

Bussiness and Politics in the Muslim World

Afghanistan This week

Report: 130

Week: 24-30 July, 2010

Date: 2, July, 2010

By: Mohammad Amin

Bussiness and Politics in the Muslim World
Afghanistan This week
Report: 130
Week: 24-30 July, 2010
Date: 2, July, 2010
By: Mohammad Amin

Contents

POLITICAL HEADLINES SUMMARY	4
GEO-STRATEGIC HEADLINES SUMMARY	6
SOCIAL HEADLINES SUMMARY	6
ECONOMICAL HEADLINES SUMMARY	7
POLITICAL HEADLINES	8
KABUL CONFERENCE A MILESTONE FOR AFGHANISTAN: UN.....	8
FOUR NATO SOLDIERS DIE IN BOMBING	8
LACK OF COORDINATION LINKED TO DRUG TRADE	9
POLICE DEATH TOLL RISING, SAYS MINISTRY.....	9
EU TO GIVE KABUL 600M EUROS OVER NEXT THREE YEARS	10
IN HERAT, MOST POLL RUNNERS ARE YOUNG & EDUCATED	11
ITALY PLEDGES 45M TO AFGHANISTAN	12
AFGHAN WAR DOCUMENTS REVEALED	12
LEAK OF WAR LOGS SURPRISES KABUL	15
BRITISH CASUALTY TAKES COALITION DEATH TOLL TO 400	15
JOINT PROBE INTO SANGIN KILLINGS UNDERWAY: NATO.....	16
KABUL SAYS LEAK OF WAR LOGS VINDICATES ITS POSITION.....	16
KARZAI ORDERS CLOSER STUDY OF LEAKED MEMOS	17
UN CALLS FOR TRANSPARENT PROBE INTO SANGIN DEATHS	17
KARZAI SLAMS LEAK OF WAR MEMOS	18
MOB TORCHES NATO VEHICLES AFTER DEADLY CRASH.....	18
THREE MORE ISAF SOLDIERS KILLED IN SOUTH	19
GEO-STRATEGIC HEADLINES	20
TALIBAN RECAPTURE BARG-I-MATAL BORDER DISTRICT.....	20
KARZAI ORDERS REINFORCEMENTS TO BARG-I-MATAL	20
TROOPS OUST TALIBAN FROM BARG-I-MATAL	21
TALIBAN SEE BARG-I-MATAL AS NEW SANCTUARY: ANALYSTS	21
GEN. PETRAEUS VISITS HELMAND	23
LONG-TERM PRESENCE OF US FORCES IN AFGHANISTAN NOT IN NATIONAL INTEREST	23

SOCIAL HEADLINES	25
QURAN DESECRATION SPARKS PROTEST	25
\$3M AGREEMENT INKED WITH NORWEGIAN ORGANISATION	25
SAUDI GIVES AFGHANISTAN \$24M FOR EDUCATION	26
ECONOMICAL HEADLINES	27
LEGAL CHALLENGE FILED TO TRANSIT TRADE DEAL	27
APTTA TO BOOST AFGHAN EXPORTS.....	28

Political Headlines Summary

Kabul conference a milestone for Afghanistan: UN

WASHINGTON (PAN): The UN Security Council on Friday welcomed the recently held Kabul conference, and termed it as a "milestone" for the development of peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Four NATO soldiers die in bombing

KABUL, (KABUL): Four NATO-led soldiers were killed in a bombing in the volatile southern Afghanistan on Saturday, the alliance said.

Lack of coordination linked to drug trade

KABUL (PAN): The lack of coordination between Afghanistan and its neighbours is a principal cause of the production and smuggling of drugs in the war-torn country, an official said on Saturday.

Police death toll rising, says ministry

KABUL (PAN): At least 44 police personnel have been killed over the past week across the country, a 27 per cent increase on the previous week, the Ministry of Interior said on Sunday.

EU to give Kabul 600m euros over next three years

KABUL (PAN): Praising the Afghan government and people for successfully holding a major international conference on Tuesday, the European Union Sunday pledged 600 million euros over next three years for the development of different Afghan sectors.

In Herat, most poll runners are young & educated

HERAT CITY (PAN): A number of young candidates are running for the September 18 parliamentary vote in western Herat province, giving a special colour to the ongoing election campaign.

Italy pledges 45m to Afghanistan

KABUL (PAN): Italy would provide 45 million euros in aid to Afghanistan's justice and agriculture sectors, as well as road construction, a top diplomat said on Sunday.

Afghan war documents revealed

KABUL (PAN): Tens of thousands of previously unseen military and intelligence logs from six years of warfare in Afghanistan have revealed what many had already suspected an alliance that was operating at times under the radar and with little accountability.

Leak of war logs surprises Kabul

KABUL (PAN): The leak of secret war logs of the US military was a "surprise" to the Afghan government, said President Hamid Karzai's spokesman on Monday.

British casualty takes coalition death toll to 400

KABUL (PAN): A British soldier was killed in a bomb blast in southern Helmand province, Britains defence ministry announced on Tuesday, bringing to 400 the number of international forces killed this year in Afghanistan.

Joint probe into Sangin killings underway: NATO

KABUL (PAN): NATO and Afghan government officials are probing allegations of civilian casualties at the hands of foreign forces in the lawless southern province of Helmand, the Western military alliance said on Tuesday.

Kabul says leak of war logs vindicates its position

KABUL (PAN): The leak of war logs has vindicated Kabul's position on cross-border terrorist sanctuaries, the National Security Council (NSC) said on Tuesday.

Karzai orders closer study of leaked memos

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai on Tuesday ordered a thorough study of nearly 92,000 leaked US military documents, suggesting regional spy agencies are fueling the Afghan war.

UN calls for transparent probe into Sangin deaths

KABUL (PAN): The United Nations on Wednesday expressed deep concern at reports of civilian casualties at the hands of foreign troops in the Sangin district of lawless southern Helmand province.

Karzai slams leak of war memos

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai on Thursday reiterated his call for international action against terrorist sanctuaries and training centers beyond Afghanistan's borders.

