

Business and Politics in the Muslim World

Afghanistan This Week

Report Number: 119

Week 8-14 May 2010

May, 17, 2010

Mohammad Amin

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Political Headlines Summary

Two NATO soldiers die in the south

KABUL (PAN): Two NATO soldiers were killed in separate attacks in volatile southern Afghanistan on Saturday, weeks ahead of a major military push against the Taliban in the region, the alliance said.

Another tribal elder killed in Kandahar

KANDAHAR CITY (PAN): A former police chief was killed, along with his two guards, in southern Kandahar province, officials said on Saturday.

Sherzai accused of backing corrupt officials

JALALABAD (PAN): Members of the Nangarhar provincial council have accused provincial administration of not cooperating with them in the fight against corruption.

Karzai asks foreign forces for more care to civilians

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai has asked foreign troops for paying more attention to securing civilian lives in the fight against insurgents, the Karzai's spokesman office said on Saturday.

Bomb-making factory discovered in Helmand

KABUL (PAN): A joint Afghan-international force discovered a bomb-making factory and detained two suspected militants in southern Helmand province, NATO said on Sunday.

15 Taliban killed in Ghazni, Paktika

GHAZNI CITY/ SHARAN (PAN): At least 15 Taliban fighters have been killed during separate clash in southern Ghazni and southeastern Paktika provinces, officials said on Sunday.

Five pro-government tribesmen killed by Taliban

HERAT CITY/PUL-I-KHUMRI (PAN): Taliban insurgents killed five pro-government militiamen in western Herat province, officials said on Sunday.

NATO soldier dies in south

KABUL (PAN): A NATO led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) servicemember has died following an insurgent attack in southern Afghanistan on Sunday, the alliance said.

Governor blamed for not helping anti-poppy drive

KABUL (PAN): The Counter-Narcotics Ministry has lashed out at the Kandahar governor for not cooperating in efforts at eradicating opium poppies from the troubled southern province.

Coalition helicopter downed in Helmand

KABUL (PAN): A NATO helicopter was forced into landing after being shot by insurgents in the lawless southern province of Helmand, the scene of a huge military offensive in March, the Western alliance said on Tuesday.

20 Taliban killed in Khost, Paktika

KABUL (PAN): At least 20 Taliban fighters were killed and several others wounded in separate incidents in southern Ghazni and southeastern Khost and Paktika provinces, officials said on Tuesday.

ISAF soldiers killed in blast

KABUL (PAN): Two International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) soldiers were killed in an improvised explosive device (IED) attack in southern Afghanistan on Tuesday, NATO said.

UN gives Afghanistan \$149m for polls

KABUL (PAN): The United Nations on Tuesday agreed to provide \$149 million to Afghanistan's election commission for the upcoming parliamentary polls, scheduled to be held on September 18.

Mullah Omar favours peace deal

KABUL (PAN): The secretive Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, is in favour of a peace deal with the government, a senior member of the Afghan National Security Council said on Wednesday.

Protest as US troops kill civilians

JALALABAD (PAN): US forces have killed 11 civilians in the eastern province of Nangarhar, bordering Pakistan's lawless tribal region of Khyber, in an attack that triggered an angry protest.

Coalition detention centres a concern: Karzai

WASHINGTON (PAN): Satisfied with the outcome of his four-day visit to Washington, President Hamid Karzai has said Afghanistan's relationship with the United States goes beyond the war on terror and will last several generations to come.

Two NATO soldiers killed

KABUL (PAN): Two International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) soldiers have been killed in separate attacks in Afghanistan, NATO said on Friday.

Geo-Strategic Headlines Summary

Foreign minister to visit Iran

KABUL (PAN): Foreign Minister Dr. Zalmay Rassol said on Saturday he would visit Iran to assess the state and number of Afghans on death-row there, after conflicting reports that dozens of prisoners had been executed.

Karzai meets US House speaker Pelosi

KABUL (PAN): Afghan President Hamid Karzai met the speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, in Kabul on Saturday evening.

Estonian troops to stay as long as needed: Ansip

KABUL (PAN): Estonian troops will remain in Afghanistan as long as their presence is required, the Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip said on Sunday.

2,000 more US troops to be stationed in north

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (PAN): Additional US troops would be deployed soon to northern Afghanistan, an American military officer said here on Monday.

Afghan war winnable; not only militarily: US

WASHINGTON (PAN): The war in Afghanistan would ultimately be successful, top US civilian and military officials said, stressing it "demands courage and resilience".

Karzai, Clinton agree on long-term partnership

WASHINGTON (PAN): President Hamid Karzai and US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton have vowed to put aside their differences and work together to build a stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

Crucial Obama-Karzai talks begin

WASHINGTON (PAN): Barack Obama, the US president, met his Afghan counterpart, Hamid Karzai, at the Oval Office on Wednesday for discussions expected to focus on corruption and security in Afghanistan.

Social Headlines Summary

Roadside bomb claims six lives

PUL-I-ALAM (PAN): Six members of two families were killed when their vehicle struck a roadside bomb in central Logar province, officials said on Saturday.

Floods continue to wreak havoc in the north

MAZAR-I-SHARIF/TALOQAN (PAN): More than two dozen people have been killed in flash floods triggered by days of heavy downpours that lashed northern Afghanistan, officials said on Saturday.

17 Paktika officials reported for corruption

SHARAN (PAN): Seventeen government officials in the southeastern province of Paktika have been reported to the Attorney General's office on allegations of corruption, a delegation said on Saturday.

Dam being constructed in Shakar Darra district of Kabul

KABUL (PAN): A hydroelectric dam will be built on the outskirts of Kabul to generate electricity as well as irrigate a large swathe of land, officials said on Saturday.

34 irrigation schemes completed in Nangarhar

JALALABAD (PAN): Up to 34 irrigation projects, funded by the United States of America, have been completed in the Rodat district of eastern Nangarhar province, an official said on Saturday.

Floods inflict heavy damage on four Parwan districts

CHARIKAR (PAN): Days of heavy rain in central Parwan province have destroyed nearly 30 kilometres of road, washed away dozens of homes and inundated hundreds of acres of farmland, officials said on Sunday.

Floods kill six in Saripul

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (PAN): Six people, including women, have been killed over the past two days of flooding as a result of heavy rains in northern Saripul province, local officials say.

Baghlan floods leave eight dead

PUL-I-KHUMRI (PAN): At least eight people were killed and a dozen others in overnight floods near this capital city of central Baghlan province, officials said on Monday.

130 tonnes of food distributed

AIBAK (PAN): Around 130 tonnes of edibles were distributed to more than 2,100 people under the work-for-food programme in northern Samangan province on Monday, an official said.

Mountain slide destroys houses

KABUL/FAIZABAD (PAN): A mountain slide has destroyed 32 houses in Yawan district of northeastern Badakhshan province, officials said on Monday.

30 girls poisoned in Kunduz

KABUL (PAN): At least 30 school girls were poisoned Tuesday in the provincial capital of Kunduz, the third such attack on a girls' school in the city in less than a month, officials said.

172 NGOs dissolved

KABUL (PAN): The Ministry of Economy (MoE) has ordered the dissolution of 172 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for failing to comply with the relevant law.

5,000 more families get electricity in Faryab

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (PAN): Officials said around 6,000 families in Shirin Tagab district of western Faryab province were provided electricity.

