministry of Finance and the World Bank signed on Tuesday a grant agreement worth \$40 million to support the Third National Solidarity Programme (NSP III), one of Afghanistan's most successful development schemes.

The agreement was inked between Minister of Finance Dr. Omar Zakhilwal and Josephine Bassinette, World Bank's Acting Country Director for Afghanistan.

Under the agreement, the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) will provide the money to support NSP III, which builds upon the achievements of the first two phases.

Since the inception of the NSP I in 2003, 17 million rural people in all 34 of provinces of the country have benefitted from improved infrastructure. As many as 22,000 Community Development Councils (CDCs) have been elected and over 41,000 village-level projects completed.

Another 10,000 sub-projects are nearing completion. To date, the programme has disbursed more than \$720 million directly to communities across Afghanistan.

After the signing ceremony, Zakhilwal told journalists that Afghan villagers would have access to electricity, water and improved rural infrastructure such as roads, culverts and bridges.

"Maintaining these achievements and expanding NSP, which is a truly national program, is essential for building a prosperous and stable Afghanistan," added the minister, who has been involved with the NSP since its beginning.

Under NSP III, a number of innovations have been introduced to support Kabul's vision for the CDCs as sustainable institutions of village-level government.

"Our analyses of NSP shows that the programme empowers communities to make decisions and manage resources which in turn lay the foundation for a sustainable form of inclusive local governance and rural development which helps alleviate poverty," said Bassinette.

The NSP III cost is \$1.5 billion, of which IDA financing of \$40 million has been approved. The remaining balance is expected to be met by other donors, especially through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF).

The ARTF Financing Strategy envisages \$700 million of investment over the coming three year period for NSP. USAID the largest of the ARTF donors contributing to NSP - recently increased its investment.

### **Civilian casualties up by 31pc: UN**

Pajhwok Report - Aug 10, 2010 - 14:12

KABUL (PAN): The number of civilian casualties increased 31 per cent in the first half of 2010 compared to the same period last year, the UN said in its mid-year report on Tuesday.

The world body said that 1,271 civilians had been killed in the first six months of this year, with another 1,997 wounded. It blamed militant groups for causing 76 per cent of the casualties, up from 53 percent last year.

The UN Special Representative to Afghanistan Staffan de Mistura announced the new report, saying civilian deaths were increasing "substantially".

De Mistura said the number of those killed or injured by the Taliban and other militant groups were 55 per cent more children than in 2009, along with six per cent more women.

"Afghan children and women are increasingly bearing the brunt of this conflict. They are being killed and injured in their homes and communities in greater numbers than ever before," said de Mistura.

The casualties caused by pro-government forces fell 30 per cent in the same period, driven by a 64 per cent decline in deaths and injuries caused by air strikes. The foreign and Afghan forces were blamed for 386 civilian deaths in the first half of this year.

Former commander of NATO-led forces in Afghanistan, Gen Stanley McChrystal, had limited the use of air strikes. His successor, Gen David Petraeus, follows the same policy.

"Every Afghan civilian death diminishes our cause," Petraeus said in a recent directive issued to his forces to avoid killing civilians.

The Taliban supreme leader, Mullah Muhammad Omar, has also issued a "code of conduct", calling on his fighters to not target non-combatants.

The main causes of the increase were the use of "a greater number of larger and more sophisticated" bombs and assassinations, including public executions of children, by militant groups, the UN report noted.

Improvised explosive devices and suicide attacks killed 557 Afghans and injured 1,137 in the first six months of 2010, it added.

Aerial attacks by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) caused 69 civilian deaths. The UN urged the Taliban to "withdraw all orders and statements calling for the killing of civilians" and end the use of IEDs.

The body also called on NATO forces to make their investigation and reporting on civilian casualties more transparent.

The Afghan Rights Monitor (ARM) released its record of casualties for the same period last month, saying 1,074 civilians had been killed, most of them in Taliban roadside bombings and suicide attacks.

### **'Taliban do not represent the popular will of Afghans'**

The Asian Age  
08/10/2010

The Taliban do not represent the popular will of the people in Afghanistan, a top Obama Administration official has said, a day after a former ISI chief told a US news network that the militant group represents the national resistance movement of that country.

"They (the Taliban) do not represent the popular will in Afghanistan and every poll, every survey – I'd particularly bring your attention to the BBC/ABC/ARD poll of earlier this year – shows that their support is in the single digits," Special US Representatives for Pakistan and Afghanistan, Mr Richard Holbrooke, told reporters at a news briefing.

"But entrenched, ruthless people have the ability to kill unarmed people who were coming back from a humanitarian mission. It's not hard to do. It just illustrates the nature of the enemy," he said in response to a question.

"I don't think in any way, shape, or form it shows that the people of Afghanistan support this; in fact, on the contrary," Mr Holbrooke said.

A day earlier, former ISI chief General Hamid Gul in an interview to the CNN claimed the

Taliban should be recognised as a national resistance movement and the US should hold talks with its leader Mullah Omar for peace in the region.

"This (the Taliban) is a national resistance movement. It should be recognised as such. They are Mujahideen of Afghanistan, as they were during the occupation by Soviet Union of Afghanistan. I think they are gaining momentum, gaining strength by the day. This should be now understood properly," Gul told Fareed Zakaria in an interview.