Mob torches NATO vehicles after deadly crash

KABUL (PAN): Scores of angry residents of this central capital on Friday torched two foreign military vehicles after a NATO vehicle crashed into a civilian car killing at least four occupants, officials and witnesses said.

Three more ISAF soldiers killed in south

KABUL (PAN): Three NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) soldiers have been killed in separate blasts in southern Afghanistan, the alliance said on Friday, making July the deadliest month for foreign forces in the nearly 9-year-war.

Geo-Strategic Headlines Summary

Taliban recapture Barg-i-Matal border district

JALALABAD (PAN): The Taliban recaptured a strategic district in eastern Nuristan province, bordering Pakistan, on Sunday, after two days of intense fighting with local security forces, the provincial governor said.

Karzai orders reinforcements to Barg-i-Matal

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai Sunday ordered the dispatch of reinforcements to the Barg-i-Matal district that fell to Taliban insurgents as a result of a pre-dawn attack in eastern Nuristan province.

Troops oust Taliban from Barg-i-Matal

JALALABAD (PAN): Afghan and NATO-led forces have recaptured the volatile Barg-i-Matal district in eastern Nuristan province a day after Taliban militants retreated local forces from the district, a top official said Monday.

Taliban see Barg-i-Matal as new sanctuary: analysts

KABUL/JALALABAD (PAN): Analysts believe the Taliban viewed Barg-i-Matal district in eastern Nuristan province as a possible safe-haven and strategic route to the north and east of the country.

Gen. Petraeus visits Helmand

LASHKARGAH (PAN): NATO's commander in Afghanistan, Gen. David Petraeus, made his first visit to the southern province of Helmand on Tuesday since taking charge of all allied forces in the country.

Long-term presence of US forces in Afghanistan not in national interest

WASHINGTON (PAN): Two influential US senators have told their president that long-term open-ended presence of US forces in Afghanistan is not in America's national interest.

Social Headlines Summary

Quran desecration sparks protest

TIRINKOT (PAN): Hundreds of people demonstrated in the capital of southern Uruzgan province on Thursday accusing NATO troops of tearing a copy of the Quran.

\$3m agreement inked with Norwegian organisation

KABUL (PAN): An agreement worth three million US dollars was signed between the Ministry of Culture and Information and a Norwegian organisation on Thursday.

Saudi gives Afghanistan \$24m for education

KABUL (PAN): The government of Saudi Arabia on Thursday provided the Afghan Ministry of Education with \$24 million to help improve educational infrastructure.

Economical Headlines Summary

Legal challenge filed to transit trade deal

KABUL (PAN): A legal challenge was filed in a Pakistani court on Saturday to the much-touted transit trade deal between Islamabad and Kabul, throwing into doubt the implementation of the agreement.

APTTA to boost Afghan exports

KABUL (PAN): The new transit deal will boost the country's exports as Afghan trucks can now unload goods anywhere in neighbouring Pakistan, believe trade leaders.

Political Headlines

Kabul conference a milestone for Afghanistan: UN

Pajhwok Correspondent - Jul 24, 2010 - 12:55

WASHINGTON (PAN): The UN Security Council on Friday welcomed the recently held Kabul conference, and termed it as a "milestone" for the development of peace and stability in Afghanistan.

"The consensus is that this summit is a milestone in the development of peace, security and stability in Afghanistan and the international community and all nation states will remain engaged with Afghanistan in order to sustain this milestone," the Security Council President for the month of July, Ambassador U Joy Ogwu of Nigeria, said.

Ogwu was speaking to reporters at the UN headquarters in New York after the UN Security Council a meeting welcomed the Kabul conference. The UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, who co-chaired the Kabul conference along with President, Hamid Karzai, briefed the 15-membered body.

"So there is a forward looking strategy rather. There is so much confidence in the capacity and ability with international cooperation and support that the elections will hold and that 2014 is realistic," Ogwu said.

In response to a question on Afghanistans delisting request the UN Security Council President said there is no deadline, but future action will depend on the progress that is satisfactory progress that is made.

Ogwu said members of the Security Council heard a briefing from the secretary-general on his visit to Afghanistan and the Kabul International Conference.

The members of the Council congratulated the government of Afghanistan on the organization of the conference, which brought together representatives of more than 60 countries, international and regional organisations and financial institutions to discuss Afghanistan's development, governance and stability, he said.

The members of the Council welcomed the commitments made by the Afghan government, including the development framework, timelines and benchmarks for the new national priority programs, progress towards transition to an Afghan security-led improvement of governance and tackling of corruption.

Four NATO soldiers die in bombing

Pajhwok Report - Jul 24, 2010 - 17:04

KABUL, (KABUL): Four NATO-led soldiers were killed in a bombing in the volatile southern Afghanistan on Saturday, the alliance said.

The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) neither disclosed the nationalities of the victims of the blast nor specified the exact location of the incident in its brief statement.

The latest deaths bring to 69 the number of ISAF soldiers killed across Afghanistan this month.

The Taliban have intensified the use of roadside bombs as their weapon of choice to target foreign and Afghan forces.

Lack of coordination linked to drug trade

Khawaja Basir Ahmad - Jul 24, 2010 - 18:06

KABUL (PAN): The lack of coordination between Afghanistan and its neighbours is a principal cause of the production and smuggling of drugs in the war-torn country, an official said on Saturday.

Joint conferences would be arranged to eliminate the scourge of drugs and forge better coordination with neighbouring countries, a spokesman for the Ministry of Counternarcotics said.

Zalmay Afzali told journalists in Kabul they could not organise such events in the past due to insufficient international support for the Afghan government's anti-drug campaign. The US and Britain were the main funding sources for the drive, he said.

However, a number of countries promised at the July 20 Kabul Conference support to the ministry and acknowledged the drug menace as a challenge to the entire global fraternity, not only to the Afghan government, he added.

In his speech to the conference, the Iranian foreign minister had said the drug production level had seen a huge surge after the deployment of foreign troops to Afghanistan.