UN investigating cause of schoolgirls' illness

KABUL (PAN): The UN's special representative to Afghanistan said on Wednesday he was concerned by reports that students at several girls schools had been sickened over the past few weeks, allegedly in gas attacks.

Karzai orders poison gas attackers arrested

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai, currently on a four-day visit to the United States, has ordered security officials to arrest perpetrators of recent poison attacks on girls' schools in Kunduz and Kabul.

Afghan women's issues a priority: Clinton

WASHINGTON (PAN): US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has said the Obama administration will accord top priority to issues related to Afghanistan's women.

Political Headlines

Two NATO soldiers die in the south

Pajhwok Report - May 8, 2010 - 16:46

KABUL (PAN): Two NATO soldiers were killed in separate attacks in volatile southern Afghanistan on Saturday, weeks ahead of a major military push against the Taliban in the region, the alliance said.

The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) did not disclose the exact location of either incident or the nationality of the service members killed, in its brief press statement.

The casualties bring the death toll of foreign troops in Afghanistan this year to 184.

US, British and Canadian troops make up the majority of international forces operating within the ISAF framework in the south.

The deaths come as US forces are planning an offensive to drive the Taliban out of Kandahar province, their spiritual stronghold.

US commanders have predicted a bloody year ahead as an additional 30,000 American troops are pumped into the mission.

Another tribal elder killed in Kandahar

Bashir Ahmad Nadam - May 8, 2010 - 17:12

KANDAHAR CITY (PAN): A former police chief was killed, along with his two guards, in southern Kandahar province, officials said on Saturday.

Taliban fighters stormed the house of the police commander and tribal elder, Manan Khan, in Arghistan district on Friday night, killing him and his two bodyguards, the administrative head of the district, Syed Ali, said.

The fighters then hijacked a police vehicle from his house and left their own car behind, he told Pajhwok Afghan News.

Taliban spokesman, Qari Yousuf Ahmadi, said they killed Khan and his five bodyguards and hijacked a police vehicle with arms and ammunition.

A member of the district council, Hayat Khan, was also killed last week in Kandahar City.

Up to 15 officials, tribal elders and their family members have been killed over the past six weeks in the province, where NATO and Afghan forces are gearing up for a major operation to flush Taliban from the region.

Sherzai accused of backing corrupt officials

Sangar - May 8, 2010 - 19:46

JALALABAD (PAN): Members of the Nangarhar provincial council have accused provincial administration of not cooperating with them in the fight against corruption.

The council's chief Nasratullah Arsala told a press conference on Saturday, they had time and again asked the provincial administration for cooperation in efforts at fighting graft, but their suggestions were fell on deaf ears.

He accused the governor, Gul Agha Sherzai, of ordering the withdrawal of donor agencies from the Khugyani and Shirzad districts just because people of those districts cultivated poppy.

The governor had sent police to the district for eradicating poppy crops prior to taking the council into confidence, he said, adding it was the reason that police suffered casualties while destroying the crops.

He said he himself had repeatedly told the governor about the widespread corruption in various government institutions in the province. "I asked the governor to remove the officials involved in corruption, instead he supported them and stood by them," Arsala charged. "Concealing crimes of corrupt officials makes the governor himself corrupt," he noted.

He further said land grab was ongoing in full swing in Nangarhar, where the poor were in a bad condition. "People are fed up with the situation," he remarked.

He said he had informed head of High Office of the Oversight on the Implementation of Anti-corruption Strategy Yasin Osmani about the facts.

"I will present documents of corruption to Osmani on Tuesday," he revealed, saying no body knew where 49 percent of Nangarhar's electricity income goes. "The people of Nangarhar have the right to know about these facts," he added.

Deputy Governor Dr Mohammad Alam Ishaqzai said they were fully cooperating with the provincial council as they representing people of the province.

Ishaqzai said they had sent officials letters to all the provincial departments asking for cooperation with provincial council in anti-corruption drive.

He said the provincial administration and the council should work shoulder by shoulder to eliminate the scourge of graft. "Boycott is not a solution," he added.

About electricity problem, he said they, together with provincial council members, would assign a commission to look into the matter.

Karzai asks foreign forces for more care to civilians

Sadaat - May 8, 2010 - 19:56

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai has asked foreign troops for paying more attention to securing civilian lives in the fight against insurgents, the Karzai's spokesman office said on Saturday.

"You (foreign soldiers) have come from a long distance to a new society. We have kids, women and people just like you have in your own homes," the president was quoted in a statement on Saturday. He stressed on exercising utmost care towards civilian lives.

The president paid a visit to the Bagram Hospital, where national and international soldiers of war receive treatment.

Karzai praised the hospital staff for their services. He told the soldiers the mission was indeed a difficult one because it demands a lot of sacrifices. The president also awarded monetary assistance to the injured personnel from the Afghan National Army (ANA).

Bomb-making factory discovered in Helmand

Pajhwok Report - May 9, 2010 - 16:39

KABUL (PAN): A joint Afghan-international force discovered a bomb-making factory and detained two suspected militants in southern Helmand province, NATO said on Sunday.

The force came across the factory during a search of Do Sang village in the Now Zad district on Saturday. Inside were two assembled homemade bombs and dozens of rocket-propelled grenades, the alliance said in a statement. The explosives are often taken out of rocket-propelled grenades to be used in bombs.

As the soldiers searched the village, they came under fire, the statement noted. There was no detail about any casualties on either side, or how the two suspected militants were arrested.

In a separate operation in Helmand, Afghanistan's largest opium poppy growing area, Afghan and ISAF soldiers seized a large quantity of drugs and weapons and killed several suspected insurgents on Saturday. The joint force had stopped a vehicle about 40 kilometres from the border with Pakistan, when the men inside fled into hiding nearby. Afghan soldiers issued warnings in several dialects, but the men, who NATO said were armed, failed to reveal themselves or respond.

The soldiers then shot them dead, NATO said.

Inside the car, the patrol discovered 2,250 kilograms of opium resin, 150 kilograms of wet opium, 60 kilograms of morphine and 20 kilograms of heroin. The men were armed with two assault rifles and two pistols.

Separately, in Chorah district of the neighbouring Uruzgan province, an ISAF patrol on Saturday found a weapons cache containing six hand grenades, three grenade fuses, nearly 1,000 7.62mm rounds, 50 machine gun rounds, two AK-47s, a pistol, a radio and several types of magazines and weapon holsters.

NATO did not say if the cache was found in the open or in a house or if there were any arrests.

15 Taliban killed in Ghazni, Paktika

Mirwais Himmatt & Obaid Kharoti - May 9, 2010 - 16:44

GHAZNI CITY/ SHARAN (PAN): At least 15 Taliban fighters have been killed during separate clash in southern Ghazni and southeastern Paktika provinces, officials said on Sunday.

Six Taliban were killed and four others wounded in an encounter with Afghan forces in Maqur district, Ghazni police chief, Brig. Gen. Khyal Baaz Sherzai, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

The fighting erupted when Taliban militants ambushed Afghan National Army soldiers and the National Police in Akhtarkhel and Shama areas of the district, he said.

The battle started at 8am near the district bazaar on the Kabul-Kandahar Highway, Maqur district chief, Saheb Khan, said.

Separately, three guards of a private security company were wounded in a fight with the Taliban in the Moshaki area of Qara Bagh district, Sherzai, said. Two Taliban fighters were killed and three others injured.

