

Bussiness and Politics in Muslim World

Afghanistan This Week

Report # 140

Week: 2-8 October, 2010

Mohammad Amin

Business and Politics in Muslim World
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Political Headlines Summary

Hundreds of candidates referred to ECC

KABUL(PAN): Hundreds of parliamentary poll candidates, who allegedly spent more money on electioneering than allowed under the relevant law, have been referred to the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC), an official said on Thursday.

Afghans blame US for instability

KABUL (PAN): Many Afghans, irked by civilian casualties, accuse the Western states of supporting the insurgents to justify their continued presence in war-devastated Afghanistan, an international group said on Thursday.

ECC probes 250 complaints

KABUL(PAN): The Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) on Thursday said it had investigated 250 objections about irregularities in last month's parliamentary election, saying some of the complaints could affect poll results.

Come to negotiating table, Karzai asks rebels

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai on Thursday inaugurated the newly-created High Peace Council, reiterating his call for the Taliban insurgents to come to the negotiating table.

Preliminary poll results delayed

KABUL (PAN): The announcement of preliminary results from last month's parliamentary election has been postponed for a week, a senior official said on Tuesday.

Incoming parliament seen as weak

KABUL (PAN): Some political experts and analysts believe the incoming Wolesi Jirga, lower house of parliament, would be a weak legislative body, packed with unprofessional and inexperienced people.

Nepotism in contracts for projects alleged

LASHKARGAH (PAN): Owners of reconstruction companies in southern Helmand province on Monday accused donors and the Afghan government of nepotism in awarding contracts for projects.

Votes from 141 polling centres voided

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8 private security firms dissolved so far

KABUL(PAN): Eight private security firms had dissolved so far in compliance with President Hamid Karzai's decree, a presidential spokesman said on Sunday.

Top officials accused of vote fraud

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (PAN): Governors and other high-ranking government servants have been accused of fraud and interference in last month's parliamentary elections in northern Afghanistan, an official said on Sunday.

3,800 complaints filed with EEC

HERAT CITY (PAN) More than 50 percent of objections filed with the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) could affect results from several polling sites, an official said on Sunday.

MPs call for enforcement of law

KABUL (PAN): The Wolesi Jirga, or lower house of parliament, on Saturday asked the government to implement as soon as possible a law protecting the rights of people with disabilities and families of martyrs.

US senator calls for supporting ANA

WASHINGTON (PAN): A top US lawmaker indicated on Friday Congress would prefer to help sustain the Afghan National Army (ANA) in the long run, something that he described as a better option than having American troops in the war-torn country.

Kunduz governor among a dozen killed in blast

KUNDUZ CITY (PAN): The governor of northern Kunduz province, Muhammad Omar, who had survived a series of assassination attempts, was among a dozen people killed in a massive bomb blast at a mosque in northern Takhar province on Friday, officials said.

Explosives smuggled into Nimroz from Iran

KABUL (PAN): Iranian officials have acknowledged the explosives seized in southeastern Nimroz province had been smuggled from that country, an Afghan foreign ministry official said on Thursday.

UN 'hid rights abuses in Afghanistan'

PressTV: The United Nations has been reportedly covering up widespread human rights violations in Afghanistan for decades for what it has described as "political reasons."

Geo-Strategic Headlines Summary

Conditions in Afghanistan unsatisfactory: Obama

WASHINGTON (PAN): US President Barack Obama has told the Congress conditions on the ground in Afghanistan remains "unsatisfactory" in the realm of security and governance, even though there has been some silver lining of late due to positive developments.

Don't cross red line, US asks Karzai govt

WASHINGTON (PAN): Extending its full support for the Karzai government's negotiations with the Taliban insurgents in a bid to end the war, the Obama administration has cautioned Kabul not to cross the red line set in this regard.

Estonia offers e-governance help

KABUL (PAN): The Estonian government has offered cooperation with Afghanistan in improving its e-governance project, the Presidential Palace said on Tuesday.

Afghan-US strategic partnership deal by year end

WASHINGTON (PAN): (PAN): President Hamid Karzai and his American counterpart Barack Obama have agreed to conclude an Afghan-US strategic partnership deal by year end, the White House said on Tuesday.

Japan assures continued support

KABUL (PAN): A top Japanese diplomat assured on Sunday his country would continue to support Afghanistan and translate all aid pledges into action.

Security focus shifts to north

KABUL (PAN): Afghan and NATO-led soldiers would increase their focus on the north, where insurgents including foreigners have intensified their activities, a defence ministry spokesman said on Sunday.

Foreigners not hitting terror centres: Karzai

KABUL (PAN): NATO-led foreign soldiers in Afghanistan are not targeting real militant safe havens, with the result that the security situation in the country remains far from satisfactory, President Hamid Karzai has said.

Karzai takes swipe at foreign presence

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai said on Saturday foreign forces were in Afghanistan to ensure security in their own countries and would leave one day when they saw no benefit in staying here.

'Afghan, Pak officials hold secret talks'

PressTV: Officials from Afghanistan and Pakistan are conducting "secret talks" reportedly mediated by the United Arab Emirates.

Obama: No shift in Afghan war strategy

PressTV: US President Barack Obama has told congressional leaders that he does not intend to change his strategies in Afghanistan or Pakistan.

Lack of Coordination, the Main Reason for Instability in the North

ToloNews: Lack of coordination between Afghan and foreign forces has made it possible for the anti-government militants to increase their activities, said the governor of Balkh.

Afghan Civilians, Target of Foreign Forces

ToloNews: Targeting Innocent Afghan civilians is a new approach followed by some rogue foreign soldiers and the consequences have been a surge in hatred toward foreign troops

Australian PM Visits Afghanistan

ToloNews: The Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard met with the Afghan president Hamid Karzai on a visit to Afghanistan on Saturday night.

Pakistan Floods Hinder Food Aid Delivery to Afghanistan: UN

ToloNews: The World Food Programme of the UN said Monday that recent Pakistan floods have hampered food aid to Afghanistan

Economic Headlines Summary

Afghan traders encounter problems in Pakistan

KABUL (PAN): Afghan traders are facing numerous problems in neighbouring Pakistan after devastating floods hit the neighbouring country two months back, an official said on Monday.

Food prices double in Afghanistan

PressTV: The floods in Pakistan, which is Afghanistan's main source of food products, have caused a considerable increase in the price of foodstuff in Afghanistan.

Social Headlines Summary

Declaration on inclusive education adopted

KABUL (PAN): The Afghan Ministry of Education organised the first-ever National Conference on Inclusive and Child-Friendly Education, the United Nations mission in Kabul said on Wednesday.