Commenting on Manouchehr Mottaki's remarks, Afzali said: "I don't rule out the involvement of foreigners in drug smuggling. However, we don't have any concrete evidence."

With the help of neighbours, the smuggling of narcotics would be curbed at borders, he said, adding poppy cultivation in Afghanistan would be reduced as a result.

Police death toll rising, says ministry

Khawaja Basir Ahmad - Jul 25, 2010 - 16:32

KABUL (PAN): At least 44 police personnel have been killed over the past week across the country, a 27 per cent increase on the previous week, the Ministry of Interior said on Sunday.

The number of bombings and armed attacks has also gone up in the past week, the spokesman for the ministry, Zemaray Bashari, told a news conference.

He said 188 security-related incidents had been reported across the country in the past seven days.

However, the number of civilian casualties had fallen to 21, he said, a decrease of 67 percent. However, 95 civilians and 69 police personnel were wounded, Bashari said during his weekly news conference, without adding whether this represented an increase or decrease from the previous week.

The interior ministry spokesman said more than 200 militants had been killed this past week with an equal number wounded and arrested.

The Taliban have intensified their attacks, particularly the use of roadside bombs, across the country over the past two months.

Security forces seized 468 bombs and more than 50 weapons during the past week, Bashari said.

EU to give Kabul 600m euros over next three years

Rahmatullah Afghan - Jul 25, 2010 - 10:22

KABUL (PAN): Praising the Afghan government and people for successfully holding a major international conference on Tuesday, the European Union Sunday pledged 600 million euros over next three years for the development of different Afghan sectors. Speaking at a press conference in Kabul, EU special representative in Afghanistan, Vygaudas Usackas, said the assistance would be used for the development of agriculture and health sectors, as well as capacity-building of Afghan officials.

He supported the decisions taken at the Kabul Conference, attended by representatives from 70 countries and international organisations, which endorsed President Hamid Karzai's goal that Afghan forces should lead security operations across the country by 2014.

"The arrangements, including security, show Afghans have the potential to run effectively any kind of affairs and they have the ability to run their country on their own," Usackas said.

Describing the conference a historic achievement for Afghanistan, the EU envoy said the plans presented by the Afghan government had been approved because they were prepared in an intelligent manner.

Officials say the Afghan government presented its programmes and priorities in areas of security, agriculture, rural development, economic and infrastructure uplift, human rights and good governance. The government pledged it would intensify efforts at countering corruption and narcotics.

Usackas promised the EU would continue to assist and work jointly with the Afghan government to implement the decisions. "Afghanistan is home to Afghans and the international community is here to help them."

The diplomat said the European Union provided one million euros annually to Afghanistan for the improvement of different sectors.

In Herat, most poll runners are young & educated

Ahmad Qureshi - Jul 25, 2010 - 17:39

HERAT CITY (PAN): A number of young candidates are running for the September 18 parliamentary vote in western Herat province, giving a special colour to the ongoing election campaign.

Most of the contenders from the relatively peaceful province, locate near the border with Iran, are headed for a neck-and-neck fight, with slogans of change and hope.

Among them is a US-educated woman, Nahid Ahmadi Farid, who has done her Masters in Political Science from the George Washington University. She says her education and interest has motivated her to run for the election.

She adds a better future for Afghanistan can be ensured only if backwardness and fundamentalism are stoutly resisted.

Another candidate, Basir Bekzad, who studied in Iran, said the previous parliamentary ballot, which was dominated by elders with ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences.

The youth should not wait and see; instead they should be an integral part of the electoral fray, according to Bekzad.

Also in the field are some elders, who are confident of making it to the Wolesi Jirga, lower house of parliament. However, they welcome the youth's foray into politics.

"Ruling the country should be left to the youth," says Syed Muhammad Rafiq, 68, who is illiterate but believes in the ability of the rising generation. According to him, the youth are welcomed everywhere in the country.

However, Muhammad Yousaf, a shopkeeper in the Hesar area, is pessimistic about the educated youth winning the polls. The 25-year-old says there are some candidates who are not eligible but they could win because they are spending a lot of much money on their campaigns.

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) statistics show the number of youth contesting the parliamentary elections has increased in the province.

Compared to the first post-Taliban parliamentary elections in 2004, the number of young contestants is up by about 80 percent. Laila Ehrari, IEC public relations head, said about 120 of the 151 candidates have completed higher education or are 12th grade graduates.

The contenders include 24 women, some having completed their higher education. None of the aspirants was illiterate, she said, adding 17 Wolesi Jirga seats were up for grabs in Herat.

Italy pledges 45m to Afghanistan

Frozan Rahmani & Sayed Abbas - Jul 25, 2010 - 19:11

KABUL (PAN): Italy would provide 45 million euros in aid to Afghanistan's justice and agriculture sectors, as well as road construction, a top diplomat said on Sunday. Most of the money would be spent on enhancing the capacity of the judiciary, particularly upgrading the role of women in this sector, said the Italian ambassador to Kabul.

Claudio Glaentzer told a news conference that capacity-building was greatly needed in Afghanistan. He also supported the decisions taken at Kabul International Conference held on July 20 and called it a "successful event".

The conference, attended by representatives from 60 countries and a dozen international organisations, agreed to channel half of international aid through the government of Afghanistan.

"The more money you spend through the government of Afghanistan, the more capacity-building will improve," the ambassador said, adding Italy had long been supportive of such a decision.

While backing all plans and priorities of the Afghan leader, the envoy said: "We will use all our means to implement President Hamid Karzai's suggestions."

Since 2001, Italy has spent 500 million in different sectors in Afghanistan. Earlier this year, it announced to spend 100 million in 2010. An amount of 55 million was spent previously and the remaining was pledged on Sunday.

Italy is also one of the major troop contributors to Afghanistan with 3,000 of its combat soldiers operating under the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), mostly in western Herat province.

Afghan war documents revealed

Pajhwok Monitor - Jul 26, 2010 - 18:48

KABUL (PAN): Tens of thousands of previously unseen military and intelligence logs from six years of warfare in Afghanistan have revealed what many had already suspected an alliance that was operating at times under the radar and with little accountability.