Only Mullah Omar can guarantee that there would be no threat to the US from this part of the world, he said. "There is only one man who can give the guarantee that there will be no terrorism exported from Afghanistan. Neither Karzai nor somebody else, not even Pakistani government, nobody can give you the guarantee," Gul said.

"One man who can give the guarantee is Mullah Omar because he symbolises today the Afghan resistance. He has to be talked to. Don't talk to Karzai. He's a puppet," Gul said in response to a question when asked what advice he would give to Commander of the US and Nato forces in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus.

### **Five killed in 2 Kabul suicide attacks**

Reuters  
08/10/2010

KABUL - Two suicide bombers killed up to five Afghans in an attack on a residential area of central Kabul on Tuesday, Afghan police and security sources said, only hours after a U.N. report detailed a sharp rise in civilian casualties.

One police source said one of the bombers had blown himself up at the gate of a compound used by foreigners, killing three Afghan passers-by and two security guards.

He said the second bomber had managed to get inside the compound before detonating an explosives-packed vest he was wearing but caused no further casualties.

A government security source said the bodies of at least three Afghans could be seen close to the site of the attack. The source said the target appeared to be an American company next to a guest-house but had no further details.

Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman, said four suicide bombers equipped with hand grenades, rockets and assault rifles had launched the attack.

"They have attacked a guest-house and a security company and fighting is going on," he told Reuters by telephone from an undisclosed location.

Police and government officials said there were no more than two attackers and that no foreigners were hurt.

A second police source said a guest-house used by foreigners had been the target but Interior Ministry spokesman Zemarai Bashary said that was not yet clear.

"There have been casualties but I do not know how many people," he told Reuters.

"It was a suicide attack. The situation is under control," Bashary said.

## CIVILIAN DEATHS

The attack came only hours after the United Nations mission in Afghanistan released a report that said civilian casualties had risen 31 percent in the first six months of the year, compared with the same period in 2009.

More than three-quarters of those casualties were blamed on the Taliban and other insurgents battling foreign forces and the Afghan government.

Violence across Afghanistan has reached its highest levels since the Taliban were ousted by U.S.-backed Afghan forces in late 2001, with the death toll for foreign troops also hitting record levels.

Some 150,000 foreign troops are squared off against the insurgents.

Commando-style attacks such as Tuesday's are not uncommon, especially against government and foreign targets in more remote areas in the south and east. In October 2009, five foreign U.N. staff were killed in a similar attack on a Kabul guest house.

A suicide bomber killed four Afghans in an attack apparently aimed at a convoy of foreign forces in Kabul on July 18, and insurgents embarrassed Afghan officials by firing rockets at a major peace conference in the capital in June.

In February, two suicide bombers killed 14 people and wounded 32 when they blew themselves up near Kabul's biggest shopping center and a hotel.

### **Security firms to be abolished at any cost: Omar**

Frozan Rahmani - Aug 10, 2010 - 13:14

KABUL (PAN): The Afghan government is serious about dissolving private security companies and a deadline for their closure would be announced soon, said a presidential spokesman on Tuesday.

"The dissolution of security firms is not a hollow slogan; it would happen at any cost," Waheed Omar told a press conference in Kabul.

"The president's stance on the firms is clear and he will soon set a deadline for their dissolution," he said, explaining the closure would take place through an organised process.

President Karzai urged the United States and its allies to stop supporting the private security companies which he accused of contributing to Afghanistan's security problem.

During a visit to the Afghan Civil Service Institute on Saturday, Karzai alleged private security contractors were operating parallel to Afghan security forces.

The government would try to minimise the impact of the companies' dissolution and their employees would be integrated into police, Omar promised.

"Without a process, there may be serious consequences," he said, adding the president had held talks with his allies and leaders of NATO and US forces and other organisations that contracted the security firms.

According to the Ministry of Interior, 27 foreign and 25 national private security firms with 40,000 personnel are currently operating in the country. Omar assured the dissolution process would be even-handed.

About the United Nations report on a 31 percent increase in civilian casualties in Afghanistan during the first six months of the current year, the presidential spokesman said the document was 'shocking.'

Omar said civilians were killed by both armed groups and international forces. Every civilian fatality was unacceptable to the government and people of Afghanistan, he remarked.

He urged anti-government elements not to kill their brothers and sisters at the behest of the enemies of peace and stability in Afghanistan. He also asked the multinational forces to pay greater attention to protecting civilians during operations.

On Wikileaks leaks, Omar said it had been proved that the war on terror could not produce the desired outcome in Afghanistan and that terrorist sanctuaries outside the country be targeted.

He also condemned the killing of 10 medical aid workers of the International Assistance Mission (IAM) in northwestern Badakhshan province earlier this week.

The government was trying to find the perpetrators and award them exemplary punishment, he said, welcoming the charity's decision to stay in Afghanistan.

About the killing of a widow by Taliban in northwestern Badghis province on the charge of adultery, he said the president was deeply saddened by her death.

## **UN urged to remove Afghans from blacklist**

Khalil Ahmad Fitri - Aug 10, 2010 - 20:13

KABUL (PAN): The Afghan National Security Council (ANSC) on Tuesday asked the United Nations for the removal of 47 names of Afghans citizens from its sanctions list.