However, the Qara Bagh district chief said that one guard was killed and another injured. A resident of Qara Bagh, Faizullah, said he saw two dead bodies and an injured person who was taken to the nearby hospital.

Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said they killed six policemen and wounded 11 others in Maqur, and killed 13 Afghan and foreign soldiers in Moshaki.

Elsewhere, seven Taliban insurgents were killed in an air strike in Paktika province, the alliance's office in the southeast said.

Insurgents attacked a convoy of NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), in Mata Khan district, on Saturday night, prompting the alliance to call in an air strike.

The governor's spokesman, Mukhles Afghan, confirmed the strike, although he said he had no further information about casualties.

Mujahid, the Taliban spokesman, said several NATO soldiers were killed in an explosion. He denied any Taliban casualties.

Five pro-government tribesmen killed by Taliban

Ahmad Qureshi & Habibur Rahman Sherzai - May 9, 2010 - 19:17

HERAT CITY/PUL-I-KHUMRI (PAN): Taliban insurgents killed five pro-government militiamen in western Herat province, officials said on Sunday.

The five were part of a 120-strong militia fighting insurgents with the help of foreign and national troops in the Shindand district. The men were killed Saturday in a clash with insurgents, district chief Mullah Laal Mohammad Omarzai, told Pajhwok Afghan News. The killings came a day after a joint Afghan-coalition force conducted an operation in the area, killing nine Taliban, police spokesman Col. Abdul Rauf Ahmadi, said.

Taliban spokesman, Qari Yusuf Ahmadi, however, said they had killed 12 national and international forces during Saturday's clash.

In northern Baghlan province, a joint Afghan-international force arrested seven suspected Taliban fighters during an operation in the Shahabuddin area of Pul-i-Khumri, the provincial capital.

Six areas around the capital were cleared of the Taliban, the commander of the 209th Shaheen Military Corps, Major Gen. Murad Ali Murad, said.

He also said three roadside bombs were discovered and defused.

The operation was still ongoing to free other areas from the Taliban's influence, he said. But another Taliban spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, rejected Murad's claims, saying they were still in control of those six areas.

Security officials say another operation entering a second month in the Baghlan-i-Markazi district has resulted in the killing of 50 Taliban fighters, a claim the Taliban deny.

NATO soldier dies in south

Hakim Basharat - May 9, 2010 - 19:18

KABUL (PAN): A NATO led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) servicemember has died following an insurgent attack in southern Afghanistan on Sunday, the alliance said.

In a statement, ISAF said the soldier died of wounds he sustained during a direct engagement with militants. The statement did not release further information.

However, Taliban spokesman Qari Yousaf Ahmadi said the fighters clashed with Canadian troops in the Dand district of southern Kandahar province Sunday morning. He claimed six foreign troops were killed during the encounter.

The death toll of foreign troops has reached 186 in different incidents of violence in separate parts of the country since the beginning of this year. Last year, the death toll was 520.

Governor blamed for not helping anti-poppy drive

Khwaja Basir Ahmad - May 10, 2010 - 20:50

KABUL (PAN): The Counter-Narcotics Ministry has lashed out at the Kandahar governor for not cooperating in efforts at eradicating opium poppies from the troubled southern province.

Addressing a press conference on Monday, the ministry's spokesman, Zalmay Afzali, accused Governor Toryalay Weesa of failing to honour his promise to help the poppy eradication drive in Kandahar, Taliban's birthplace.

Governor Weesa was not immediately available to comment on the allegation.

Afzali also assailed NATO-led forces for preventing counter-narcotics forces from launching an eradication campaign in the recently captured district of Majra in neighbouring Helmand province.

The forces had cleared a number of Helmand districts, but not Marja, former hub for Taliban's narco-trade, the spokesman said, adding the drive had been ongoing in the provinces of Farah, Helmand, Nimroz, Badghis, Zabul, Nangarhar, Badakhshan and Kabul.

Foreign forces allowed local farmers to collect their opium harvest this year, warning them to avoid cultivating poppy next year.

Afzali cautioned drug production, a major source of income for terrorists, turn to could be a huge challenge. He said the illicit crop had been cultivated in 68 restive districts across the country, as the Taliban forced farmers to grow poppies in some provinces.

He asked European countries to help the ministry curb drug production in Afghanistan.

He called the US the only donor to his ministry.

Coalition helicopter downed in Helmand

Zainullah Stanikzai - May 11, 2010 - 12:08

KABUL (PAN): A NATO helicopter was forced into landing after being shot by insurgents in the lawless southern province of Helmand, the scene of a huge military offensive in March, the Western alliance said on Tuesday.

"An MH-60 helicopter made a controlled landing after being hit by enemy fire in Helmand province this afternoon. All crewmembers have been safely returned to base", the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said.

A statement from the NATO-led force said the chopper was supporting a combined Afghan-international assault force near the Nangazai area of Sangin district. The copter was hit by enemy fire soon after it began its return flight.

The crew was airlifted by additional aircraft, according to the press release, which added: "The helicopter could not be recovered and was destroyed in place with close air support". Several of the fighters, engaged by the combined force, were detained at the targeted compound. The assault force and crewmembers safely returned to their base.

The Taliban militants, meanwhile, claimed responsibility for shooting down two ISAF helicopters in Helmand on Monday afternoon. A spokesman for the rebel movement said 55 soldiers were killed in the crash and clashes in Sangin.

Qari Yousaf Ahmadi told Pajhwok Afghan News over the telephone from an undisclosed location that many foreign troops were wounded in the clashes that erupted in Sarwan Qala and Barakzai Shahzadi areas.

20 Taliban killed in Khost, Paktika

Obaid Kharotai & Mirwais Himmat - May 11, 2010 - 16:31

KABUL (PAN): At least 20 Taliban fighters were killed and several others wounded in separate incidents in southern Ghazni and southeastern Khost and Paktika provinces, officials said on Tuesday.

Three insurgents were killed in a NATO air strike in Ghazni's Qarabagh district while nine others died in fighting in Rashidan and Zana Khan districts, and in the provincial capital, Ghazni City, the police chief said.

Brig. Gen. Khyal Baz Sherzai, told Pajhwok Afghan News an Afghan soldier and three policemen were also wounded in the fighting.

A resident of the area said he saw Taliban fighters moving the bodies of their fighters by tractor.

Sherzai said one of the dead insurgents was from the Waziristan tribal region of Pakistan. He said the Taliban's recently announced offensive, Al-Fatah (meaning victory), was a failure.

Separately, three more Taliban fighters died during a clash with Afghan and international troops in the Yousufkhel district of Paktika province, an official said.

The bodies of the dead fighters were left in the area, the governor's spokesman, Mukhles Afghan, said. Another three insurgents were detained, while three motorbikes, two RPG, three Kalashnikovs and a wireless radio were recovered from the area.

Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, denied any insurgent casualties saying several foreign and Afghan soldiers were killed.

Another five Taliban fighters were killed in a NATO air strike in neighbouring Khost's Ali Sher district, the provincial police chief, Gen. Abdul Hakim Eshaqzai said. The fighters took two bodies and left behind three others, he added.

ISAF soldiers killed in blast

Pajhwok Report - May 11, 2010 - 16:34

KABUL (PAN): Two International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) soldiers were killed in an improvised explosive device (IED) attack in southern Afghanistan on Tuesday, NATO said.

In line with its policy, the 44-nation force neither disclosed the nationalities of the fallen soldiers nor the exact location of the roadside bomb attack.