The documents, leaked by the online whistle blower Wikileaks, and given several weeks prior to three media outlets -- The Guardian, The New York Times and the German news magazine Der Spiegel -- detail unreported civilian casualties, covert hit squads, undisciplined Afghan security forces, the escalation of Taliban attacks and Pakistans growing influence with the Taliban.

There are 92,000 entries in all, covering the war from January 2004 through December 2009. Most are military logs, entries by soldiers on the ground, but others are classified memos between diplomats and intelligence agents.

Not all have been published by Wikileaks, whose founder, Julian Assange, has not said where he got the information from. He said he would censor some of the information so as to protect local informants and genuine military secrets. He added the data was showing the real nature of the war in Afghanistan.

The White House has condemned their release saying it put at risk the lives of Americans, our partners, and local populations who co-operate with us and said the logs do not reflect the current administrations efforts in Afghanistan, blaming years of neglect by Barack Obamas predecessor, George W Bush. .

On Dec. 1, 2009, President Obama announced a new strategy with a substantial increase in resources for Afghanistan, and increased focus on Al Qaeda and Taliban safe-havens in Pakistan, precisely because of the grave situation that had developed over several years, said Gen. James L Jones, White House national security adviser, in a statement released Sunday, the day the documents were published.

The New York Times and the Guardian both point to documents in which Pakistan is shown to have increasing influence with the Taliban, news that is likely to put pressure on President Hamid Karzai who is trying to bring Islamabad into the negotiation process with the Taliban.

The Guardian says that more than 180 intelligence files in the war logs, most of which cannot be confirmed, detail accusations that Pakistan's premier spy agency, the ISI, has been supplying, arming and training the insurgency since at least 2004.

The Times says that the former ISI chief Hamid Gul was at a meeting of Taliban in 2009 where they discussed how to follow on with a suicide mission of a killed insurgent. Gul is also reported to have discussed the assassination of Afghan President Hamid Karzai. The ISI are also believed to have had a hand in the Indian Embassy bombing, according to the Times.

The paper also says that from 2001 to 2008, the CIA paid the budget of Afghanistans spy agency, the National Directorate of Security, and ran it as a virtual subsidiary.

All three media reported on the previously undisclosed information that the Taliban had heat-seeking missiles, the same surface-to-air rockets the CIA supplied to the Mujahideen

in the 1980s that helped them defeat the Soviets. In at least one incident, NATO insisted a helicopter had been brought down by small arms fire, despite residents providing information to the contrary.

The NATO coalition was also shown to be operating a secret hit squad with a list of 2,000 Taliban and Al Qaeda figures to capture or kill. However, the documents show that often, civilians or even police have been killed in the cross-fire.

The Guardian, which has an interactive map pointing to 300 of the thousands of fatal incidents over the six years, details harrowing stories of civilians killed in combat. It said there were 144 incidents of accident civilian deaths, mostly from air strikes, but also of civilians on motorbikes or in cars shot by NATO soldiers afraid of falling prey to a suicide bomber.

The Times reported on a deaf man in southeastern Paktika province who was shot as he ran out of his house during a raid because he could not hear paramilitary forces when they shouted to him to stop. Food and provisions were given as compensation, the Times said

At the same time, the documents also show a surge in the number of civilian deaths -- 2,000 -- from Taliban-planted roadside bombings.

Rachel Reid, who investigates civilian casualty incidents in Afghanistan for Human Rights Watch, told the Guardian: "These files bring to light what's been a consistent trend by US and NATO forces: the concealment of civilian casualties. Despite numerous tactical directives ordering transparent investigations when civilians are killed, there have been incidents I've investigated in recent months where this is still not happening.

Accountability is not just something you do when you are caught. It should be part of the way the US and NATO do business in Afghanistan every time they kill or harm civilians."

Other damning information for the coalition is the lack of discipline among Afghan security forces, which NATO is counting on to take the lead in security from 2014. The reports show how Afghan police and soldiers have turned on each other over seemingly trivial arguments, how they have terrorised civilians in some parts of the country and friendly fire in which their coalition counterparts have been shot at.

Some supporters of the war have suggested that logs do not present any new information, as mounting civilian casualties and the role of Pakistan in supporting the Taliban has been widely suspected.

However, US senator John Kerry, chair of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the leaks "raise serious questions about the reality of America's policy toward Pakistan and Afghanistan.

"Those policies are at a critical stage and these documents may very well underscore the stakes and make the calibrations needed to get the policy right more urgent."

Leak of war logs surprises Kabul

Frozan Rahmani - Jul 26, 2010 - 18:50

KABUL (PAN): The leak of secret war logs of the US military was a "surprise" to the Afghan government, said President Hamid Karzai's spokesman on Monday.

The documents would help Kabul gain more information about the nature of the stalemated war, Wahid Omar told a news conference in the capital.

The online release of nearly 92,000 reports of incidents and classified meetings over the past six years would enable the Afghan government to access such information much faster, he hoped.

The cover-up of civilian casualties and the role of spy agencies of Afghanistan's neighbour in fueling the insurgency were the two important documents for the Karzai administration, he added.

Speaking a day after the documents were released by the Wikileaks, he said the Afghan government was aware of foreign role in destabilising the country -- a concern repeatedly expressed over the last several years.

"The publication of the documents is important for all of us to know that peace and stability in Afghanistan is possible only if the centres of training, equipping and funding of terrorists are dealt with," Omar said, pointing to rebel sanctuaries across Afghan borders.

Pakistan has said the disclosure of the documents would not affect its relations with the United States. Kabul emphasised efforts to minimise civilian casualties, saying rows with foreign troops over deaths of non-combatants had decreased.

Omar urged the US and Pakistan to seriously fight against the menace of terrorism in the region.

British casualty takes coalition death toll to 400

Jawid Hamim Kakar - Jul 27, 2010 - 13:12

KABUL (PAN): A British soldier was killed in a bomb blast in southern Helmand province, Britains defence ministry announced on Tuesday, bringing to 400 the number of international forces killed this year in Afghanistan.