The demand, which is in line with the decisions of June's Peace Consultative Jirga, is aimed to accelerate the process of reconciliation with the Taliban who renounce ties to the al-Qaeda network.

A statement from the ANSC asked the world body to consider the removal of the 47 individuals whose names had been sent to the Security Council after an investigation by security institutions and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In order to implement recommendations of the Peace Advisory Jirga, the government had taken another step to speed up the process of reconciliation and reintegration of the militants, the Presidential Palace.



It recalled the government had sent the names of 20 Afghans to the UN Security Council and they were later struck off the blacklist.

### **Reducing civilian casualties a priority for the US**

Lalit K Jha - Aug 11, 2010 - 10:55

WASHINGTON (PAN): The White House stressed that it is doing everything it can to protect the lives of civilians in Afghanistan but blamed much of the killings on the militants, a day after a UN report that said civilian casualties had shot up 31 per cent in the first half of this year.

"We are going to continue to do everything we can to reduce civilian casualties. This is something that is very important to General (David) Petraeus. It's been important to our mission over there," the White House deputy press secretary, Bill Burton, told reporters at a news conference.

"We are going to continue to make sure that the Afghan people know that we're committed to rooting out insurgency, dismantling Al Qaeda and doing it in such a way that is as safe as possible for the people of Afghanistan," Burton said.

However, he also said the Taliban and other militants were to blame for the majority of the casualties, not international forces. "The Taliban has been known to kill indiscriminately. If you look at what happened with those 10 aid workers that were killed; Americans died, Europeans died and Afghans died in what was a brutal and senseless attack," he said.

"It's because of those sorts of attacks that the Taliban does not have widespread support in the country of Afghanistan," Burton said.

The Pentagon spokesman, Geoff Morrell, echoed Burton's comments on Tuesday, saying that the militants were causing the majority of the civilian casualties. He pointed to a part in the UN report which said that insurgent-caused civilian casualties had increased 50 percent, while those caused by international forces had dropped 30 percent.

"So even while we're improving, the enemy, the Taliban, other terrorists are becoming more deadly. So for this counterinsurgency to work, we've got to protect all Afghans, not just from our inadvertent operations, but also from the Taliban themselves," Morrell told the MSNBC news channel.

"So we're working our darnedest to try to make sure we're protecting the population as a whole both from us inadvertently and from the Taliban," he said.

### **Human rights groups want Afghan names off WikiLeaks**

Jawid Hamim Kakar - Aug 11, 2010 - 17:43

KABUL (PAN): Human rights groups, including the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, have called on the online whistle blower WikiLeaks to censor the names of Afghan informants who they say could be at risk from Taliban reprisals.

Taliban leader Mullah Omar issued a directive recently, calling on his supporters to kill all Afghans, including women, who worked with foreigners or the Afghan government.

Over the past six months dozens of government officials and tribal and religious elders believed to be supporting the government have been assassinated.

The names of Afghan informants are included in about 70,000 previously classified military and intelligence logs that WikiLeaks released online and to three major media outlets last month.

They cover a period of the Afghan war from early 2004 until late 2009 and detail how western forces covered up civilian casualties, the role of Pakistan intelligence agents in supporting the Taliban and the presence of an assassination squad. WikiLeaks has said it plans to release another 15,000 previously unseen logs.

But human rights groups fear that the inclusion of the names, provinces and villages of Afghans helping the US and NATO could lead to reprisals attacks. They have urged the website's founder, Julian Assange, not to include anymore names of Afghans and to remove those already online. Nadar Nadari, a spokesman for the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, said WikiLeaks did not care about the lives of ordinary Afghans.

"They should not only remove the names of Afghans, but, in the future make sure no names of Afghans are published in any documents," he said.

The coalition of rights groups which sent Assange the letter includes Amnesty International, the Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict, the Open Society Institute and the International Crisis Group.

The US and NATO have also criticised WikiLeaks for releasing the documents saying they put at risk those Afghans who have been helping the military with information. According to A UN report released on Tuesday, civilian casualties shot up 31 percent compared to last year.

About 72 percent of the casualties were caused by insurgents, it said.

### **Analysts criticise Amnesty's call to prosecute Taliban**

Frozan Rahmani - Aug 12, 2010 - 16:47

KABUL (PAN): Amnesty International's demand that the Taliban and other insurgents be tried for war crimes is one-sided and impractical, analysts here said on Thursday.

The rights watchdog made the demand after a UN report showed that civilian casualties in the first half of this year had risen 31 percent compared to the same period last year.

The majority of incidents -- 76 percent -- were caused by the Taliban and other insurgents, while about 12 percent were blamed on US and NATO forces.

Waheed Muzhda, an Afghan political analyst, said it was unlikely the Taliban would be brought to court for their actions as the same crimes they have been accused of had also been carried out by people currently in parliament.

However, he would not name those MPs.

He said the call for the Taliban to be investigated comes at a time when the government is trying to reconcile with the Taliban and bring them into the mainstream; and such a demand would not help the status quo.

Nasratullah Stanakzai, a law professor at Kabul University, said international troops have also caused civilian casualties and should also be investigated.

If human rights are being violated by Taliban or international forces, both should be equally reprehended, he said.

Baryali Halali, a spokesman for the newly established Peace and Reconciliation Programme with armed opposition, said it was unlikely to affect the peace process.