Religious scholar shot dead in Kandahar

KANDAHAR CITY (PAN): Gunmen shot dead a religious scholar --- the 50th this year -- in a mosque during Friday prayers in this provincial capital of southern Kandahar province, the spiritual home of the Taliban, an official said.

Political Headlines

Hundreds of candidates referred to ECC

by [Farid Ahmad](#) on 7 October, 2010 - 18:22

KABUL(PAN): Hundreds of parliamentary poll candidates, who allegedly spent more money on electioneering than allowed under the relevant law, have been referred to the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC), an official said on Thursday.

With the electoral watchdog still looking into a variety of complaints, poll runners overshot the campaign spending limit in 22 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, a spokesman for the Independent Election Commissions (IEC) told Pajhwok Afghan News.

Noor Muhammad Noor said contenders violating the election law had been divided into three categories. Those in the first and the second categories spent more money than allowed. Candidates in the third category failed to submit expenditure reports to IEC, he disclosed.

"Similarly, 154 candidates received illegal campaign funds, 38 exceeded the legally permissible spending limit and 275 did not provide expenditure reports," explained the spokesman, who did not name anyone.

Afghans blame US for instability

by [Pajhwok Report](#) on 7 October, 2010 - 17:31

KABUL (PAN): Many Afghans, irked by civilian casualties, accuse the Western states of supporting the insurgents to justify their continued presence in war-devastated Afghanistan, an international group said on Thursday.

The Open Society Foundations, active in more than 70 countries to help build vibrant and tolerant democracies, warned global efforts at bringing stability to Afghanistan would fail if Afghan perceptions were ignored.

In a report titled *The Trust Deficit: The Impact of Local Perceptions on Policy in Afghanistan*, the organisation highlighted the erosion of Afghan confidence in international forces due to civilian casualties, abusive detention operations and a lack of accountability.

"While insurgents may be statistically responsible for a greater share of civilian casualties, many Afghans place equal or greater blame on international forces, in particular the US military," it added.

Erica Gaston, a human rights lawyer for Open Society Foundations and co-author of the report, said: "Though stories about international forces supporting insurgents or planting IEDs are often dismissed as conspiracy theories, they offer a reality check on just how strained the international community's position is in Afghanistan."

The world would find it difficult to implement some of its most ambitious strategies, such as reconciliation and reintegration, due to the trust gap, the report said, adding suspicions about the international community were further exacerbated by its support for local armed groups.

"Support for these groups often empowers warlords and criminal groups; leads to corruption and serious human rights abuses; and, in some cases, diverts international community resources to insurgents,"

The global fraternity was urged to address the policies that were feeding negative Afghan perceptions. The group wanted reconciliation talks to include a transitional justice mechanism that documented the suffering of victims.

ECC probes 250 complaints

by [Farid Ahmad](#) on 7 October, 2010 - 16:21

KABUL(PAN): The Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) on Thursday said it had investigated 250 objections about irregularities in last month's parliamentary election, saying some of the complaints could affect poll results.

The objections were received from Uruzgan, Zabul, Baghlan, Logar, Farah and Helmand provinces, said Shah Sultan Akifi, an ECC member. He added complaints included in the first category could affect the outcome.

Candidates accused of fraud in the election had the right to move the court of appeals against the allegations, Akifi said, adding the names of such contenders would be disclosed at an appropriate time.

The ECC has divided objections in three categories, with complaints in the first category likely to impinge on the outcome. Complaints in the second category would have no impact on the poll result, the official explained.

Nearly 4,000 objections have been filed so far with the ECC and investigations into the allegations were underway, he added.

Come to negotiating table, Karzai asks rebels

by [Frozan Rahmani](#) on 7 October, 2010 - 14:59

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai on Thursday inaugurated the newly-created High Peace Council, reiterating his call for the Taliban insurgents to come to the negotiating table.

Addressing the inaugural meeting of the 68-member council at the high-security Presidential Palace, Karzai said the independent body had been created to realize their countrymen's aspirations for peace and security.

Both the Afghan government and the international community supported the body and were ready for cooperating with its efforts at achieving its objectives, the president told the participants, including members and cabinet ministers.

"This week we are holding the council's inaugural session; we will decide on its leadership next week," Karzai said, adding: "I wish you success and I wish our hopes come true -- the hope for peace and stability in the country."

In early June, about 1,200 elders and influential people, who attended the Peace Advisory Jirga in Kabul, called for the creation of the body for peace parleys with Taliban and other insurgents.

On July 20, President Hamid Karzai also presented his reconciliation programme to representatives of 70 countries and international organisations at the International Kabul Conference. The proposal received overwhelming support.

Although Karzai said the council would act independently, a noted political analyst sounded skeptical about its mandate.

No organisation in Afghanistan was free, and the peace council was no exception, remarked Sayed Massoud, a professor at the Kabul University.

"And if it's not independent, the council cannot bring about peace. At best it can work for evolving a mechanism for talks." he said.

According to him, some members of the council are responsible for their country's problems. The professor did not name anyone.

The council includes former jihadi leaders, ex-Taliban officials, tribal elders and government officials.

Preliminary poll results delayed

by [Abasin Zaheer & Frozan Rahmani](#) on 5 October, 2010 - 19:33

KABUL (PAN): The announcement of preliminary results from last month's parliamentary election has been postponed for a week, a senior official said on Tuesday. Addressing a press conference, Independent Election Commission (IEC) chief, Fazal Ahmad Manawi, said initial results would be unveiled on October 17 instead of October 9.

In order to address complaints of fraud and election law violations during the September 18 vote, he said the outcome had been set back by a week.

When asked whether the delay would affect final results, which are due on October 30, Manawi replied: "Yes, it can."

Earlier in the day, Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) Public Relations Director Muhammad Farid Afghanzai told Pajhwok Afghan News the results might be delayed for one or two days. The ECC had so far received 3,800 complaints.

IEC spokesman, Ahmad Zia Rafat, said the process of investigating complaints would be completed before the announcement of the final results.

Manwai said votes from 339 polling centres would be recounted. Ballots from 227 polling centres have been declared void.

Allegedly involved in widespread fraud and irregularities, 142 candidates had been referred to the ECC, added the IEC head, who denied the allegations that some government officials and foreigners had been interfering in the panel's affairs.

He went on to dispel the impression that the commission was involved in changing results in exchange for money. "I can assure you that no one is allowed to meddle in our affairs."