The soldier was killed in Sangin district, where the British army has lost 100 soldiers over the past eight years. The US is expected to take over from Britain in the coming months.

Britain has 10,000 soldiers stationed in Afghanistan, the second highest contributing force after the US, and has lost 324 servicemen and women since the start of the war in late 2001.

Of the 400 foreign soldiers killed this year, 260 were American, 100 British and 60 of other nationalities.

Joint probe into Sangin killings underway: NATO

Pajhwok Report - Jul 27, 2010 - 13:45

KABUL (PAN): NATO and Afghan government officials are probing allegations of civilian casualties at the hands of foreign forces in the lawless southern province of Helmand, the Western military alliance said on Tuesday.

Fifty-two civilians were killed in a flawed attack by NATO-led foreign troops in the Regi area of the Taliban-infested Sangin district on Friday, residents, tribal elders and intelligence officials say.

Mortar shells hit a mud house, where civilians had taken refuge from fighting between International Security Assistance (ISAF) troops and Taliban insurgents, killing more than 50 innocent people. The dead included women and children.

Chairing a meeting of the Council of Ministers on Monday, President Hamid Karzai voiced deep shock at the killing of innocent people. He denounced the incident as an immoral and inhuman act and asked NATO forces to do all they could to prevent civilian casualties in counterinsurgency operations.

ISAF and ministries of interior and defence officials reviewed a combined operation that occurred 10 kilometres south of the village, where the troops came under attack with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades.

"All fires were observed and accounted for and struck the intended target. Coalition forces reported six insurgents killed in the strike, including a Taliban commander, a report verified by ground observation and intelligence sources."

"Any speculation at this point of an alleged civilian casualty in Regi village is completely unfounded," said ISAF Communication Director Rear Admiral Greg Smith. "We are conducting a thorough investigation and will report any and all findings when known."

On July 10, six Afghan non-combatants were shot dead by ISAF troops in the southeastern province of Paktia.

Kabul says leak of war logs vindicates its position

Zarghona Salehi - Jul 27, 2010 - 16:32

KABUL (PAN): The leak of war logs has vindicated Kabul's position on cross-border terrorist sanctuaries, the National Security Council (NSC) said on Tuesday.

The disclosure of nearly 92,000 classified military documents by Wikileaks also supported Afghanistan's criticism over the lack of mechanisms to eliminate militant safe havens, the council added.

Some of the documents and intelligence memos indicate Pakistan provides safe havens for the Taliban and the war in Afghanistan is led from those sanctuaries.

The documents also suggest Iran is financing militant groups, the Gulbadin Hekmatyar-led Hezb-i-Islami in particular, to fight foreign troops in Afghanistan.

While stressing the elimination of real terrorist sanctuaries, the NSC said: "It's sad to say that our allies have not paid enough attention to foreign financing, training and support for militants, which threatens security of the region and the world at large."

There was a need for a "clear" anti-terror policy, the top security body said in a statement. Pakistan and Iran have already denied playing any role in propping up the insurgency in Afghanistan, saying their secret services have no links to militant groups.

Karzai orders closer study of leaked memos

Pajhwok Report - Jul 27, 2010 - 19:19

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai on Tuesday ordered a thorough study of nearly 92,000 leaked US military documents, suggesting regional spy agencies are fueling the Afghan war.

President Karzai ordered the National Security Council and the foreign ministry to go through the documents on Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region, his office said in a statement.

The biggest leak in the US military history, the war logs were released by the Wikileaks on Sunday.

Karzai directed the ministry and the council to indentify the points that were crucial to the security of his country at the earliest possible, the statement added.

UN calls for transparent probe into Sangin deaths

Pajhwok Report - Jul 28, 2010 - 19:17

KABUL (PAN): The United Nations on Wednesday expressed deep concern at reports of civilian casualties at the hands of foreign troops in the Sangin district of lawless southern Helmand province.

NATO and Afghan government officials are currently probing allegations of the July 23 civilian deaths in the Regi village. Fifty-two residents were reportedly killed as mortar shells hit a mud house, where civilians had taken refuge from fighting.

"It is essential that the current ISAF-Afghan government investigation be completed in a thorough, transparent and timely manner, and that the findings be made public as soon as possible," the UN mission in Kabul said.

UNAMA's human rights office is also gathering information on the matter, according to Staffan de Mistura, special representative of the secretary-general for Afghanistan and head of the UN mission.

He added: "While the government and ISAF determine the facts of what occurred in Regi, where reports detail a large number of civilian deaths and injuries, I once again highlight the need for all sides to meet their obligations to protect civilians."

All parties to an armed conflict had responsibilities under international law to protect civilians and minimise the impact of their actions on the civilian population and objects, such as schools and hospitals, the mission said in a statement.

It added all parties were obliged not to launch attacks where death and damage to civilians and civilian objects would be excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage; take constant care to spare the population and never use civilians as human shields.

"Any loss of civilian life is tragic, and we offer our sincere condolences to family

members and the community, and wish a speedy recovery to those injured," said de Mistura.

Karzai slams leak of war memos

Frozan Rahmani - Jul 29, 2010 - 16:01

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai on Thursday reiterated his call for international action against terrorist sanctuaries and training centers beyond Afghanistan's borders.

His remarks come days after a website called Wikileaks released over 90,000 documents on the war. The leaked memos accused Pakistan's spy agency of aiding the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

His administration was still reading and analyzing the stream of US military documents, he said, warning the reports might endanger the lives of Afghans who provided the information to the website.

"It is extremely irresponsible and shocking; there are lives in danger," remarked the Afghan leader, who has directed his Cabinet ministers to look into the documents, particularly the papers on civilian casualties.

"The international community is here to fight the menace of terrorism, but there is danger elsewhere and they are not acting," he told a news briefing in Kabul.

Karzai asked the world to mount pressure on Pakistan to dismantle the terrorist hideouts instead of damaging the homes of ordinary Afghans in counterinsurgency operations.