The government would continue to pursue its plan to bring armed opposition groups back into the mainstream as this was the demand of all Afghans.

The Taliban have also rejected the Amnesty International claim as unrealistic.

## **UAE provides food for flood victims**

Abdul Fatah Yasir - Aug 12, 2010 - 15:48

KABUL (PAN): The United Arab Emirates on Thursday provided the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) with 30 tonnes of edibles for distribution to flood victims, an official said. The food items included flour, rice, ghee, dates, pulses, salt and sugar, said Fatima Gilani, the ARCS head. "These items will be distributed to those flood-hit people who have not yet received any relief in Kabul and nearby provinces."

She received the relief goods from UAE representative for Afghanistan's reconstruction, Matar Al-Kutbi, who promised continued support to the Afghans and the construction of a mosque at the ARCS main office.

The floods killed 122 people across the country, said Gilani, who added thousands of acres of crops had been destroyed in several provinces.

The victims are in dire need of assistance. "Every organisation and individual can help the victims through the Red Crescent Society," Gilani said. The 31,000 ARCS volunteers were ready to supply relief to victims across the country.

## **Taliban increasingly responsible for civilian casualties: US**

Lalit K Jha - Aug 12, 2010 - 15:52

WASHINGTON (PAN): The United States has accused the Taliban of causing more civilian casualties in Afghanistan than NATO and US forces and not taking responsibility for the consequences.

"If we tragically see civilian casualties, and there've been a couple of episodes in the last few days, we aggressively investigate," the state department spokesman, P J Crowley, said.

"If we're responsible, we freely admit that and we immediately interact with families of the village and make compensation for civilian casualties. That is certainly in contrast to the Taliban who are now increasingly responsible for civilian casualties and we see no comparable actions by the Taliban," he said.

A UN report this week showed that the number of civilian casualties those killed and wounded had jumped 31 percent this year compared to the same period last year. The insurgents were blamed for 73 percent of the casualties, an increase of 50 percent, while NATO and US troops were said to cause about 12 percent, a drop of 30 percent.

Crowley said that had been as the result of the more stringent rules of engagement imposed by Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the former US and NATO general, and by his successor, Gen. David Petraeus.

The Taliban have a different purpose, a different strategy and ultimately do not have the interest of the Afghan people at stake, Crowley said.

Meanwhile, Defence Secretary Robert Gates said six helicopters the US had sent from Afghanistan to Pakistan to help with the flood relief were returning to base and would be replaced by 19 new helicopters.

## **ISAF-fired rocket kills civilians in Helmand**

Zainullah Stanikzai - Aug 13, 2010 - 15:47

LASHKARGAH (PAN): Several civilians were killed and wounded by a rocket fired into a house by NATO-led troops in southern Helmand province, residents claimed on Friday. The rocket attack happened late Thursday when the Taliban assaulted foreign troops in the Baba Jee neighbourhood on the outskirts of the provincial capital, Lashkargah, resident Haji Ziauddin said.

He told Pajhwok Afghan News one warplane slammed a rocket into the house of village prayer leader Qari Obaidullah, killing seven members of his family. Only a woman survived the assault, he added.

A spokesman for the provincial governor acknowledged the civilian casualties in the Baba Jee area. However, Daud Ahmadi had no specific figures. He said a delegation had been sent to the scene to gather information about the incident.

Meanwhile, NATO said the troops sought close air support after they came under attack from the Taliban. The casualties resulted from the subsequent rocket strike, the alliance said, without giving an exact figure. The incident was under investigation, it added.

## **Geo-Strategic Headlines**

### **Karzai meets Kayani, Petraeus**

Pajhwok Report - Aug 9, 2010 - 17:51

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai met Pakistan Army chief, Gen. Parvaiz Ashfaq Kayani, and NATO Commander Gen. David Petraeus on Monday, his office said.

Kayani is visiting Kabul for a trilateral security meeting among Afghanistan, Pakistan and NATO, according to a statement from the Presidential Palace.

A week earlier, media reports suggested the Pakistan Army chief had offered to broker a deal between the Taliban and Kabul if Karzai closed down Indian consulates in Afghanistan.

But Karzai's office denied receiving such a proposal.

### **Iran to host regional summit on Afghanistan**

Javed Hamim Kakar - Aug 10, 2010 - 17:50

KABUL (PAN): Iran will soon host a regional summit on Afghanistan in which seven neighbouring countries will be invited, an Iranian official said on Tuesday.

Foreign Ministry spokesman, Ramin Mehman-Parast, told reporters in Tehran that the conference was part of Iran's efforts at countering drug smuggling, extremism and bringing stability and peace to the region.

Without providing a specific date for the summit, the official said if other nations, including the US, wanted to bring stability and peace to Afghanistan, they should support their efforts and avoid creating tension.

Last week, two trilateral summits, Afghanistan-Pakistan-Iran and Afghanistan-Iran-Tajikistan, were hosted by Tehran.

Iran has been trying to play a major role in Afghanistan, placing emphasis on a regional solution to the conflict.

Addressing the Iran-Tajikistan-Afghanistan summit on July 27 in Tehran, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called for a regional solution to the conflict. "The experience proves that the US and its allies have failed to overcome the regional difficulties as they failed in Iraq," Ahmadinejad said.