Incoming parliament seen as weak

by [Farid Ahmad](#) on 5 October, 2010 - 18:50

KABUL (PAN): Some political experts and analysts believe the incoming Wolesi Jirga, lower house of parliament, would be a weak legislative body, packed with unprofessional and inexperienced people.

Just like the sitting lawmakers, new parliament members would be unaware of their constitutional role. The analysts blamed the relevant law, which "did not outline duties and responsibilities of MPs."

Professor of Law at Kabul University, Shehla Farid, said the conditions set forth in the Election Law for parliament candidates are easy to meet and no criteria had been set for legislators' qualifications.

The law states that everyone could nominate him/herself for parliament candidacy.

"Deficiencies in the Election Law have led to the fact that everyone, regardless of their knowledge about the parliamentary business, can run for election."

A legal expert, Abdul Sattar Saadat said the conditions for a parliamentary candidate were too lenient. A village council member is required to be literate, but there is no such condition for a Wolesi Jirga aspirant, according to him

Under the election law, everyone Afghan citizen, 25-year-old and not convicted of any crimes against humanity, could run for parliament. Saadat suggested the law should be amended because a strong legislature was vital for a country like Afghanistan.

He predicted differences would crop up among new house members, sooner or later.

They could also be at odds with the government and the political atmosphere could be bitterer than what had been seen over the last five years.

Shehla believed that people with bachelor's degrees in law, political science and sociology should be allowed to contest the parliamentary election.

She lashed out at poll contenders who chose not to run from their native provinces. The law should have a provision preventing this practice, she opined.

Deputy Head of Wolesi Jirga's Legislative Commission Abdul Khabir acknowledged the Law contained no condition for candidates in terms of qualifications. "Indeed the election law has many deficiencies."

Nepotism in contracts for projects alleged

by [Zainullah Stanikzai](#) on 4 October, 2010 - 21:06

LASHKARGAH (PAN): Owners of reconstruction companies in southern Helmand province on Monday accused donors and the Afghan government of nepotism in awarding contracts for projects.

A large number of reconstruction companies had been operating in the province, but projects were being granted to some particular firms, Haji Talib, director of a private construction company, alleged.

He said some firms, who managed to get contracts out of the country, were selling those contracts to other firms.

"The projects which change many hands are not good in quality, the companies involved in the projects also face problems in receiving payment," he added.

Owner of another company, Abdul Ali said, the nepotism in giving contracts to companies was affecting the quality of projects and earning a bad name for the government and the international community among people.

A Lashkargah resident, Muhammad Yaqub, said foreigners had been using most of foreign aid on their own security. "No mega project has so far been completed in Lashkargah," he added.

Due to low quality, some projects, including roads and buildings, had damaged soon after their completion, the resident said.

Governor Muhammad Gulab Mangal also confirmed the problem, saying he was trying to hand over contracts for development projects to Afghan companies based in the province. The handover of contracts to Afghan companies would help prevent corruption and the projects would be completed with good quality, he told Pajhwok Afghan News.

Votes from 141 polling centres voided

by [Frozan Rahmani](#) on 3 October, 2010 - 20:30

KABUL (PAN): The Independent Election Commission (IEC) on Sunday said votes cast in 141 polling centres during last month's parliamentary election had been invalidated. Votes from another 202 polling centres would be recounted on the basis of evidence of fraud, IEC chief, Fazal Ahmad Manawi, told a press conference in Kabul.

He said the commission decided today to invalidate votes from the 141 polling centres in different provinces and that the ballots had been excluded from the process of counting. Without saying how many votes had been declared void, he said they were working to separate fraudulent ballots from valid ones.

Partial returns have been released for 24 of the country's 34 provinces. Final results are expected at the end of October.

The IEC head said 45 candidates had been referred to the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) for alleged electoral fraud. He added there was also evidence of fraud committed by at least one provincial election chief.

Manawi asked the Ministry of Interior to arrest the government officials who helped an election candidate misuse state resources.

8 private security firms dissolved so far

by [Abasin Zaheer](#) on 3 October, 2010 - 20:05

KABUL(PAN): Eight private security firms had dissolved so far in compliance with President Hamid Karzai's decree, a presidential spokesman said on Sunday.

Addressing a press conference in Kabul, Waheed Omar said five big and three small domestic and international security companies had been closed since Karzai issued the ban a month back.

Minister of Interior Bismillah Muhammadi provided details to the president on the dissolution of the eight firms at a meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) today, Omar said, adding the companies included NCL, FHI, WA, XE, White Eagle and three other small entities.

According to the Ministry of Interior, 52 private security companies are operating in the country. They include 27 international and 25 local firms.

Omar believed the security situation had considerably improved since the launch of the dissolution process. Weapons received from the eight security companies would be shown to media on Wednesday, he promised.

Omar rejected as baseless a report published in a Swiss newspaper on the human rights situation in Afghanistan. The newspaper accused the Afghan government of asking the UN not to publish the report.

The report covers the human rights situation in Afghanistan from 1979 when a Soviet-backed party overthrew a democratic government in Kabul, till date. It also carries the names of some high-profile figures in the Karzai administration.

Top officials accused of vote fraud

by [Zabihullah Ehsas](#) on 3 October, 2010 - 17:11

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (PAN): Governors and other high-ranking government servants have been accused of fraud and interference in last month's parliamentary elections in northern Afghanistan, an official said on Sunday.

An Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) spokesman told a news conference in Mazar-i-Sharif, capital of northern Balkh province, they had so far received 49 complaints of irregularities and fraud in the second post-Taliban parliamentary vote.

Two district police chiefs, a border police commander and a police post personnel had been accused of irregularities, Zia Rafat said, without naming anyone. One governor in the north and another in the west have been blamed for influencing the vote.

Additionally, a number of government officials had been blamed for anomalies committed since the beginning of electioneering until the election day, the ECC spokesman continued.

During the campaign period, he alleged, a governor, a deputy governor and a member of the provincial council had worked in support of their favourite candidates.

When asked how the ECC would punish the powerful individuals involved in poll rigging, Rafat said: "We are investigating the allegations and powerful people are not a hurdle in our way."

The ECC had fined 50,000 afghanis each of the 25 candidates in the north who did not reveal their expenses, he said. The list of the candidates, including 16 from Sar-i-Pul, from from Jawzjan and five from Samangan, was referred to the ECC by the Independent Election Commission.

Preliminary results from the election would be announced on Friday (October 8), while the process of investigating complaint would continue until the 22nd of the current month, the official said. He hinted the investigation could turn a winner a loser and vice versa.