Tuesday's fatalities bring to 169 the number of foreign troops killed in Afghanistan so far this year. At least a dozen international soldiers, most of them Americans, have been killed in militant attacks over the past 10 days.

With thousands of additional US troops in the process of deploying to the war-hit country, the authorities said 42 Taliban militants had been killed in clashes with security forces in different parts of Afghanistan.

UN gives Afghanistan \$149m for polls

Mohammad Jawad Sharifzada - May 11, 2010 - 10:09

KABUL (PAN): The United Nations on Tuesday agreed to provide \$149 million to Afghanistan's election commission for the upcoming parliamentary polls, scheduled to be held on September 18.

The UN's special representative for Afghanistan, Staffan De Mistura, and Fazal Ahmad Manawi, chief of the Independent Election Commission, signed an agreement in Kabul on Tuesday.

Manawi said this showed the international community fully supports the legislature polls. He said the money would be spent for the needs of the IEC, the Electoral Complaint Commission (ECC) and the registration of new electorates who have either turned 18 or returned to the country.

The registration of voters will start on June 12 and last a month.

De Mistura called for the vote to be an "Afghan election" with the international community playing the role of a guest.

"We have learned lessons from previous elections, we now have a new IEC chief, I am sure we are on the right path."

He said that the financial contribution would help to build capacity among election workers, and could make this vote a model for the future.

The parliamentary election is pencilled in for September 18. Some 2,800 candidates are standing for 249-seats in the parliament.

Mullah Omar favours peace deal

Frozan Rahmani - May 12, 2010 - 22:02

KABUL (PAN): The secretive Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, is in favour of a peace deal with the government, a senior member of the Afghan National Security Council said on Wednesday.

Problems within the leadership, a lack of resources and the arrests of senior commanders are forcing the Taliban to seek a deal to end the resistance, the official said on condition of anonymity. He predicted many low-ranking Taliban fighters would join the reconciliation process.

The announcement comes hours ahead of President Hamid Karzai's meeting with his US counterpart, Barack Obama, at the White House, where they are expected discuss in detail Karzai's plan to reintegrate the Taliban.

A purported Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, however, said there would be no talks while foreign troops were still in the country.

The official, who was updating a few journalists in the presidential palace, said the dispute over who would replace Mullah Baradar, the Taliban No. 2 who was detained in Pakistan in February, caused serious rifts in the leadership of the Taliban.

Mullah Mansoor and Mulla Qayum Zakir, a former Guantanamo detainee, are said to have been appointed Baradar's successor.

Despite the lack of any clear indication from the Taliban that they are interested in talks, Afghan analysts have said Baradar sent some of his people to meet the former UN envoy to Afghanistan, Kai Eide, in Dubai.

Karzai will hold a long-awaited peace jirga later this month to renew his call on the Taliban to renounce violence and rejoin society.

Protest as US troops kill civilians

Abdul Mueed Hashmi - May 14, 2010 - 16:46

JALALABAD (PAN): US forces have killed 11 civilians in the eastern province of Nangarhar, bordering Pakistan's lawless tribal region of Khyber, in an attack that triggered an angry protest.

Residents said on Friday the troops opened fire at the men who were busy threshing their wheat crop in the Bawal village of Surkh Rod district last night.

Most of the victims were young men, wearing dirt-soiled clothes, whose bloodied bodies were transferred from the site by tractor-trolleys. One of them carried five corpses, including that of a grey-bearded man.

In the latest imprecise raid that came the day President Hamid Karzai renewed his call for an end to civilian deaths, the body of a 17-year-old boy was riddled with bullets while

another man's face was badly disfigured.

"The Americans shot dead the innocents who were on their farm to thresh bundles of manually harvested wheat crop," said Muhammad Saber, who lost five sons in the attack. Another six people were reportedly killed in subsequent raids on houses in the area, claimed a villager, who did not want to be named. But the provincial police spokesman, Col. Abdul Ghafoor, put the death toll at 10.

Furious people, who wanted to bring the dead bodies to the district centre before placing them in front of the governor's house in Jalalabad as a mark of protest, were stopped by local police.

Policemen fired at the protestors after they defied warnings to disperse, killing one man and wounding another. The demonstrators said they would go ahead with their march towards the provincial capital.

But NATO said a Taliban sub-commander and some other insurgents were killed and two suspects captured in the raid on a compound by an Afghan-international security force.

"As the joint force approached the compound, they received automatic gunfire. During the firefight the security force attempted several callouts without success," the ISAF press office in Kabul said.

One of the militants killed was a Taliban sub-commander responsible for rocket attacks and ambushes against ISAF soldiers. The two detainees were wounded and evacuated to a local NATO medical facility.

At a joint appearance with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Washington on Thursday, Karzai said President Barack Obama, Defence Secretary Robert Gates and Vice-President Joe Biden supported his stance on civilian casualties.

The desire for the protection of civilians was strong and visible, according to the president. "The question of nighttime raids that concerns the Afghan people was raised and an instruction issued to reduce it to the minimum possible".

Coalition detention centres a concern: Karzai

Lalit K Jha - May 14, 2010 - 10:44

WASHINGTON (PAN): Satisfied with the outcome of his four-day visit to Washington, President Hamid Karzai has said Afghanistan's relationship with the United States goes beyond the war on terror and will last several generations to come.

In his last public appearance at a Washington-based think tank along with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Karzai said on Thursday he was going home with some achievements that would go a long way in bringing peace and development to his country.

"In short, the trip was meaningful, substantive and had all the right tones and objectives. Going back home with this in background, the conclusion of the trip would bring me to the implementation of all that we discussed...

"I will be taking away back home quite a few achievements. One thing that I will take back home is to tell the Afghan people of this tremendously warm hospitality of the American people, that we have to do a lot more in order to ensure that we are also hospitable," Karzai remarked.

The two sides had reached agreements on a range of issues of mutual concern, the

president said, adding the most important question for his nation was detentions and the continuity of detention centers in Afghanistan run by coalition forces.

"We have agreed there will be a transition of detention centres to the Afghan authority (in) January, the 1st of January of next year. And that will be as soon as we are in Kabul, assigning senior teams on both sides to work out the exact timelines of the complete transfer of detention centers."

A strong sentiment had been expressed by US President Barack Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Defence Secretary Robert Gates and Vice President Joe Biden on the issue of civilian casualties, he said.

The desire for the protection of civilians was very visible, he insisted. "The question of nighttime raids that concerns the Afghan people was raised and an instruction issued to reduce it to the minimum possible".

Echoing Karzai's views, Clinton described his visit as a success. "From our side, this was a highly successful visit. And the substantive discussions that we had, I think, took our relationship to an even higher level, which will serve as a very good starting point for the efforts to rewrite and refurbish the strategic partnership declaration that we hope to complete by the end of this year".

Two NATO soldiers killed

Pajhwok Report - May 14, 2010 - 13:29

KABUL (PAN): Two International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) soldiers have been killed in separate attacks in Afghanistan, NATO said on Friday.

The NATO-led force said one of the service-members died following an insurgent attack in eastern Afghanistan. Another soldier died was killed in a roadside bomb blast in the south.

In line with its policy, the multinational force neither disclosed the nationalities of the fallen soldiers nor the exact locations of the assaults.

The fatalities bring to 193 the number of foreign troops killed in Afghanistan so far during the current year. The US and Britain have borne the brunt of the casualties.