The Iranian foreign minister also stressed the need for a regional solution to the Afghan conflict during his address to the Kabul International Conference two months ago.

### **U.S. Role Evolves As Allies Leave Afghanistan**

NPR

08/10/2010

By Quil Lawrence

Amid the continuing violence in Afghanistan, the shape of the NATO alliance is changing.

At the beginning of August, Dutch troops left the restive province of Uruzgan, and Canadian soldiers appear set to depart next year. At the same time, the U.S. forces surging into Afghanistan are finding new ways to work with their NATO counterparts.

In Kunduz, German soldiers are notionally in command of the incoming American surge.

About 1,800 Dutch soldiers left Uruzgan province last week after a four-year mission. By the end of their time in Uruzgan, criticism of the Dutch practice of restrained use of force had turned to admiration from the U.S. military proponents of counterinsurgency, which emphasizes winning over the population to defeat the Taliban.

The Dutch public was not convinced, and when the prime minister attempted to extend the troops' commitment last winter, his government fell.

"If you ask the soldiers, everybody wants to stay here to ... finish the job," says Dutch Brig. Gen. Leo Beulen. "But it's also clear that if politics calls us home, we go home. There's no question about it."

Beulen is one of a few Dutch nationals who will stay on as part of the NATO staff in Kabul. He says that American troops will fill in the gap, joining Australian soldiers who will remain in Uruzgan.

### Reconciling The Rules Of Engagement

That's a pattern across Afghanistan, as some 30,000 additional Americans have arrived. In the south, Americans are relieving British troops who have spent five bloody summers in Helmand province. The same goes for Kandahar where the Canadians are expected to keep to their government's deadline to leave next year.

But dozens of nations still have troops in Afghanistan, and in some key areas they work differently from the Americans — issues as important as when to shoot and when not to. Beulen says this has not been a problem.

"The set of rules of engagement are quite clear and defined, so there is no difference between the rules of engagement. But some countries have national caveats on some of the rules of engagement, which are always more strict than the general rules of engagement," he says.

That may not be the case for long. Each country's specific rules about when and how to engage are classified, but the issue has been controversial of late, with some American troops complaining that they were being so restricted that they couldn't return fire when under attack.

With troops now integrating in more combat situations, Gen. David Petraeus, the new NATO commander, issued a clarification Sunday through his NATO spokesman, Brig. Gen. Josef Blotz, that the rules of engagement must be harmonized.

"This point is intended to ensure commanders apply the guidance consistently across the force, recusing the possibility that an overly cautious commander could hinder their troops' ability to defend themselves," he said.

### Hustling To Match U.S. Standards

And there have been other adjustments to make. The NATO standard maximum time for getting a medical evacuation helicopter to wounded soldiers is 90 minutes — the U.S. military standard is just one hour.

As American reinforcements have deployed, some of the other NATO partners have been hustling to match that standard. Maj. Parker Frawley, of the U.S. Army's 4th combat aviation brigade in Mazar-e-Sharif, described how the Norwegian medevac team in nearby Maimana moved its barracks closer to the airstrip and cut its preparation time in half.

"Once they learned we were coming out to Maimana, the Norwegians have shortened their notice-to-move time down to 15 minutes to match our standards, so they could truly team with our medevac guys," Frawley says.

But the integration is not without its pitfalls. Speaking informally, U.S. military officers can be harshly critical of many of the NATO partners in Afghanistan — for example, in the north, where the Taliban presence has grown rapidly over the past five years. American soldiers in that area are officially under German command, but the difference in resources is stark — the Americans bring many more helicopters and mine-resistant vehicles to the fight.

Still, the cooperation has its lighter moments. In a recent nighttime engagement in Kunduz, a German officer ordered his cannons to shoot illumination rounds over the heads of American troops to light their way. The Americans joked afterward that it was the first time a German had fired artillery in their direction since World War II.

### **Iran's regional conference pointless: analysts**

Rahmatullah Afghan - Aug 11, 2010 - 12:10

KABUL (PAN): A regional conference on Afghanistan to be hosted by Iran is just another way of Tehran exerting its influence in the country, several analysts said on Wednesday.

Iran on Tuesday announced it would host a regional meeting on stabilising Afghanistan. It did not give a date or say which countries had been invited, however the announcement comes just days after the second vice president made a trip to Iran.

However, some analysts say the conference is unlikely to break any new ground as it just an attempt by Iran to interfere in Afghanistan's domestic affairs and make problems for the West.

"Iran wants to create obstacles for America by holding this conference," Abdul Ghafoor Liwal, head of the Center for Regional Studies, said.

"As Iran has been working on a dangerous cultural intervention I do not trust that the conference would be held," he said, but he did not clarify the cultural intervention.

Even as the Iranian government is under pressure from the international community to give up its nuclear ambitions, it has been trying to undermine the West by meddling in Afghanistan's affairs, political science professor at Kabul University, Nasrulah Stanikzai, said.

He said the Afghans know the Iranian government very well and the regional conference was likely to be ineffective.

However, a professor of economics, Masoud, said Iran was trying to become a diplomatic broker in the region by hosting similar conferences. While Iran was using such conferences to its own benefit, Afghan officials should do likewise, he said.

Masoud also cautioned Afghanistan about relying too heavily on international or regional partners.