3,800 complaints filed with EEC

by [Ahmad Quraishi](#) on 3 October, 2010 - 15:21

HERAT CITY (PAN) More than 50 percent of objections filed with the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) could affect results from several polling sites, an official said on Sunday.

The ECC would seriously consider the complaints, promised Ahmad Zia Rafat, a member of the electoral watchdog. He revealed 3,347 of the total complaints had been divided into three categories.

Rafat said 56 percent of the objections had been included in the first category. If substantiated, the complaints could impinge on the election outcome from polling centres, he told a news conference in Herat City.

The Independent Election Commission had referred 156 candidates from Parwan, Jawzjan, Samangan, Sar-i-Pul, Badakhshan, Kunduz and Laghman provinces to the ECC, the spokesman continued. They will be fined for violating the election law.

In Herat, where 26 people were arrested on the charge of fraud on the election day, 325 complaints -- 180 of them placed in the first category -- have been registered. Two district governors, two district police chiefs, one crime branch chief and a municipality official used governmental resources in the province.

Without naming anyone, the ECC spokesman said complaints had also been filed against a sitting minister.

MPs call for enforcement of law

by [Abasin Zaheer](#) on 2 October, 2010 - 17:19

KABUL (PAN): The Wolesi Jirga, or lower house of parliament, on Saturday asked the government to implement as soon as possible a law protecting the rights of people with disabilities and families of martyrs.

Speaker Yunus Qanuni told Saturday's session the house had approved the law with a two-thirds majority a year back, but it had not been enforced so far.

Under Article 94 of the constitution, if the president disagrees with a piece of legislation, he has to reject it with reasons within 15 days. If the period ends or the house passes a piece of legislation with a two-thirds majority, the law is considered approved.

But Minister of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and the Disabled Amina Afzali, who was summoned to the house to brief lawmakers on the non-implementation of the law, said the process was yet to be completed.

She said they were unable to enforce the law as it had not been formally sent to the Ministry of Justice by the council of ministers for publication in the statute book.

The minister added the issue had been raised several times at cabinet meetings. The council promised its publication in the statute book during the ongoing week, she continued.

Afzali explained her ministry started providing assistances to the families of martyrs and people with disabilities soon after the parliament approved the law.

According to head of the parliamentary commission for martyrs and the disabled, Muhammad Asim, the minimum salary for their families stood at 1,500 afghanis and the maximum at 14,000 in line with pay and grade law. But the families are currently receiving 550 to 650 afghanis a month.

A lawmaker from northern Takhar province, Habiba Danish, complained the families were not receiving even that meagre amount in time. She said the problem was more acute in provinces.

Afzali confirmed the problem, saying efforts were underway to provide the families with bank cards to receive their stipends without any problem.

Another MP from northern Kunduz province alleged the ministry was plagued by corruption. Shukriya Paikan said ministry officials had registered in their names land plots meant for distribution to families of martyrs and the disabled.

Afzali said the claim would be investigated and those found responsible for the wrongdoing referred to judicial organs.

US senator calls for supporting ANA

by [Pajhwok Correspondent](#) on 2 October, 2010 - 11:31

WASHINGTON (PAN): A top US lawmaker indicated on Friday Congress would prefer to help sustain the Afghan National Army (ANA) in the long run, something that he described as a better option than having American troops in the war-torn country.

"We're going to be there and should be there for a long time, with some military capability by the way, focusing on Special Forces and a few other parts of it. But this is not a rush to exits. It's got to be a clear statement to Afghanistan about their responsibility," Senator Carl Levin said.

Speaking at the Council on Foreign Relations, a Washington-based think tank, he said:

"In terms of the cost, maintaining the Afghan army is such a tiny part of the cost of maintaining a hundred thousand troops in Afghanistan ... I think it will be seen by Congress as good value over a long period of time."

Look at how long the US army had stayed in various parts of the world, including Korea, at a much greater cost, the senator said the value of supporting Afghan security forces would be seen as something that was clearly worth the support.

Levin alleged despite sporadic attempts to root out corruption, it remained deeply embedded in the Afghan government and police.

Kunduz governor among a dozen killed in blast

by [Habibur Rahman Sherzai & Wahidullah](#) on 8 October, 2010 - 15:28

KUNDUZ CITY (PAN): The governor of northern Kunduz province, Muhammad Omar, who had survived a series of assassination attempts, was among a dozen people killed in a massive bomb blast at a mosque in northern Takhar province on Friday, officials said. Another 20 people were wounded in the explosion during Friday prayers at the Spinghar mosque in Taluqan, the provincial capital, where the governor regularly attended Friday prayers, Faiz Muhammad Tawheedi, the governor's spokesman, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

It was a pre-planted bomb which exploded when a large number of people, including Omar, were offering Friday prayers.

A resident, Haji Muhammad Hakim, said he saw the dead bodies of the governor, the prayer leader and a tribal elder on the mosque floor.

"Prayers were ongoing when the massive explosion that shook the mosque took place", he added.

The worshippers escaped, but came back to help the wounded, the resident said. "There were stains of blood and human flesh scattered all around," he added

Eng. Omar was resident of Takhar province.

There was no claim of responsibility for the blast.

Afghan officials are prime targets for the Taliban and other militant groups that have instituted an assassination campaign against people who work with the Afghan government or NATO forces.

On September 28, a suicide bomber killed a deputy provincial governor and five others in Ghazni province. The bomber rammed a motorised rickshaw loaded with explosives into

a convoy taking deputy governor Khazim Allayar to his office in Ghazni city. His son, a nephew, a bodyguard and two civilians also were killed.

Takhar has been the scene of escalating violence amid intensified military operations by NATO and Afghan forces in recent days.

Explosives smuggled into Nimroz from Iran

by [Abasin Zaheer](#) on 7 October, 2010 - 17:25

KABUL (PAN): Iranian officials have acknowledged the explosives seized in southeastern Nimroz province had been smuggled from that country, an Afghan foreign ministry official said on Thursday.

The explosives weighing 19 tonnes were captured by security officials in Zaranj, Nimroz's capital, from a container on Thursday.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Ahmad Zahir Faqiri told a press conference in Kabul the Iranian authorities had admitted the explosives had been brought to Nimroz through smuggling routes from Iran.

Nimroz deputy police chief, Musa Rassouli, told Pajhwok Afghan News police had arrested a trader who imported the container. The detainee was under interrogation, he added, revealing the explosives were stashed in boxes marked "food, toys and kitchenware."