Geo-Strategic Headlines

Foreign minister to visit Iran

Mohammad Jawad Sharifzada - May 8, 2010 - 11:15

KABUL (PAN): Foreign Minister Dr. Zalmay Rassol said on Saturday he would visit Iran to assess the state and number of Afghans on death-row there, after conflicting reports that dozens of prisoners had been executed.

Summoned by the Wolesi Jirga (lower house of the parliament), Rassol told MPs, "We should know what defence is available to Afghans there and whether a representative from the Afghan Embassy is available." However, he would not mention the exact date of his visit.

Rassol said that according to the Iranian foreign ministry, nine Afghans had recently been put to death. Another 3,000 are said to be on death row, most of whom have been convicted of drugs offences.

He called for the prisoners to be granted their rights under international law.

But he also said the foreign ministry alone could not deal with the problem and that the refugee and interior ministries should also contribute. He said he would appoint competent ambassadors for countries in the region who could realistically protect the rights of Afghans.

According to statistics, roughly three million Afghans live in Iran with only one million having legal documents.

The foreign minister said he would also urge Iranian officials to issue legal documents to more Afghans.

He said he would ask countries in the Gulf as well as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Iran to allow Afghans to work there legally.

Abdul Salam Qazizada, an MP from western Herat province, accused the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of failing to protect the rights of Afghans in Iran and elsewhere.

An MP from Kabul, Dr. Ramazan Bashardost, said, according to international law, an Afghan embassy official should have been present during any execution of Afghans. But he said the absence showed the Afghan government's lack of respect for the lives of its citizens.

Over a month ago, Gul Ahmad Amini, a lawmaker from western Herat province, said 45 bodies of Afghans executed in Iran had been transferred to the province.

But the foreign ministry at that time put the number at six.

In another report, an Afghan diplomat said Iranian officials had burned alive three Afghans in Quzvin province.

Karzai meets US House speaker Pelosi

Syed Abas Sadaat - May 9, 2010 - 17:05

KABUL (PAN): Afghan President Hamid Karzai met the speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, in Kabul on Saturday evening.

The Afghan president thanked the influential US congresswoman for the support of the American people to Afghanistan, according to a statement issued by Karzai's office. Pelosi's unannounced visit comes on the eve of Karzai's four-day trip to Washington, where he is expected to meet his US counterpart, Barack Obama, and other top US officials.

Pelosi said Karzai's trip was important for strengthening relations between the two countries. Karzai's recent anti-US remarks had infuriated the White House, and Pelosi said she hoped the Afghan leader would be warmly welcomed in Washington.

Last month, Karzai accused the West of interfering in last year's presidential election in an attempt to install a "puppet government" in Kabul.

Karzai was expected to discuss issues of strategic cooperation and relations while in Washington, the statement quoted Pelosi as saying.

She hoped the visit, Karzai's first after his reelection last year, would encourage Washington to increase its support for Afghanistan.

Estonian troops to stay as long as needed: Ansip

Abdul Qadir Siddique - May 9, 2010 - 20:33

KABUL (PAN): Estonian troops will remain in Afghanistan as long as their presence is required, the Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip said on Sunday.

Estonia has 140 soldiers in the troubled southern Helmand province under NATO command. Ansip arrived in Kabul on Sunday and met President Hamid Karzai at the Presidential Palace.

During their meeting, Karzai and Ansip discussed issues of mutual concern as well as the regional situation. They also discussed development in Afghanistan, a statement from the president's office said.

The visiting dignitary assured Karzai of his country's continued assistance towards Afghanistan's civil sector. The statement had no details about the nature of that assistance. For his part, Karzai praised Estonia's contribution towards security and peace in the country.

He also paid tribute to the sacrifices Estonian troops had made in the war against terrorism.

2,000 more US troops to be stationed in north

Zabihullah Ihsas - May 10, 2010 - 13:02

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (PAN): Additional US troops would be deployed soon to northern Afghanistan, an American military officer said here on Monday.

Col. Bill Bursleson, commander of 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, said this at a joint news conference with Gen. Mujtaba Patang, head of 303rd Pamir

Police Headquarters.

Col. Bill Burluson told reporters an additional 2,000 US soldiers would be stationed shortly in the relatively calm north, where 3,000 American service-members were deployed some two months back.

Speaking exclusively to Pajhwok Afghan News after the media briefing, he explained the additional troops would be tasked with training Afghan security forces.

The fresh soldiers, equipped with helicopters and other military facilities, would train Afghan pilots in addition to lending their counterparts logistical support, he said.

Gen. Mujtaba said the police force in northern Afghanistan needed professional training.

Nearly 5,000 policemen in the zone were yet to complete their training, he added.

He underlined the need for better coordination between Afghan and international forces to ensure security in the region. He promised all possible efforts to stop willful house searches during counterinsurgency operations.

Afghan war winnable; not only militarily: US

Lalit K Jha - May 11, 2010 - 13:59

WASHINGTON (PAN): The war in Afghanistan would ultimately be successful, top US civilian and military officials said, stressing it "demands courage and resilience".

"This is a process that takes time. It will demand courage and resilience. We will encounter increased violence as our combined security forces expand into Taliban-controlled areas," said Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the top US commander in Afghanistan in a joint conference with US ambassador, Karl Eikenberry, in the White House.

The two top US officials -- heading the military and civilian aspects of the US strategy for Afghanistan -- are accompanying President Hamid Karzai on his four-day trip to Washington.

Gen. McChrystal, who immediately after his appointment asked for reinforcement to avoid a failure in the nine-year-long war, said with the arriving forces, military operations will escalate in southern Kandahar province, the Taliban birthplace.

Kandahar is "uniquely complex and will require a unique solution", he said. "This effort is being led by the Afghans, and will focus on the complex political and governance aspects of Kandahar."

Karzai is scheduled to meet his US counterpart, Barack Obama, for a three-hour long discussion, in which security and governance would be discussed, on Wednesday.

"We cannot succeed in Afghanistan by military means alone. As well, our civilian mission cannot succeed without the contributions of the military. And accordingly, our efforts have been redesigned and transformed over the past year," Eikenberry told reporters.

"The Afghans must take the lead in their own security and governance in order to defeat and preclude the return to Afghanistan of Al Qaeda and their terrorist allies."

Eikenberry said Americas civilian presence has more than tripled over the past year to more than 1,000. He praised Karzai for some of his recent steps to improve governance.

"We've seen President Karzai make some very important decisions about how to carry the parliamentary elections forward," indicating to the recent changes in the leadership of

Afghanistan's election body.

Karzai and Obama's discussion is highly expected to focus on talks with the Taliban as Karzai delayed a long-awaited peace jirga in which he planned to call on the Taliban to renounce violence, offering them jobs and land in return.

When asked about the reconciliation plan, Gen. McChrystal said: "I think the most important thing is that we first get an Afghan solution, crafted by Afghans, and, second, that it be inclusive and it feel fair to everyone, that everybody has the opportunity to reintegrate in or rejoin the political process."

Karzai, Clinton agree on long-term partnership

Lalit K Jha - May 11, 2010 - 12:01

WASHINGTON (PAN): President Hamid Karzai and US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton have vowed to put aside their differences and work together to build a stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

In her opening remarks at the start of three days Afghan-US talks, Clinton said the progress in Afghanistan had been real, but fragile. She promised the US would remain committed to Afghanistan's security and reconstruction even after the withdrawal of combat troops.