"Afghanistan's problems should be solved at the regional level. It has been proven that America and its allies failed to solve the problems in the region as they did in Iraq," Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said last week.

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, in a speech at the Kabul Conference in July, also insisted Afghanistan's conflict could only be solved at the regional level.



## Social Headlines

### Floods wreak havoc in several provinces

Pajhwok Report - Aug 7, 2010 - 12:43

KABUL (PAN): Scores of people were killed and injured and thousands of acres of crops destroyed by flash floods in three central and two eastern provinces, officials and residents said on Saturday.

Rain-induced floods killed 22 people and hundreds of livestock in different areas of Maidan Wardak. Eleven people were killed in Jalrez district, four in Nirkh and two in Chak, National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) Director Najibullah told Pajhwok Afghan News. Governor's spokesman, Shahidullah Shahid, confirmed the deaths, saying they had sent rescue teams to the affected districts after an emergency meeting on how to deal with the aftermath of floods.

Hazrat Janan, a member of the provincial council, said the floods killed 11 in Jalrez, six in Daimirdad, four in Nirkh and one in Chak districts. At least 30 bridges, 40 small dams and 300 animals were washed away.

Several routes in Jalrez district that link Kabul to Bamyan province had been blocked, he added. A hundred houses were destroyed, 400 partially damaged and more than 3500 acres of agriculture land and orchards washed away.

Mohammad Azim, a Nirkh district resident, said: "I haven't seen such a flooding in the last 40 years. The floods happened when people were fast asleep; streets were full of water when they woke up."

In central Logar, the overnight floods, triggered by three hours of heavy rain, swept away more than 100 houses and thousands of acres of farmland. Five children have been missing in Pul-i-Alam and Khushi districts.

Din Muhammad Darwesh, speaking on behalf of the Logar governor, said Padakhwab Shana, Hesarak, Porak, Shahi Kala, Baboos, Wazir Kala, Bari and Shahghasi villages were the worst-hit. Seventy houses collapsed and 65 cattle heads were swept away by floodwaters that also destroyed thousands of acres of onion, beans and vegetables.

Saifullah, a resident of Hesarak village, said "The intensive floods damaged 30 houses and washed away 150 acres of farmland, after floods came to our village; all the villagers left for safe areas and spent all the night outside their houses".

ANDMA Director Shujauddin Shuja said the floods caused serious losses in the province. Teams have been sent to the affected areas to survey the damages and the number of casualties.

Over the past week, floods killed six people, including two women, in Khushi, Kharwar, Muhammad Agha and Baraki Barak districts.

Abdul Jamil, a resident of the Guzrargah area in Kabul, said "On Friday night we heard warnings of floods over Mosque loudspeaker at 9pm. At midnight people were informed the floods have changed their route. But two hours later, the area was inundated. No organisation has given us relief so far."

In eastern Nuristan province, a whole village called Malokia was destroyed and 22 people were killed. Dozens of houses were wiped out, including the Waigal district office complex, Governor Jamaluddin Badar told Pajhwok Afghan News.

Elsewhere in the eastern province of Nangarhar, 200 houses were devastated in Hesarak and three other districts, where rescue teams are providing assistance to the victims. Afghan Red Crescent official, Muhammad Iqbal Saeed said they had no reports about the number of casualties.

### **Al-Azhar University to open branches in Afghanistan**

Abdul Qadir Siddiqui - Aug 9, 2010 - 18:38

KABUL (PAN): The Egypt-based Al-Azhar University would open its branches in Nangarhar and Herat province of Afghanistan and award 200 scholarships to Afghan students every year, an official said on Monday.

Speaking to Pajhwok Afghan News, a spokesman for the Department of Education in Nangarhar, Gul Agha Ahmadi, said the promise was held out to Education Minister Dr. Ghulam Farooq Wardak during his recent visit to Egypt.

A 1000-year-old university, Al-Azhar is considered the largest centre of Islamic teachings in the Muslim world. Students from different countries are acquiring education at the university.

Ahmadi said Egyptian authorities had promised they would provide 200 scholarships to Afghan students every year. Earlier, he added, the university was giving only 25 scholarships to Afghan students.

### **US backs women's role in peace drive**

Abdul Qadir Siddique - Aug 10, 2010 - 17:08

KABUL (PAN): The US ambassador-at-large for global women's issues Tuesday supported demands of Afghan women that their rights should be protected in the reconciliation process. Melanne Verwee, who met in Kabul a number of women, including representatives of rights organisations, said they wanted the peace process to be carried forward in a way that did not undermine women's rights.

Afghan Red Crescent Society head, Fatima Gilani, said Afghan women were desirous of peace and stability in their country. But the peace should not be brought at the cost of their rights, she stressed.

She pledged continued efforts at protecting the rights of women. "But we will never act in contradiction to the Afghan constitution or Islam," Gilani explained.

Gilani also called for considering women's opinion in carrying forward the peace drive and they should be invited to discussions on the reconciliation issue.

Afghanistan's Human Rights Commission's representative, Suraya Subhrang, said all Afghans, including women, wanted peace and stability in the country. She added there should be no such programme as harmed women's rights.

"There should not be a situation where peace jirgas are held on the one hand and the Taliban hang women in public on the other," she said, referring to an incident three days ago in northwestern Badghis province, where the insurgents executed a woman on the charge of adultery.