Faqiri also briefed reporters about Foreign Minister Zalmay Rassoul's participation in the 65th United Nations General Assembly in New York. Rassoul, during his meetings with foreign counterparts on the sidelines of the assembly, had insisted on continued international assistance to the war-torn country.

Faqiri said Iraq and Brazil were expected to open their embassies in Kabul soon. He hoped diplomatic relations with the two countries would see a considerable boost with the opening of embassies.

He informed the Pakistani cabinet had approved the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement. Under the deal, he explained, Afghan traders would be able to supply their goods to every city of the neighbouring country.

The pact also allowed Afghan traders to transfer their goods to India through the Wagah border crossing in Punjab province.

UN 'hid rights abuses in Afghanistan'

Sat Oct 2, 2010 7:25PM

PressTV: The United Nations has been reportedly covering up widespread human rights violations in Afghanistan for decades for what it has described as "political reasons."

The Swiss newspaper *Le Temps* said the UN has been receiving reports of human rights abuses in Afghanistan from April 1978 until December 2001.

The rights violation reports, however, have never been published for what the UN called political reasons.

"The famous 'mapping report', which was finalized in December 2004 after a year of work, was supposed to be published in January 2005," the newspaper said.

"It was not and, after a succession of other reports, was forgotten," the report added.

The documents accuse the Soviets, American forces and Taliban militants of torture, summary executions, mass rape and using child soldiers during war time.

Sources said the report has been kept secret by the UN since 2005 at the request of Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

The US invaded Afghanistan with the aim of toppling the Taliban regime and dismantling the al-Qaeda network.

However, nine years after the start of war statistics show that civilians have been the main victims of violence in Afghanistan, particularly in the country's troubled southern and eastern provinces.

Geo-Strategic Headlines

Conditions in Afghanistan unsatisfactory: Obama

by [Pajhwok Correspondent](#) on 7 October, 2010 - 10:54

WASHINGTON (PAN): US President Barack Obama has told the Congress conditions on the ground in Afghanistan remains "unsatisfactory" in the realm of security and governance, even though there has been some silver lining of late due to positive developments.

But in his six-monthly report to lawmakers, the president expressed satisfaction over the progress made by Afghan National Army (ANA) and police in recent years.

In his 27-page declassified portion of the report, obtained by Pajhwok Afghan News, he said Afghan forces were on track for planned growth and Afghan public perception of their performance was increasing.

"Nonetheless, challenges remain. The ANSF are generally not yet capable of providing necessary security without substantial security support," the report added. District-by-district assessment data shows only minor positive change has occurred.

It said the capacity of the Afghan government to serve the people and function with limited international support remained unsatisfactory, but progress was there, albeit temporarily. "This progress is a result of the steps that the Afghan Government made toward good governance."

The Afghan government's institutional capacity was improving slowly, but there were still key impediments to its effectiveness at the national, provincial and local levels, the report noted.

While Afghan-Pakistani military-to-military relations improved, there was only modest improvement in diplomatic relations, according to the document, which criticised the Pakistan military for not directly combating the Taliban and al-Qaeda in North Waziristan.

"In South Waziristan, the Pakistan military continued to conduct small-scale operations against those militants who did not flee in late 2009," the report recalled. "But the military largely stayed close to the roads and did not engage against those militants who returned after fleeing into North Waziristan."

From March to June, the report said, the Pakistani Army "continued to avoid military engagements that would put it in direct conflict with Afghan Taliban or (al Qaeda) forces in North Waziristan. This is as much a political choice as it is a reflection of an under-resourced military prioritising its targets."

Don't cross red line, US asks Karzai govt

by [Lalit K Jha](#) on 7 October, 2010 - 10:39

WASHINGTON (PAN): Extending its full support for the Karzai government's negotiations with the Taliban insurgents in a bid to end the war, the Obama administration has cautioned Kabul not to cross the red line set in this regard.

The reconciliation effort and peace talks had to be an Afghan-led process, top US administration said. But they stressed any move towards a political settlement needed to

meet three conditions -- renunciation of Al Qaeda, shunning violence and adhering to the Afghan constitution.

"This is not something that we do with the Taliban. This is something that Afghans government has to do with people in Afghanistan. And we have always been supportive of that reconciliation," the White House press secretary said.

Robert Gibbs, commenting on a media report that the representatives of the Taliban and the Karzai government have begun high-level secret talks, said: "We have established our criteria in terms of what we would see as acceptable for those who might seek reconciliation."

Anyone who adopted those criteria: giving up violence, ending ties to Al Qaeda, and supporting the Afghan constitution and the rights inherent in it, relative to all segments of Afghan society, including women, could play a role in the future of Afghanistan," the State Department spokesman, PJ Crowley, told reporters at a separate news conference.

"In our discussions with President Karzai and the Afghan government, we have made clear that there are, in our view – and this is widely shared by the international community – certain red lines that we think are important," he added.

Crowley said the US was not interested in recreating something that it and the people of Afghanistan rejected during the 1990s. "But to those elements who are willing to accept the criteria that are shared by the Afghan government and Afghan people and by the international community, we support this process," the spokesman concluded.

Estonia offers e-governance help

by [Frozan Rahmani](#) on 5 October, 2010 - 18:17

KABUL (PAN): The Estonian government has offered cooperation with Afghanistan in improving its e-governance project, the Presidential Palace said on Tuesday.

The assurance was held out by Estonia's President Toomas Hendrik Ilves at a meeting with his Afghan counterpart Hamid Karzai in Kabul.

A statement from the palace said the two leaders agreed on an early meeting between officials of the two countries on how to better the Afghan e-governance project.

It added Karzai and Ilves also concurred on bilateral dialogue on further improving Afghanistan-Estonia ties. The host president hoped their 80-year-old relations would become stronger.

While briefing the visiting dignitary on Afghanistan's political, economic and security situation, Karzai commended the services of the 2,500 Estonian soldiers, operating within the ISAF framework.

Afghan-US strategic partnership deal by year end

by [Lalit K Jha](#) on 5 October, 2010 - 11:18

WASHINGTON (PAN): (PAN): President Hamid Karzai and his American counterpart Barack Obama have agreed to conclude an Afghan-US strategic partnership deal by year end, the White House said on Tuesday.

During a 30-minute secure video conference on Monday, Obama assured full support to Karzai's goal of completing the transition to an Afghan-led security responsibility by 2014.

"The two leaders spoke for 30 minutes and discussed a number of topics, including the strategic vision for long term US-Afghan relations, the recent parliamentary elections and regional relations," the White House said.