He said Afghanistan would continue to cooperate with the global fraternity if the approach to the war on terror was altered in light of the leaked memos.

The government would expand relations with neighbouring countries so that Afghanistan could fight against the menace on its own, the president promised.

Mob torches NATO vehicles after deadly crash

Jawad Sharifzada - Jul 30, 2010 - 10:44

KABUL (PAN): Scores of angry residents of this central capital on Friday torched two foreign military vehicles after a NATO vehicle crashed into a civilian car killing at least four occupants, officials and witnesses said.

The crash happened in the Bebe Mahro area on the Kabul Airport road at 3pm. Afghan forces cordoned off the area, closing the road against traffic.

A large number of Kabul residents arrived at the scene to know what had happened. They got angry after knowing about the deaths and started throwing stones at foreign troops, eyewitnesses said.

Two NATO armoured vehicles were set afire soon after the incident took place.

Shamsuddin, who works at a bakery shop, told Pajhwok Afghan News that foreign troops escaped after killing four civilians in a car, leaving behind their armoured vehicles.

To disperse the mob, police also fired into the air. The road was reopened for vehicular traffic at 4:30pm.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said a quick reaction force had been dispatched to the area. The incident was being investigated, it added.

Witnesses said the passenger vehicle was hit by a NATO vehicle in convoy.

The accident happened when the civilian vehicle drove onto the main road from a side

street and was hit by one of the two military vehicles, residents said.

The angry mob also chanted slogans against foreign troops and President Hamid Karzai. Kabul police crime investigation branch chief, Syed Abdul Ghaffar, told reporters that it was an accident. He did not identify the troops.

He said six people were travelling in the car. Four of them were killed in the accident and the two sustained injuries.

Deputy police chief, Khalilullah Dastyar, and three others policemen were seen bleeding after hit with stones by protestors.

Police also detained a number of protestors. However, Ghaffar denied commenting on the arrests.

Three more ISAF soldiers killed in south

Rahmatullah Afghan - Jul 30, 2010 - 17:01

KABUL (PAN): Three NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) soldiers have been killed in separate blasts in southern Afghanistan, the alliance said on Friday, making July the deadliest month for foreign forces in the nearly 9-year-war. The servicemembers were killed on Thursday in two separate improvised explosive device strikes in the volatile south of the country, a statement issued by NATO media office in Kabul said. However, the statement did not release further information pending notification of kin.

US and NATO commanders had warned that casualties would rise as the international military force ramps up the war against the Taliban, especially in their southern strongholds in Helmand and Kandahar provinces.

Up to 406 foreign soldiers, including 261 US and 80 British, have been killed in Afghanistan over the past nine years.

Geo-Strategic Headlines

Taliban recapture Barg-i-Matal border district

Abdul Moeed Hashmi - Jul 25, 2010 - 16:13

JALALABAD (PAN): The Taliban recaptured a strategic district in eastern Nuristan province, bordering Pakistan, on Sunday, after two days of intense fighting with local security forces, the provincial governor said.

Afghan security forces retreated from Barg-i-Matal district centre on Saturday night, a move local officials described as tactical to minimise civilian and other casualties.

It is the second time in two months that the Taliban have overthrown the district government.

Security personnel are holding positions five kilometres north of the district centre, Nuristan governor, Jamaluddin Badr, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

Nearly two dozen militants and four police have been killed over the past 48 hours and 15 other police have been wounded, he said.

Taliban have looted nearby villages and killed locals, including a prominent tribal elder, Maulvi Abdul Khabir, in charge of cooperating with the government, he added.

A day earlier, the Ministry of Defense said 50 militants were killed in Barg-i-Matal, while NATO said the death toll was 25.

Karzai orders reinforcements to Barg-i-Matal

Sayed Abbas Sadat - Jul 25, 2010 - 18:51

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai Sunday ordered the dispatch of reinforcements to the Barg-i-Matal district that fell to Taliban insurgents as a result of a pre-dawn attack in eastern Nuristan province.

The order from Karzai came as police retreated from the town, which borders Pakistan's northwestern district of Chitral. The Ministry of Interior said a huge offensive would be launched soon to wrest back the town's control from the militants.

Karzai issued the orders at a National Security Council meeting, which was attended by the two vice presidents, senior minister, Hedayat Amin Arsala, national security advisor, defence and interior ministers and the National Directorate of Security director-general. The head of administrative affairs at the Presidential Palace and senior security officials were also present at the meeting, according to a statement from the Presidential Palace in Kabul.

All aspects of the security situation in the district were discussed in detail, and a decision was taken on sending additional forces to Barg-i-Matal to flush out the militants out as soon as possible, the statement added.

Barg-i-Matal has been the scene of several insurgent attacks in recent months. Some two months back, the Taliban captured the district, but Afghan and NATO-led forces retook it after heavy fighting.

The participants also conferred on the situation in Kandahar and Nangarhar provinces. Officials concerned were directed to assess the situation and present a detailed report at the Security Council's next meeting.

Security measures for upcoming parliamentary elections, slated for September 18, also came under discussion. It was decided all available resources would be utilised for holding the ballot in a peaceful and transparent manner.

Karzai praised the forces for coordination in maintaining security during the Kabul International Conference, which was held on Tuesday. The president thanked citizens for cooperating with security forces and exercising patience.

Troops oust Taliban from Barg-i-Matal

Abdul Moeed Hashmi - Jul 26, 2010 - 17:26

JALALABAD (PAN): Afghan and NATO-led forces have recaptured the volatile Barg-i-Matal district in eastern Nuristan province a day after Taliban militants retreated local forces from the district, a top official said Monday.

The district bordering Pakistan's remote northwestern district of Chitral, fell into hands of the Taliban after deadly overnight clash on Saturday.

Afghan Special Forces backed by NATO-led International Security Force (ISAF) air support recaptured the key district around Sunday midnight, Nuristan police chief, Gen. Qasim Paiman, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

The district was under complete control of the Afghan forces, he added.

No possible casualties from both sides of the fighting have been reported so far.

Barg-i-Matal has been the scene of several insurgent attacks in recent months.