"The country remains under constant threat from extremists who use violence to achieve political ends and promote criminal enterprises, including narcotics trafficking", Clinton added.

The US would stay in the war-devastated country until the dream of a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan was realised, said the secretary of state, who sought patience from all stakeholders.

Even as he praised General Stanley McChrystal, commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, Karzai called for an end to civilian casualties. He also sought Washington's help in making Afghanistan self-reliant.

The visiting leader, dressed in his customary Afghan attire, said Afghanistan had the potential to emerge as a hub of trade and commercial activities between South and Central Asia.

Karzai and Clinton acknowledged there were differences between the leaders of the two countries, but they were reflective of a maturing relationship. "As two mature nations and two mature governments, we will be having disagreements", Karzai said.

"We will not abandon the Afghan people. Our civilian commitment will remain long into the future", assured Clinton, who explained disagreements on issues of bilateral importance did not impeded their ability to achieve their shared objectives.

Afghan police had suffered casualties in far greater numbers than the international forces, Clinton acknowledged, saying government officials continued to be the target of a ruthless assassination campaign.

In Kandahar, motorcycle hit squads preyed on government workers and, a few weeks ago, assassinated the deputy mayor, she recalled. "So it will take time and persistence to cement the gains already made and to secure more as we confront the challenges".

The Karzai government would begin to assume greater responsibility for security starting next year, Clinton hoped. "A sustained focus on economic, social and political development as well as continued training of Afghan security forces is essential to help build effective and durable institutions necessary for long-term stability".

She identified security, development, governance and reintegration and reconciliation as key priorities in Afghanistan and said each was integral to achieving and sustaining stability and progress.

Improved security was an important first step, she said, adding courageous Afghan soldiers were fighting side by side with the brave men and women of the United States and more than 40 other countries.

"This partnership will help Afghans build capacity so they can assume lead responsibility for security over time as conditions permit. And we will continue to equip, train and support the Afghan National Security Forces after our combat role winds down", she reiterated.

She went on to explain long-term stability required improved government capacity at every level. "It requires a common and concerted effort against corruption, implementing the vision and proposals that the president laid out in his inaugural address and at the London Conference".

As was expected, Karzai raised the issue of civilian casualties at the hands of US and coalition forces. He insisted an end to the collateral damage was key to winning the hearts and minds of Afghans.

"As we move forward in this joint venture together, in this partnership together, Afghanistan would be seeking respectful judicial independence. Afghanistan will be seeking protection for its civilian population, for which I'm very thankful to General McChrystal".

He noted Afghanistan and the United States were engaged in a relationship that covered economic reconstruction, improved governance, economy, education, all other aspects of daily lives, security and the training of police and defence forces, as well as combating terrorism.

"Just last week, we had a gruesome example of the threats of terrorism -- once again presents itself in New York -- which fortunately did not materialise, for the security of all of us", he said. Afghanistan would continue to be a partner with the US and other allies in the war on terror.

At the same time, Afghanistan would continue to build its institutions, preserve its progress and walk toward the future with steady, strong steps, observed the president, who was confident the US would help his country to advance the big cause of its reconstruction and economic development.

At the talks, Afghanistan was represented by its foreign, defence, education, finance, culture and interior ministers, national security advisor and ambassador to the US.

The US delegation included Secretary of Defence Robert Gates, Special Representative for Pakistan and Afghanistan Richard Holbrooke, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, NATO Commander in Afghanistan Gen. McChrystal, Ambassador Karl Eikenberry and USAID Administrator Raj Shah.

Karzai arrived in Washington on Monday at the invitation of his US counterpart. He will meet President Barack Obama at the White House on Wednesday. The two leaders will address a joint press conference at the Rose Garden after the meeting.

Crucial Obama-Karzai talks begin

Lalit K Jha - May 12, 2010 - 22:09

WASHINGTON (PAN): Barack Obama, the US president, met his Afghan counterpart, Haimd Karzai, at the Oval Office on Wednesday for discussions expected to focus on corruption and security in Afghanistan.

Obama and Karzai were accompanied by their close aides in to the meeting which was scheduled to last for about 45 minutes. The two leaders are then due to address a joint press conference in the East Room of the White House.

Karzai was expected to bring up the issues of civilian casualties caused by US-led air strikes in Afghanistan. Kabul insists such deaths drive the public towards the Taliban. The issue comes as US troops are planning to launch a major offensive in the southern Afghan province of Kandahar, the Taliban birthplace, which has been labeled a test of Obama's strategy for Afghanistan.

Obama and Karzai will return to talks following the press conference, after which the two will have lunch at the White House.

US and Afghan officials are then expected to continue talks at the White House while Karzai meets top lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

Karzai was invited to visit Washington by Obama, when the US president was in Kabul in March. But that visit set off a war of words between the two leaders and at one time, the Washington visit looked on the verge of being called off.

Diplomatic sources told Pajhwok Afghan News that the there was no evidence of that hostility in meetings at the State Department with Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state, or at the White House with Obama.

Both Karzai and Clinton reiterated their commitment to work together for long-term stability and peace in the region. Karzai brought up civilian casualties and more aid for the government, while the US pressed the Afghan leader on his anti-corruption efforts.

Social Headlines

Roadside bomb claims six lives

Abdul Maqsood Azizi - May 8, 2010 - 11:17

PUL-I-ALAM (PAN): Six members of two families were killed when their vehicle struck a roadside bomb in central Logar province, officials said on Saturday.

The incident took place Friday evening in Garmaba area of Charkh district, the governor's spokesman, Din Muhammad Darwish, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

The powerful explosion tore the car apart, said crime branch chief, Col. Muhammad Jan Abid.

"The roadside bomb was recently planted by Taliban," he said.

The two families were traveling from a clinic back to their homes when their vehicle hit the bomb in Khwaja Ismailkhel village, a resident of the area, Haji Muhammad Naem, said.

Ghulam, his wife and two children, and the driver Gul Mohammad and his wife were killed in the incident, a relative of the victims, Daud Shah, said.

"Five bodies were blown to pieces and we collected the parts of their bodies from the area," he said.

Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, denied the militants were behind the explosion, however he claimed they blew up a US tank on Saturday morning, killing everyone inside, in the Baboos desert of the province.

He added they fired four rockets at a military base of US-led coalition forces in Pat Khwab Shana area, but officials denied the claim.

Floods continue to wreak havoc in the north

Zabihullah Ihsas & Abdul Matin Sarfaraz - May 8, 2010 - 12:58

MAZAR-I-SHARIF/TALOQAN (PAN): More than two dozen people have been killed in flash floods triggered by days of heavy downpours that lashed northern Afghanistan, officials said on Saturday.

Most of the fatalities occurred in the Pakhtun Kot district of Farayab province, where 17 people were killed.

Another two people died in Almar, one in Ghor Mach and another in Gurzi Wan district, the governor's spokesman, Ahmad Javed Baidar, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

The dead included 14 men, five women and two children, he added.

In addition, the flood waters inundated thousands of acres of farmland and washed away thousands of houses in the districts, Baidar said.

Seven teams had been sent to the affected areas to assess the scale of the disaster.

However, roads leading to Kohistanat and Gorzi Wan districts remained blocked due to the floods, he said.

"All houses in our villages were destroyed by floods," Sardar Khan, a tribal elder in

Pakhtun Kot district, said.

"Yesterday, the house of Mullah Imam collapsed as water entered his house," Khan said. The imam was killed but his family members were rescued by villagers, he said.