They agreed to continue routine engagements to refine a common vision and align efforts to support the Afghan leader's goal of completing the transition to Afghan-led security responsibility over the next four years.

"In doing so, both vowed to strive to conclude the US-Afghan Strategic Partnership Declaration by the year's end and support two Afghanistan-related themes at the NATO Summit in Lisbon in November: transition to Afghan lead and an enduring commitment to the Afghan people," the White House said.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Deputy National Security Advisor Tom Donilon, his Chief of Staff Pete Rouse and Lt. Gen. (R) Doug Lute participated in the conference from the White House, while US Ambassador Karl Eikenberry and General David Petraeus attended from Kabul.

Japan assures continued support

by [Pajhwok Report](#) on 3 October, 2010 - 21:05

KABUL (PAN): A top Japanese diplomat assured on Sunday his country would continue to support Afghanistan and translate all aid pledges into action.

Japan's Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Tadamichi Yamamoto held out the assurance at a meeting with President Hamid Karzai.

He pledged his country would spend \$5 billion on promoting agriculture, boosting security and counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan, the Presidential Palace said.

The special envoy, who called Afghanistan one of Japan's top foreign policy priorities, said Tokyo would continue to fund Afghan police salaries. He promised Japan would arrange training courses for the nascent force in Turkey.

Karzai hailed Japan as Afghanistan's longtime friend and urged it to cooperate with his administration in strengthening an ongoing peace process with militants.

According to a statement from the Presidential Palace, Yamamoto positively responded to Karzai's call. He said Tokyo would lend its weight to the reconciliation drive, just the way Kabul wanted.

Security focus shifts to north

by [Khawaja Basir Ahmad & Wahidullah](#) on 3 October, 2010 - 17:46

KABUL (PAN): Afghan and NATO-led soldiers would increase their focus on the north, where insurgents including foreigners have intensified their activities, a defence ministry spokesman said on Sunday.

At a joint news conference with ISAF spokesman Josef Blotz, Gen. Zahir Azimi said anti-government elements -- under pressure from security forces -- had extended their operations to the north from their strongholds in the south.

The general claimed the security situation in the south and east was improving and that focus would shift to the north. "Militants are unable to create a security situation in Kunduz," he assured.

He said the militants had launched a propaganda campaign in northern provinces after Afghan and NATO forces were deployed to the south and east for security of polling stations during last month's parliamentary elections.

But Kunduz Governor Eng. Muhammad Omar said that about 40 percent of rural areas in the province were being controlled by the Taliban. He told Pajhwok Afghan News the militants could easily move around in those areas.

However, Omar added airstrikes by NATO-led ISAF soldiers had weakened the militants, who no longer posed a serious threat. "ISI-backed fighters are trying to disturb security in Kunduz," the governor alleged, referring to Pakistan spy agency, Inter-Services Intelligence.

Omar called for equipping and training Afghan forces, saying they lacked the tools needed to root out the insurgents operating in his province. There were 1,000 Taliban fighters and 200 foreigners, including Pakistanis, Chechens, Uzbeks and Arabs, active in Kunduz, he said.

At the press conference, Azimi said the number of Afghan soldiers had gone up to 140,000. He hoped the army strength would reach 171,600 before the June 2011 deadline. He pointed out nearly 20,000 policemen were under training at various centres of the Ministry of Interior in Kabul and other provinces.

After the 2011 deadline, another 240,000 troops would be trained, boosting Afghan security forces' strength to 400,000 -- 240,000 soldiers and 160,000 policemen.

Currently, Afghanistan has a police force of 109,000.

For his part, ISAF spokesman Josef Blotz said about 45,000 foreign soldiers had been operating in the northern region. "Some are busy maintaining security and others training Afghan soldiers," he said.

ISAF soldiers had killed or captured 105 militants last month, he claimed. The militants killed in September included shadow governors for the northern provinces, group leaders, commanders and rebel facilitators," Blotz added. However, he did not provide further details.

Foreigners not hitting terror centres: Karzai

by [Javed Hamim Kakar](#) on 3 October, 2010 - 11:44

KABUL (PAN): NATO-led foreign soldiers in Afghanistan are not targeting real militant safe havens, with the result that the security situation in the country remains far from satisfactory, President Hamid Karzai has said.

The Presidential Palace in Kabul said on Sunday Karzai, at a meeting with Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard on Saturday night, highlighted Afghanistan's lingering security concerns.

He linked the problem to international troops' failure to eliminate terrorist sanctuaries and training centres in the region. "Similarly, the international community has not paid enough attention to training Afghan army and police."

Afghanistan's partners should focus on addressing these issues to enable the impoverished country to make progress on the security front, Karzai told the visiting dignitary, who also met Australian troops in central Uruzgan province.

Ms. Gillard reassured Karzai of her country's commitment to cooperating with the Afghan government in achieving its security, reconstruction and economic objectives, the Presidential Palace said in a statement.

While commending Canberra as one of Kabul's sincere friends, Karzai thanked the Australian government and people for their military and civilian aid to Afghanistan. As a result of their assistance, he acknowledged, a positive change had come to the lives of Uruzgan residents.

At a separate meeting, Gillard discussed with NATO commander Gen. Petraeus the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) strategy in Afghanistan. They conferred on plans for a transition to an Afghan-led security responsibility over the coming years. During a visit to the Australian military base in Tirinkot, the capital of Uruzgan, she reiterated Australia's commitment to the mission in Afghanistan. "As an Australian, we are very proud of our people for good reason," she said.

Of the 1550 Australian soldiers fighting the insurgents in Afghanistan within the ISAF framework, 21 have been killed since 2002. She had a meal and watched a football match with the troops.

Karzai takes swipe at foreign presence

by [Frozan Rahmani](#) on 2 October, 2010 - 18:53

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai said on Saturday foreign forces were in Afghanistan to ensure security in their own countries and would leave one day when they saw no benefit in staying here.

Karzai made the blunt remarks at a ceremony at the Presidential Palace in connection with promotions granted to 28 security officials from Ministries of Defence and Interior and National Directorate of Security (NDS).

While lashing out at the presence of international forces, he complained Afghans had been forgotten before the September 11 tragedy by the international community. He added they came to Afghanistan after the devastating assaults on the Twin Towers. The international forces used the fight against terrorism and slogans of helping Afghans and bringing democracy to the war-weary country as a pretext to stay put in Afghanistan, the president alleged.

During the 10-year jihad against the Soviet Union, foreigners supported mujahidin but once they realised the holy warriors were of no benefit to them, they cut off all links and did not balk at even closing their embassies in Kabul, Karzai recalled.