Some two months back, the Taliban captured the district, but Afghan and NATO-led international forces retook it after heavy fighting.

Taliban see Barg-i-Matal as new sanctuary: analysts

Khawaja Baseer Ahmad/Abdul Mueed Hashmi - Jul 26, 2010 - 16:52

KABUL/JALALABAD (PAN): Analysts believe the Taliban viewed Barg-i-Matal district in eastern Nuristan province as a possible safe-haven and strategic route to the north and east of the country.

The district was captured by the Taliban twice in the past two months, most recently on Saturday night after six-days of heavy fighting. However, late Sunday night, Afghan security forces said they were again in control of the district.

Analysts say Barg-i-Matal was strategic to the Taliban and Al Qaeda because it would give them a new sanctuary and new routes into the previously unconquered north and volatile east.

Ghulam Jilani Zwak, who heads the Afghanistan Research and Advisory Centre, said the government should increase troops in the district if it wants it to remain secure. He said the government was deliberately allowing opponents to capture the district.

Former governor of Nuristan, Tamim Nuristani, also blamed the local government for failing to seek help earlier from the central government.

He said Barg-i-Matal was an opening to the northern provinces and if the insurgents gained strength there, they could easily spread their influence.

Former head of the provincial council, Rahmatullah Rashidi, said the local police were outnumbered by the insurgents and suggested an army brigade was needed to secure the area.

A report released by the Afghanistan Research and Advisory Centre said the district was of key strategic importance. Not only did it sit along the Durand Line, the de facto border with Pakistan, but it gave access to the north and east of Afghanistan.

It said the capture of Barg-i-Matal would also open routes to Central Asia and Xinjiang province of western China. The mountainous terrain would also keep militants safe from drone or other air strikes, it said.

With the expected operation in Kandahar and increasing drone strikes in Pakistans Waziristan region, the insurgents were looking for a new sanctuary, it said.

Some officials, last week, also warned that Mullah Fazlullah, chief of Taliban in Pakistans Swat region, had been seen in the district. They said Fazlullah was supported by Chechen and Uzbek fighters.

The report said the capture of Barg-i-Matal would help the Uzbek and Chechen fighters gain access to Central Asian states.

It also questioned why foreign troops did not extend any support to their Afghan colleagues during the six days of fighting it took to recapture the district.

Gen. Petraeus visits Helmand

Zainullah Stanakzai - Jul 27, 2010 - 14:59

LASHKARGAH (PAN): NATO's commander in Afghanistan, Gen. David Petraeus, made his first visit to the southern province of Helmand on Tuesday since taking charge of all allied forces in the country.

Petraeus spoke with officials in Helmand about security, development and the upcoming parliamentary elections in September, Daud Ahmadi, the governor's spokesman said. Petraeus was accompanied by Chief of Army Staff Gen. Sher Muhammad Karimi, and the two travelled to Musa Qala district, where security has become increasingly worse since coalition forces in February launched a massive operation to rid the district of the Taliban.

Helmand governor, Gulab Mangal, shared some of the security problems in the province with the two officials in order to find solution, Ahmadi said.

As well as visiting US and Afghan soldiers, Karimi and Petraeus met with tribal elders, Ahmadi said.

Petraeus replaced Gen. Stanley McChrystal as the chief commander of NATO and US forces in Afghanistan.

Long-term presence of US forces in Afghanistan not in national interest

Lalit K Jha - Jul 29, 2010 - 10:27

WASHINGTON (PAN): Two influential US senators have told their president that long-term open-ended presence of US forces in Afghanistan is not in America's national interest.

In a letter to Barack Obama, the senators -- Russ Feingold and Jim Webb -- called for prior approval from the Senate for any proposed agreement that the US enters into with Afghanistan about US military presence there.

In the letter, the senators reminded Obama that his predecessor, George W Bush had failed to submit the security agreement between the US and Iraq to the Senate. As a senator, Obama had opposed Bush's effort to circumvent the constitutional requirement of Senate advice and consent.

Agreements governing these operations have profound implications for our troops, the American people and Congress's constitutional responsibility to declare war and make spending decisions about military operations, the senators wrote.

Any such agreements carry the weight of a treaty and should be submitted to the Senate for its advice and consent in keeping with constitutional requirements, they said.

We do not believe that a long-term, open-ended presence of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan serves our national interest, the Senators wrote.

Most importantly, we believe that any consideration of such a prospect must be taken with the full advice and consent of the Senate, the Senators told Obama, who has convened a situation room meeting on the current situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. According to the State Department, an agreement involving commitments or risks affecting the nation as a whole should be considered for submission as a treaty.

Feingold and Webb pointed out that the strategic agreement between the US and Iraq committed the nation as a whole and imposed operational restrictions on US troops, yet was not submitted to the Senate.

Considering the nearly 100,000 US troops conducting military operations in Afghanistan, Feingold and Webb cautioned that this precedent should not be repeated in Afghanistan, because it goes against the intent of the constitution.

The senators concluded by acknowledging the need to negotiate a strategic agreement with Afghanistan, but aired their concern with the current Afghanistan strategy.

Social Headlines

Quran desecration sparks protest

Ahmad Omaid Khpalwak - Jul 29, 2010 - 15:22

TIRINKOT (PAN): Hundreds of people demonstrated in the capital of southern Uruzgan province on Thursday accusing NATO troops of tearing a copy of the Quran.

The demonstrators gathered at 9am in a mosque in Tirinkot city and then moved toward the governors office, but were stopped by police.

One protester, Asadullah, said coalition troops had torn up a copy of the Quran during a night raid on Wednesday in Marabad, just outside Tirinkot.

During the operation, women in one house showed a copy of the Quran to the troops and said that in the eyes of the Holy book of Muslims they were respectable people, she then asked the soldiers not to disrespect them.

However, the soldiers used their knives to rip up the book, Asadullah said.

The protesters carried parts of the torn Quran in their hands and were trying to take them to the governors office, but were prevented by police who fired their guns into the air, he said.

Roads leading to Tirinkot city were closed and people were forced to shut their businesses because of the demonstration.