Dawlatabad resident, Saifur Rahmand Samid, said around 500 acres of cultivable land was washed away and more than 1,000 houses destroyed in their district.

The governor's spokesman urged welfare organisations to send relief as soon as possible. He said they would only be able to assist 1,000 victims, but thousands more would remain in need of help.

In neighbouring Takhar province, five people died and thousands of acres of farmland was destroyed by floods. Three people were killed in Yangi Qala and two others in Chah-i-Ab districts, said the governor's spokesman, Faiz Muhammad Tawheedi.

17 Paktika officials reported for corruption

Obaid Kharoti - May 8, 2010 - 18:20

SHARAN (PAN): Seventeen government officials in the southeastern province of Paktika have been reported to the Attorney General's office on allegations of corruption, a delegation said on Saturday.

The officials, some of whom are high-ranking, have been accused of embezzling funds, Major Gen. Shir Ali Qadir Sarbaz, head of a delegation from the Attorney General's office told Pajhwok Afghan News.

Those named included the administrative and financial head of the governor's office, the provincial head of the Afghan Red Crescent Society, the provincial education director and the district education directors of four districts, the head of the revenue department and some other members of that department, he said.

Dam being constructed in Shakar Darra district of Kabul

Abdul Qadir Siddique - May 8, 2010 - 19:15

KABUL (PAN): A hydroelectric dam will be built on the outskirts of Kabul to generate electricity as well as irrigate a large swathe of land, officials said on Saturday.

The dam will be built in the Shah Aroos area of Kabuls Shakar Darra district, and should generate 1.2 megawatts of electricity for the power-starved city, the Minister for Energy and Water Muhammad Ismail said.

The dam will be built by Iranian company over three and a half years and cost \$40 million, he said.

He said the Iranian company beat out several local and foreign companies who had bid for the tender. About 300 people will be employed to work on the project, he said.

The minister said there were also plans to build hydroelectric dams in Faryab, Herat and Paktia provinces at the cost of \$200 million.

Over the past eight years, the ministry had built 208 small such dams, he said.

Officials said the country's demands are for 5,000 megawatts of power, while its existing capacity is 1,200 megawatts.

34 irrigation schemes completed in Nangarhar

Sangar - May 8, 2010 - 19:19

JALALABAD (PAN): Up to 34 irrigation projects, funded by the United States of America, have been completed in the Rodat district of eastern Nangarhar province, an official said on Saturday.

The schemes included the construction of 22 water dams, a canal and 11 Karez systems, the district chief, Ali Akbar Sadat, told Pajhwok Afghan News on Saturday.

He added the projects cost \$658,000 provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). He hoped the projects would help resolve the issue of water shortage for irrigating crops.

USIAD project coordinator Farid said about 56,125 acres of land would receive water through the schemes, benefiting 17,988 families in the district.

Happy over completion of the projects, a farmer named Samiullah said their yields would improve as last year they faced with water shortage.

Floods inflict heavy damage on four Parwan districts

Farid Tanha - May 9, 2010 - 15:42

CHARIKAR (PAN): Days of heavy rain in central Parwan province have destroyed nearly 30 kilometres of road, washed away dozens of homes and inundated hundreds of acres of farmland, officials said on Sunday.

Residents in four badly-hit districts of the province say they have lost crops and homes and have yet to receive any aid.

The four districts are Sorkh Parsa, Shekh Ali, Sya Gard and Shinwari.

Shinawari was the worst-affected district with 13 homes and 25 kilometres of road destroyed by the floods, Qari Abdul Rahman Ahmadi, a provincial council member, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

Hundreds of acres of farmland were also swamped by the rains, he said.

Ahmadi is a member of an official delegation assessing the scale of damage in the districts.

He said that in Sorkh Parsa, 2.5 kilometres of road were destroyed, three kilometres in Shekh Ali and one kilometre in Sya Gard.

Although there were no reports of deaths, Ahmadi said the residents faced long-term problems with the loss of their crops and livelihoods.

A resident of Shinwari district said his one acre of wheat was destroyed. He worried that the damaged roads would cause problems transporting food, medicine and even patients.

Another resident, Ghulam Mohammad said his house was completely destroyed in a landslide caused by the rains. He demanded the government and relief organisations offer immediate help.

Amir Mohammad Haidari, the provincial head of Afghanistan's National Disaster Management Authority, said they had made a report to the main office about the damage and property loss.

Governor Abdul Basir Salangi said relief supplies, including tents and blankets, had been sent to the district. He added that reconstruction work on the damaged roads would begin soon.

Floods kill six in Saripul

Zabihullah Ihsas - May 9, 2010 - 19:10

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (PAN): Six people, including women, have been killed over the past two days of flooding as a result of heavy rains in northern Saripul province, local officials say.

Deputy Governor, Qamaruddin Shakeeb, told Pajhwok Afghan News on Sunday the floods erupted in the Balkhab and Sancharak districts, where the six people were killed and seven others injured and 300 houses destroyed.

The flash floods also inundated tens of kilometers of roads and bridges were also inundated and thousands of acres of agriculture land washed away.

A resident of Sancharak district, Mohammad said, the entire village of Shagokan was destroyed in the flood. "Believe me there were 40 houses in this village, now even a single one is not intact."

Shakeeb said they did not have any resources to help the flood victims and asked the government to assist them as soon as possible.

It merits a mention here that over the past ten days, floods in various parts of the country have roughly killed 90 people and inflicted huge financial damages.

Baghlan floods leave eight dead

Habibur Rahman Sherzai - May 10, 2010 - 15:32

PUL-I-KHUMRI (PAN): At least eight people were killed and a dozen others in overnight floods near this capital city of central Baghlan province, officials said on Monday.

The casualties occurred in the village of Qul-i-Ahan Dara Kochak, where floodwaters gushed into houses at about 7:30pm Sunday evening.

Mohammad Naseer Kahzad, head of Emergency Committee for the province, said two sons of Senator Maulvi Abdul Wali Rajai were among the casualties.

The official said initial reports revealed the floods destroyed nearly 100 houses. Villagers ascended nearby mountains before floodwaters entered their houses.

A doctor at the Pul-i-Khumri Hospital confirmed receiving the bodies of a 35-year-old man and an infant, as well as eight injured people, four children and as many women.

A resident of the Talashi village, Arbab Mohammad, told Pajhwok Afghan News 700 houses were destroyed and 500 acres of farmland washed away by the floods.

130 tonnes of food distributed

Muhammad Barat - May 10, 2010 - 17:16

AIBAK (PAN): Around 130 tonnes of edibles were distributed to more than 2,100 people under the work-for-food programme in northern Samangan province on Monday, an official said.

A total of 2,146 people from Feroz Nakhchir worked on graveling a 17-kilometre road, clearing a 2.5 kilometre canal and constructing a school boundary wall, district chief Muhammad Nawab Momand told Pajhwok Afghan News.

Funded by the World Food Programme (WFP), the projects were implemented by the Rural Rehabilitation and Development Directorate, said Director Muhammad Aman Amin.

The workers received 107 tonnes of wheat, 13 tonnes of pulses, eight tonnes of ghee and more than two tonnes of salt. Amin said around 10,000 families benefited from the projects.

Mountain slide destroys houses

Jafar Tayar & Zarghona Salehi - May 10, 2010 - 19:49

KABUL/FAIZABAD (PAN): A mountain slide has destroyed 32 houses in Yawan district of northeastern Badakhshan province, officials said on Monday.