Before the eventual exit of foreign troops, Afghan police and army should prepare to take responsibility for defending the nation and protecting borders, he said. "Unfortunately, today we do not have this capability."

Political analyst, Waheed Muzhda, said Karzai's relations with the West, particularly with

the US, had been strained in recent months. He believed the US wanted to remove Ahmad Wali Karzai, half-brother of the president, as Kandahar provincial council chief. He claimed the president was averse to the US plan. "But America wants to play an unchallenged role in the country," where soldiers from 48 countries are currently combating the Taliban insurgency and training Afghan forces.

'Afghan, Pak officials hold secret talks'

Wed Oct 6, 2010 1:39AM

PressTV: Officials from Afghanistan and Pakistan are conducting "secret talks" reportedly mediated by the United Arab Emirates.

Officials from the two countries conferred in the Afghan capital, Kabul, for a second consecutive day on Tuesday, *Al Jazeera* reported.

Issues high on the agenda were said to include, finding solutions for problems that have plagued the two countries and the ongoing issue regarding the Taliban. No other specific details have been forthcoming, as the talks are being held behind closed doors.

The talks are intended to be a follow-up to discussions that were held in Abu Dhabi earlier in the year.

There has been no reaction from the Taliban so far with regards to the current discussions being held in Kabul.

The Afghan delegation currently attending the talks reportedly includes Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, former Taliban ambassador to Pakistan, Hekmat Karzai, the Director of the Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies, and Ali Ahmad Jalali, the former Afghan interior minister.

Aftab Ahmad Shirpaw, the former Pakistani interior minister and Asif Durrani, the former chief of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence are two of the main Pakistani officials attending the talks.

The international community and the Afghan government have reportedly asked for the decisions made in Abu Dhabi to be respected and that peace efforts should be emphasized upon as the current military strategy is deemed to have destabilized the region.

Obama: No shift in Afghan war strategy

Tue Oct 5, 2010 5:46AM

PressTV: US President Barack Obama has told congressional leaders that he does not intend to change his strategies in Afghanistan or Pakistan.

In a letter released by the White House on Monday, Obama notified leaders of the US Senate and House of Representatives that he has no plans to modify his policies towards Kabul and Islamabad, Reuters reported on Monday.

"We are continuing to implement the policy as described in December and do not believe further adjustments are required at this time," Obama said in the letter.

"As the Congress continues its deliberations on the way ahead in Afghanistan and Pakistan, I want to continue to underscore our nation's interests in the successful implementation of this policy," the letter added.

The Obama administration decided last December to send an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan, and to begin withdrawing troops from that country by July 2011.

Meanwhile, Obama's war strategies in Afghanistan and Pakistan are becoming increasingly unpopular among US lawmakers and the American public.

A new book by prominent Washington Post journalist Bob Woodward alleges that Obama's national security team is split on his Afghan strategy.

US-led forces in Afghanistan are under pressure over the rising number of civilian casualties. They are also under fire over CIA's drone attacks in Pakistan.

Lack of Coordination, the Main Reason for Instability in the North

Wednesday, 06 October 2010 .

ToloNews: Lack of coordination between Afghan and foreign forces has made it possible for the anti-government militants to increase their activities, said the governor of Balkh. Lack of coordination between Afghan and foreign forces and the concentration of the anti-government militants on targeting these forces are the main reasons for insecurity in the north, the governor of the Northern Balkh province, Ata Mohammad Noor, told reporters in a press conference held in Mazar-e-Sharif, the province's capital, on Wednesday.

"Lack of coordination between NATO (coalition) forces and the Afghan forces is what the enemy takes advantage of and is now stepping forward," Noor said.

A key police official in the province, Gen. Abdul Rawoof Taj, denying these comments said there is full coordination between the activities of Afghan and foreign forces in the province.

"We have no problems in our security institutions," Rawoof added.

Meanwhile an Afghan merchant who was kidnapped in Mazar-e-Sharif on Tuesday was released on Wednesday.

The abductors had demanded US\$ 1 million for his release, which was not paid, he added.

"The kidnappers wanted US\$1 Million for my release and I told them that my whole property is not worth US\$1 million," said Gul Ahmad, a goldsmith in Mazar-e-Sharif who has been released now.

This is the first abduction case in the province this year.

Meanwhile, Afghan officials are concerned about the increase of violence in the north, as Gen. Zahir Azimi, a spokesman for the Ministry of Defence said that it is planned to concentrate on the north after security is maintained in the south.

Afghan Civilians, Target of Foreign Forces

Tuesday, 05 October 2010 18:04

ToloNews: Targeting Innocent Afghan civilians is a new approach followed by some rogue foreign soldiers and the consequences have been a surge in hatred toward foreign troops

A new article published by New York Times reflects stories by family members of Afghan civilians who were murdered by US soldiers in southern parts of Afghanistan while on the look-out for insurgents.

Publishing of such cases in recent months increased worries that civilian casualties and murders will decrease Afghans' trust in the war against terrorism in the country.

The article quotes a woman whose name is Mora who has lost her husband after US forces stormed her house in a district in Kandahar province.

Mora has said in order to justify the killing, the soldiers searched every inch of her house, "but they did not find a single bullet in my home."

The article is published as a US soldier has recently confessed how his unit sergeant and group members were involved in innocent Afghan civilian killings.

The soldier had confessed that their group leader even kept a collection of body parts from civilians killed intentionally in Afghanistan.

Civilians are often the main victims of conflicts in Afghanistan, and the Afghan government has repeatedly called on foreign forces to take every possible measures to avoid civilian casualties during their operations.

Australian PM Visits Afghanistan

Sunday, 03 October 2010 15:08

ToloNews: The Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard met with the Afghan president Hamid Karzai on a visit to Afghanistan on Saturday night.

On her visit to Afghanistan, Australia's Prime Minister first went to Terin Kot, the provincial capital of the country's southern Uruzgan province, where most of the Australian troops are stationed.

In a meeting with the Australian forces there, Ms Gillard was asked if she was planning to send extra troops and equipment to Afghanistan.

She then went to the Afghan capital Kabul to meet Afghan president Hamid Karzai. Speaking to President Hamid Karzai in the presidential palace, she emphasised on her country's commitment to maintaining peace in Afghanistan and the ongoing reconstruction process in the country.

President Karzai thanked Ms Gillard for her country's contribution to the Afghan peace building process and the US-led NATO's mission in Afghanistan, and added that the international community should further focus on insurgents' sanctuaries outside Afghan borders.