A nighttime curfew might be enforced to prevent any possible looting of businesses, a security official said on condition of anonymity.

Provincial governor, Khodai Rahim, refused to talk to Pajhwok about the demonstration.

The International Security Assistance Force said it was aware of the demonstration, and would look into allegations that soldiers insulted the Quran.

\$3m agreement inked with Norwegian organisation

Muhammad Jawad Sharifzada - Jul 29, 2010 - 18:00

KABUL (PAN): An agreement worth three million US dollars was signed between the Ministry of Culture and Information and a Norwegian organisation on Thursday.

Tens of thousands Afghan youth would be educated under the agreement inked between Deputy Youth Affairs Minister Taimor Shah Ishaqzai and a representative of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Inger Svendsen.

Abdul Wadood Afghan, a spokesman for Ishaqzai, told Pajhwok Afghan News the money would be spent on providing education and vocational training to about 150,000 internally-displaced, repatriated and vulnerable youth in Balkh, Nangarhar, Sa-i-Pul, Faryab, Kunduz and Herat provinces.

Another contract was signed between Ishaqzai and Khyal Muhammad Malikzada, owner of a private university, Maiwand Institute of Higher Education.

According to Afghan, more than 2,000 students, who failed to qualify for admission to state-run universities, would be given 70 percent fee remission by the Maiwand Institute of Higher Education.

Saudi gives Afghanistan \$24m for education

Rahmatullah Afghan - Jul 29, 2010 - 19:15

KABUL (PAN): The government of Saudi Arabia on Thursday provided the Afghan Ministry of Education with \$24 million to help improve educational infrastructure. The assistance would be spent on the construction of school buildings, teacher training centres and religious seminaries, a statement issued by the Ministry of Education quoted Dr. Shafiq Samim, deputy head of religious studies at the ministry, as saying. Saudi Arabia also pledged to construct a mosque in the style of Shah Faisal Mosque in Pakistan's capital of Islamabad. Saudi Arabia has already funded the building of an Islamic centre on Maranjan hill in Kabul at a cost of \$100 million, the statement said.

Economical Headlines

Legal challenge filed to transit trade deal

PAN Monitor - Jul 24, 2010 - 19:19

KABUL (PAN): A legal challenge was filed in a Pakistani court on Saturday to the much-touted transit trade deal between Islamabad and Kabul, throwing into doubt the implementation of the agreement.

The Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement, signed on July 19 in Islamabad between commerce ministers of the two countries, was challenged in the Lahore High Court, Pakistan's private TV channels reported.

Advocate Shafqat Mehmood Chauhan, former president of the Lahore High Court Bar Association (LHCBA), asked the court to declare the agreement null and void. He said the pact was contrary to Pakistan's constitution and would have an adverse affect on Pakistan's economy.

Geo News, monitored in Kabul, quoted the petitioner as saying the accord would promote the smuggling of opium and arms into the country in addition to causing security implications.

"It may also spur terrorist activities in Pakistan, with the relaxation of fragile security arrangements at the border, enabling terrorists to pour into Pakistan," Chauhan said according to Geo.

If the agreement was allowed to go ahead, banned Indian goods could be smuggled into Pakistan via Afghanistan, he said.

Under the agreement, Afghanistan can transport goods through Pakistan to India and also pick up other goods at the seaports from other countries. Pakistan, in return, can use Afghanistan to transport goods to the Central Asian market. However, India will not be allowed to ship its goods through Pakistan to Afghanistan.

Commerce Minister Dr. Anwaul Haq Ahadi and his Pakistani counterpart, Makhdoom Amin Fahim, signed the pact in the presence of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani.

President Hamid Karzai, the US, NATO, the EU and Afghan traders have welcomed the agreement as an important step for the promotion of trade ties in the region and a boost to Afghanistan's economy.

APTTA to boost Afghan exports

Zainab Muhammadi - Jul 24, 2010 - 19:58

KABUL (PAN): The new transit deal will boost the country's exports as Afghan trucks can now unload goods anywhere in neighbouring Pakistan, believe trade leaders.

Afghan traders were given the privilege under the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA), signed earlier this week between commerce minister, Anwarul Haq Ahadi, and his Pakistani counterpart, Makhdoom Amin Fahim.

The pact was worked out by the Afghan government two years ago and presented to the Pakistani side for consideration. Several meetings were held on narrowing differences over certain parts of the agreement before it was signed on July 19.

To encourage Islamabad into concluding the agreement, the Afghan government allowed Pakistani trucks and traders to enter Afghan soil and use its territory for exports to Central Asia.

Before the APTTA was signed, Afghan vehicles could only go to border regions of Pakistan and had to load commodities on Pakistan Army trucks or trains, said the deputy head of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce.

Khan Jan Alakozay added the Pakistani transportation means would not let the volume of Afghan exports grow. Earlier, Afghan businessmen took more than a month to export their goods into Pakistan, he recalled. Now the process has been cut short to a maximum of three days.

The delay in exports, particularly fruits and vegetables, caused a lot of damage. According to Alakozay, there were several problems for Afghan traders to take goods to India. But the agreement has addressed most of the problems.

Afghan vehicles would be able to transport goods to India through the Wagah border. Pakistan is considered to be the shortest transit route for Afghanistan. He said 70 percent of Afghan imports and 50 percent exports went through Pakistan.

According to unofficial statistics, Afghanistan's current import bill is about \$5 billion while its exports amount to \$700 million. Alakozay said the accord would help Afghanistan increase its exports to Pakistan from \$500 million to \$700 million.

The director of Afghanistan Export Promotion Agency, Ahmad Javed, also viewed the agreement as useful for the promotion of exports. He hoped the problems Afghan traders currently faced in Pakistan would be resolved.

According to Ministry of Commerce and Industries, a similar agreement signed between the two countries in 1965 is outdated and out of step with the current ground realities.

At that time, the volume of trade between the two countries was not as much as it is now and Pakistan had only one border port, Wagah. But now, the neighbouring country has two other big ports in Karachi and Gwadar.