"All those who respect the Afghan constitution and women's rights should be part of the reconciliation programme," said Subhrang, who declared the incident in Badghis a dangerous sign for women.

Ambassador Melanne Verveer praised the achievements made by Afghan women over the last nine years. She said the Afghan women had the ability to play an active role in the country's affairs and their participation in the peace process was a must.

### **Egypt to train Afghan midwives**

Zarghona Salehi - Aug 10, 2010 - 17:35

KABUL (PAN): With support from the United States, the number of midwives, who would receive training abroad, would increase from 2,600 to 6,000 over the next four years, the acting minister of public health said on Tuesday.

At a joint news conference with US Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues Melanne Verveer and Egyptian Ambassador Karim Sharaf, Dr. Suraya Dalil said 30 experienced midwives would attend the two-week programme in Alexandria, Egypt.

USAID's Midwifery Education Programme, which has trained over half of all midwives in Afghanistan, was expanded this week with the announcement of an advanced training and study tour co-sponsored by the Egyptian government.

In 2004, USAID assisted the Ministry to develop a curriculum for the midwife programme, a two-year course designed to provide women from rural areas with professional midwifery skills. To date, this programme has trained 1,467 midwives, 55 percent of all practicing midwives in Afghanistan.

"Few programmes sponsored by the United States government have had such a profound impact on Afghan women and their health as the Midwifery Education Programme," said Ambassador Verveer.

"The participation of Egypt and the Suzanne Mubarak Centre for Women's Health and Development demonstrates the universal need to treat maternal care from a global front," she added.

Verveer said US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had announced at last month's Kabul Conference \$37 million in assistance for educating Afghan midwives.

Sharaf said his country was pleased to share its experiences and successes in promoting safe motherhood and child care for the benefit of the people of Afghanistan.

The Ministry of Public Health estimates more than 2,400 midwives have been trained in Afghanistan, up from 436 in 2002. Officials say at least 10,000 additional midwives will be needed by 2015 to fill current and anticipated workforce gaps.

Saleha Hamnawaz Zada, secretary-general of Midwives Association, said midwives from Khost, Paktia, Zabul, Helmand and Nuristan provinces were unable to participate in the training because of security concerns.

### **344 police complete training**

Basher Ahmad Naadem - Aug 12, 2010 - 18:10

KANDAHAR CITY (PAN): Hundreds of police officials completed a six-week training course at the Kandahar Police Training Centre on Thursday, an official said.

As many as 344 officials received the professional training from local and foreign mentors, said Gen. Nasrullah Zarifi, commander of the Training Centre.

He hoped the security situation would improve and problems of people would be resolved if the officials acted the way they were trained.

The general thanked the two Australian generals who trained the policemen. Zarifi called on the graduates to work for restoring people's trust in the police force.

### **Statistics show more Afghan women attempting suicide**

ABC News, AU

08/12/2010

By Joanna McCarthy for Radio Australia

Government statistics in Afghanistan have raised concerns that a growing number of Afghan women are attempting suicide.

The government says every year about 2,300 women or girls attempt to kill themselves, mainly due to mental illness, domestic violence and poverty.

Rachel Reid, Afghan analyst from Human Rights Watch, has told Radio Australia's Connect Asia program there are a range of issues facing women in Afghanistan.

"There are extraordinarily high levels of child-enforced marriage, domestic violence, violence against women generally and huge cultural, social taboos on women seeking help when they've got problems," she said.

"So I have interviewed women in burns hospitals in Kabul who have tried to kill themselves and failed and talked to them about what drove them to it and there will be a litany of awful stories of generally domestic abuse and a feeling of complete helplessness."

The report shows a several-fold increase in suicide attempt compared to 30 years ago, including more than 100 cases of self-immolation at Herat City Hospital in the past year, and an increase in the number of women using pharmaceuticals to kill themselves.

Ms Reid says despite this the report actually shows some promise.

"I was actually really encouraged the government was actually drawing attention to this and the

government was being actually quite spot-on in terms of what was driving women to this," she said.

"That in itself is quite a seachange over the past 10 years; that a government in Afghanistan would come out and say 'this is happening on a huge scale and we understand that what drives this' are quite difficult things to talk about."

The rights of Afghan women have been highlighted in the wake of a recent Time magazine cover in the US that featured the photo of an 18-year-old woman whose face had been mutilated by the Taliban.

Ms Reid says women's rights in Afghanistan are not just about the attitudes of the Taliban, but governments need to be aware of the attitudes of the Taliban towards women if they are looking towards a political settlement.

"In terms of Afghan women's prospects they are pretty dismal at the moment," she said.

"They are already facing huge problems within their society and many of them pay a very heavy price in the conflict and desperately want it to end, but they also say that their rights might be sold out in hasty deals with the Taliban."

## **Afghan Clerics Seek Return to Strict Islamic Law**

Reuters

08/12/2010

By Sayed Salahuddin

KABUL - Afghanistan's largest gathering of clerics, who met to discuss reconciliation with the Taliban, has called for the revival of strict Islamic law as the country seeks ways to win militants away from a growing insurgency.

About 350 of the Islamic clerics, or ulema, met for three days this week, the meeting ending with a declaration calling on President Hamid Karzai to enact sharia, or Islamic law, including punishments such as stonings, lashing, amputation and execution.