Australia has some 1,500 soldiers in Afghanistan, most of them stationed in the southern Uruzgan province. Australia has lost 21 soldiers since the US-led invasion of 2001. The Australian prime minister was back on her way to attend a meeting of the European and Asian leaders in Brussels, Belgium.

Pakistan Floods Hinder Food Aid Delivery to Afghanistan: UN

Monday, 04 October 2010 16:02

ToloNews: The World Food Programme of the UN said Monday that recent Pakistan floods have hampered food aid to Afghanistan

With about 80% of UN food aid passing through Pakistan, the country plays a crucial role letting food aid through its soil so that starvation and food crisis in rural rugged areas of Afghanistan in long winter time are controlled.

The food aid delivery would have fed about a million people, mostly subsist on bread and tea, this winter, according to the UN.

The aid provided by World Food Programme is usually moved to Afghanistan in autumn, before roads are blocked by winter time for months.

The UN had planned to provide food for Around 3.8 million people in November.

But about 16,000 metric tonnes of Afghan-bound wheat awaits some custom rules in Pakistan when heavy floods start to wash down most parts neighbouring Pakistan, said Challiss McDonough, a spokeswoman for the organisation.

She said an air drop could be possible for an alternative to supply those who will not receive food because of a curb in delivery, but it is so expensive that the agency saves that only for emergency cases, McDonough said.

First the agency plans to make sure that the neediest people, victims of natural disaster or people displaced by the conflict are supplied with the wheat.

Economic Headlines

Afghan traders encounter problems in Pakistan

by [Abdul Qadeer Siddique](#) on 4 October, 2010 - 17:51

KABUL (PAN): Afghan traders are facing numerous problems in neighbouring Pakistan after devastating floods hit the neighbouring country two months back, an official said on Monday.

More than 2,000 people were killed and 20 million others affected by the worst flooding in several decades in that country. The economic system of Pakistan was badly damaged. Chief Executive of Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI), Muhammad Qurban Haqjo said a sudden rush of assistance for flood victims left Pakistan's commercial sector overstretched.

Addressing a news conference here in Kabul, he said as the rehabilitation campaign continued in Pakistan, Afghan goods had been stuck at the Karachi port for almost two months. With each passing day, the importers have to pay higher custom duties. He alleged the National Logistic Cell (NLC), a company responsible for transferring Afghan goods to various places in Pakistan, had failed to pay the drivers for transporting the trade items.

ACCI deputy chairman, Khan Jan Alakozay said a container of Afghan goods had to pay \$60 a day if the goods were not unloaded within 12 days. The charges go up to \$80 a day if unloading does not take place in 20 days.

He claimed many Afghan traders were paying hundreds of dollars on a daily basis because of the problems.

The owner of the Ali Baba Company, Haji Ali Khan who imports food items from Pakistan, told reporters the prices of edibles were likely to jump because of the problems in Pakistan.

He warned Afghan importers would have to hike prices of the items to cover their losses. Khan accused the Karzai government of doing nothing to protect the rights of Afghan traders in Pakistan.

"I just want to tell the Afghan people that if prices go up, it would be because of the weakness of the government," he remarked. If the government did not resolve their problems, they would stop imports, he concluded.

Food prices double in Afghanistan

Sun Oct 3, 2010 2:45PM

PressTV: The floods in Pakistan, which is Afghanistan's main source of food products, have caused a considerable increase in the price of foodstuff in Afghanistan.

"Floods and landslides have blocked many supply routes. There is no one to open the routes so that we can bring food here," said an Afghan truck driver.

The rise in the price of food products such as rice, cooking oil and meat has pushed many Afghans, who are among the poorest people in the world, into a high risk of food insecurity, a Press TV correspondent reported.

"Food prices have doubled, and we are worried because the government is not taking any tangible steps to reduce the prices," says an Afghan citizen.

The Afghan government also admitted the dependence of their country on neighboring nations, especially Pakistan, regarding foodstuff.

"Unfortunately, Afghanistan is highly import-dependent when it comes to basic goods," said spokesman for Afghanistan's Ministry of Commerce Ahmad Farhad Afghanzoi.

"It does not produce much to meet its needs. Therefore, we import most of our food from our neighboring countries," Afghanzoi added.

The floods in Pakistan started in late July and have so far killed nearly 1,800 people and affected some 21 million others.

Analysts believe the rising food prices in Afghanistan could trigger an outbreak of famine unless the country received more humanitarian aid.

Social Headlines

Declaration on inclusive education adopted

by [Pajhwok Report](#) on 6 October, 2010 - 16:01

KABUL (PAN): The Afghan Ministry of Education organised the first-ever National Conference on Inclusive and Child-Friendly Education, the United Nations mission in Kabul said on Wednesday.

More than 120 delegates from Ministry of Education, other government ministries, universities, NGOs, the donor community and UN agencies reaffirmed their commitment to promoting the right to education for all children.

The ministry adopted the Afghanistan Declaration on Inclusive and Child-Friendly Education developed by the delegates, stressing the importance of promoting non-discrimination in education and providing future generations with basic skills.

The Afghanistan Declaration says: "The education system should contribute to the peaceful development of Afghanistan, enabling children, families and communities to develop."

Held on Tuesday, the national conference, supported UNESCO and Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), was also an opportunity to celebrate the World Teacher Day 2010 under the slogan "Recovery begins with teachers".

Religious scholar shot dead in Kandahar

by [Basher Ahmad Naadem](#) on 8 October, 2010 - 18:17

KANDAHAR CITY (PAN): Gunmen shot dead a religious scholar --- the 50th this year -- in a mosque during Friday prayers in this provincial capital of southern Kandahar province, the spiritual home of the Taliban, an official said.

Maulvi Muhammad, member of the provincial ulema council, was offering prayers in the Loye Walai Mosque in the 9th police district of Kandahar city when unknown gunmen entered the mosque and opened fire at him, said deputy head of the council, Maulvi Hikmatullah Hikmat.

The attackers fled soon after killing Muhammad, he said.

When contacted, security officials avoided to comment on the incident.

There was no claim of responsibility for the killing, but such incidents are blamed on the Taliban who are waging a bloody insurgency to topple the Karzai-led government.

The shooting came four days after another member of the Kandahar Ulema Council, Maulvi Habibullah, was gunned down in the city.

Hikmat said 50 ulema had been killed during the past nine months.

Also on Friday, the governor of northern Kunduz province, Muhammad Omar, was killed along with several others in neighbouring Takhar province in a mosque.