Provincial council chief, Zabihullah Attiq, told Pajhwok Afghan News the rockslide took place at midnight on Sunday. He explained the incident in the Saripul village did not cause casualties, as residents had already evacuated the area.

He said the mountain had a crack which widened as a result of incessant rain. The displaced people, living in mosques, relatives' homes and makeshift shelters, are facing problems.

The provincial council chief urged local officials to provide assistance to the affected families as soon as possible.

Mohammad Ibrahim, 55, one of the victims, said all household items and tens of his animals were buried under the rubble. Living with his wife and four children in a mosque, he said: "I lost what I earned in several years. The government should assist us".

Meanwhile, the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) director confirmed the disaster in the Saripul village.

However, Abdul Matin Idraak said it was almost impossible to dispatch assistance to the area due to recent floods that had inundated key roads.

But he added excavators and tractors had been sent to the area to clear the roads as soon as possible so that aid could be delivered to victims.

30 girls poisoned in Kunduz

Abdul Matin Sarfaraz - May 11, 2010 - 17:05

KABUL (PAN): At least 30 school girls were poisoned Tuesday in the provincial capital of Kunduz, the third such attack on a girls' school in the city in less than a month, officials said.

The girls had been taken to a local hospital, where some of them were unconscious and in critical condition, the head of the city hospital, Homayoon Khamosh, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

He said the cause of their sickness was a poisonous gas, similar to the one that had been used at Khodeja-ul-Kubra and Fatima-tu-Zahara girls schools in the city, three weeks ago. "A masked man, dressed in black, came into the classroom and threw a small box at us. When we saw the box, we tried to run away, but I passed out. When I regained consciousness, I was in hospital," one of the girls, Nafeesa, 13, said.

The acting director of the education department, Abdul Karim Wahdat, confirmed the incident.

His predecessor was fired after the previous two attacks on girl schools.

Provincial police chief, Brig. Gen. Mohammad Razaq Yaqubi, blamed those who did not want girls to get an education, although he said he did not think the Taliban was involved. The Taliban banned education for girls during their five-year regime and in many rural areas, there are still threats against families who allow their daughters to attend school and against female teachers.

There have been no claims of responsibility for any of the gas attacks, so far. Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, has strongly condemned the incident.

172 NGOs dissolved

Rahmatullah Afghan - May 11, 2010 - 19:26

KABUL (PAN): The Ministry of Economy (MoE) has ordered the dissolution of 172 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for failing to comply with the relevant law. The activities of these NGOs were jointly evaluated by the Ministry of Economy and a commission formed by President Hamid Karzai. The commission included officials from the Ministries of Interior, Justice, Foreign Affairs, Finance and Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Economy, Siddiq Amarkhel told Pajhwok Afghan News that 20 foreign NGOs were also among those dissolved. Under the law, each NGO has to report to the MoE every six months. But these organisations failed to present their reports for the last two years.

Currently, 1,224 national and 301 international NGOs are operating in Afghanistan. Last year, 255 NGOs, including 13 international organisations, were ordered closed by the ministry.

5,000 more families get electricity in Faryab

Zabihullah Ihsas - May 11, 2010 - 19:49

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (PAN): Officials said around 6,000 families in Shirin Tagab district of western Faryab province were provided electricity. Governor's spokesman Ahmad Javed Bidar told Pajhwok Afghan News that 11 electricity centres, costing 19 million afghanis, had been established in the district. He added with the new electricity centers, power has reached 90 per cent of the people in the area. Eight districts in the province have access to electricity. Happy over the provision of electricity, a resident of Takhta Koprak village Juma Badi said earlier they had to use lamps for light in their houses.

UN investigating cause of schoolgirls' illness

Pajhwok Report - May 12, 2010 - 13:18

KABUL (PAN): The UN's special representative to Afghanistan said on Wednesday he was concerned by reports that students at several girls schools had been sickened over the past few weeks, allegedly in gas attacks.

Dozens of girls at schools in Kabul, Daikundi and Kunduz provinces have been hospitalised with vomiting or having lost consciousness. Many of them have reported smelling a sweet odour before passing out or feeling sick.

On Tuesday, 30 girls in Kunduz were treated in hospital after students said a man dressed in black threw a bottle at their school. In Kabul, another six were also hospitalized.

There has been no claim of responsibility in any of the suspected attacks so far. Officials blame opponents of education for girls, although the Taliban, which during its five year reign banned girls from going to school, has denied any involvement.

The World Health Organization and UNICEF, the UN children's fund, have been investigating these reports, helping to treat the ill children and seeking ways to prevent any possible breach of security in Afghanistan's schools, Staffan de Mistura, the special envoy, said in a statement.

Blood samples have been sent to laboratories outside of the country, as there are no facilities in Afghanistan to thoroughly test the blood, he said.

UNICEF has provided medication to the Ministry of Public Health and is actively pursuing ways to ensure school security, it said.

"As the senior UN official in Afghanistan, I have asked all relevant UN entities to remain vigilant in the protection of schools and of all children's rights to education," he said.

Karzai orders poison gas attackers arrested

Abdul Qadir Siddiqui - May 12, 2010 - 19:25

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai, currently on a four-day visit to the United States, has ordered security officials to arrest perpetrators of recent poison attacks on girls' schools in Kunduz and Kabul.

On Tuesday, at least 30 students of the Khudijatul Kubra Girls' High School were poisoned in the capital of northern Kunduz province, the third such attack in the city in less than a month.

After the suspected poisonous gas attack, the girls were taken to a local hospital, where some of them are said to be in a critical condition.

The Taliban fighters, who are opposed to female education, have been accused of carrying out the attacks, but they have denied involvement in the incidents.

Karzai had directed the provincial authorities to put special arrangements in place for the protection of schoolchildren, the Presidential Palace in Kabul said on Wednesday.

"The elements who commit such inhuman acts against students are the enemies of the country and they want Afghans to be deprived of education and to live in darkness," the statement added.

Afghan women's issues a priority: Clinton

Pajhwok Correspondent - May 14, 2010 - 16:01

WASHINGTON (PAN): US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has said the Obama administration will accord top priority to issues related to Afghanistan's women.

"The United States will continue to target assistance to women in areas ranging from girls' education to better health services, particularly maternal health, to protecting women from violence, to enhancing their roles in agriculture and the economy".

At a meeting with women ministers from the conflict-devastated country on Thursday, she appreciated the fact that many women in Afghanistan were concerned about what reintegration and reconciliation would mean for them.

"It is essential I have said this in London, I have said this in the United States, I will say this again at the Kabul conference - it is essential that women's rights and opportunities are not sacrificed," she added.

Minister of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and the Disabled Amina Afzali, acting Minister of Health Dr. Suraya Dalil and Director of Gender and Human Rights at Ministry of Foreign Affairs Osman were in Washington as part of a delegation led by President Hamid Karzai.

"I am delighted to be meeting with these women because the Afghan government has made very important contributions and commitments to the dialogue between our two countries," Clinton said.

Women were central to long-term stability and the US strategy to promote security, good governance and economic and social development in Afghanistan, the secretary said.

Clinton said she had pledged to Karzai that the US would not abandon Afghanistan's women in its quest for peace and long-term stability. "We will stand with you always. I am so impressed and admiring of the contributions that women have made in all of Afghanistan's history".