"The lack of implementation of sharia hodud (punishment) has cast a negative impact on the peace process," said a 10-point resolution issued after the meeting.

"We the ulema and preachers of Afghanistan ... earnestly ask the government not to spare any efforts in the implementation of sharia hodud."

The resolution, seen by Reuters, was sent to Karzai's government.

The ulema have a long-standing and deep influence in traditionally conservative Afghanistan and have often stepped in to back uprisings or been used to bolster past governments.

The head of a government council of religious leaders, separate to the gathering this week, has been asked to find ways to make peace with the Taliban after almost 10 years of war since the militants were ousted by U.S.-backed Afghan forces.

The head of that government council, Mawlavi Qiyamuddin Kashaf, attended the meeting of clerics and scholars this week, which included representatives from both the majority Sunni Muslim sect and minority Shi'ites.

"This (gathering) was very new for the peace efforts and the biggest yet. They will go and preach for peace in their respective regions," Kashaf told Reuters on Thursday.

However, there has so far been no reaction from Karzai's government to the council's resolution.

After years of conflict in Afghanistan, Karzai has sought to soften perceptions of his deeply religious country through programs such as moderate Islamic schools.

But at the same time he has been pushing reconciliation with the Taliban as violence continues to rise, raising concerns among some of his backers in the West.

Karzai called a major tribal "peace gathering" in June to win support for his plan to offer an amnesty, cash and job incentives to Taliban foot soldiers while arranging asylum for top figures in a second country and getting their names struck off a U.N. and U.S. blacklist.

## NOTORIOUS

The Taliban were notorious for their harsh punishment of offenders during their rule from 1996 to 2001 and staged public stonings, floggings, amputations and executions.

In a reminder of their harsh rule, a woman received dozens of lashes before she was publicly executed by a Taliban commander in a remote district of northwest Badghis province this week, officials have said.

The clerics' resolution also urged foreign forces, who number more than 140,000, to stop unnecessary air strikes and searching of Afghans' homes.

While military deaths have reached record proportions this year, Afghan civilians bear the brunt of the conflict and civilian casualties have long been an irritant to Karzai's government and its backers in the West.

Such concerns have led to a tightening of tactical directives twice in the past year, under the former head of NATO and U.S. forces, General Stanley McChrystal, and his successor General David Petraeus in June.

The council also pushed for a crackdown against corruption -- one of the major Western complaints against Karzai's government -- and social immorality and "cultural invasion."

The latter two are indirect references to the airing of immodest Indian and Western songs and films by the growing number of private cable and satellite television networks in Afghanistan. Such entertainment was banned under the Taliban.

### **Several hurt in Kochi-Hazara clash**

Abasin Zaheer - Aug 13, 2010 - 15:01

KABUL (PAN): Amid conflicting claims of casualties, a fierce clash is ongoing between members of Kochi and Hazara communities in the 13th police district of Kabul, officials said on Friday.

Qurban Ali Fasihi, a representative of the Behsud people, confirmed the fighting erupted at 9am. The clash was still in progress as of 2pm, he said, adding one Hazara had been killed and more than a dozen others were wounded.

Several armed Kuchis, living in the neighbourhood over the past two months, have been involved in robberies and harassment of Hazaras, Fasihi alleged.

He assailed the Kochis for forcibly occupying the properties of their opponents. They had even encroached on Hazara graveyards, he continued.

But a parliamentarian from the nomadic tribe, rejecting Fasihi's views, accused the Hazaras of destroying more than 50 Kochi houses. Eight members of his tribe had been wounded, Mullah Tarakhel said. "I'm trying along with other Kochi elders to end the clash."

But deputy police chief of Kabul, Brig. Gen. Khalilullah Dastyar, said that only three people had been injured from both sides. The injured, currently under treatment at a local hospital, were in a stable condition, he explained.

## **Economical Headlines**

### **Bumper pistachio crops this year in Samangan**

Muhammad Barat - Aug 7, 2010 - 18:53

AIBAK (PAN): Pistachio farmers in northern Samangan province have had a bumper crop, harvesting 900 tonnes of the nut compared to just eight tones last year, an agricultural official said on Saturday.

Good weather was behind the increase, said Noor Muhammad, agriculture promotion head of the provincial agriculture, livestock and irrigation department.

He said a harsh winter meant the harvest last year was just eight tons, while this year it had reached 900 tons.

However, the price of the nut, beloved among Afghans, has risen.

Noor Muhammad said a kilogram of pistachios was priced at \$20, earning \$3 million in revenue for the government.

"I've earned 15,000 afghani by selling 210 kilograms of pistachio," said a farmer, Abdul Hameed.

A pistachio trader, Abdul Rahim, said that last year the price of one kg of pistachios was 500 afghani while this year, you had to pay 950 afghanis.

He blamed the government for paying no attention to finding good markets or establishing processing and packing plants.

He said some Indian companies buy pistachios from the province for a very low price, process in their own country and sell to American and European markets as Indian products.

Director of Samangan agriculture department, Abdul Razzaq Rahimi, said the department was planning to build a storage facility for pistachios.

He acknowledged the lack of a good market system and no factories were problems. However, he said there were no plans to address this.

Samangan is the second largest pistachio producing province in the country after northwestern Badghis province.