

Bussiness and Politics in the Muslim World
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Mohammad Amin

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Political Headlines Summary

Thousands of Afghan refugees in Pakistan affected by flood: Tanin

WASHINGTON (PAN): Thousands of Afghan refugees in Pakistan have been badly affected by the floods, Afghanistans top diplomat to the United Nations said, calling for the international community to do more to aid the millions of victims.

District chief kidnapped in Kunar

ASADABAD (PAN): Unidentified gunmen kidnapped a district chief in Asadabad, the capital of eastern Kunar province, on Saturday, an official said.

3 civilians among 6 killed in Farah

FARAH CITY (PAN): A NATO air strike killed a woman and two children, as well as six Taliban, in the western province of Farah, officials said on Saturday.

Voters could lose faith in election due to violations: FEFA

KABUL (PAN): People could lose faith in the September 18 parliamentary election process if authorities do not address violations in several parts of the country, the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA) warned on Saturday.

3 NATO soldiers killed in south

KABUL (PAN): Three NATO-led International Security Assistance Force service-members were killed in separate incidents in the country's volatile south, taking the number of foreign troops killed this year to 446, the alliance said on Saturday.

Kerry leaned on Karzai to curb corruption, say analysts

KABUL (PAN): The key objective behind US Senator John Kerry's flying visit to Kabul on Friday was to review a presidential decree banning operations of all private security companies in Afghanistan, believe political analysts.

Voters concerned over polling centres closure

KABUL (PAN): Residents in areas where polling centres are unlikely to open for the September 18 election say the government should do more to improve security so they can cast their vote.

Hundreds of polling centres closed despite troop surge

KABUL (PAN): Despite recent surges in levels of Afghan and foreign soldiers, insecurity has forced the Independent Election Commission (IEC) to shut down 938 polling centers across the country.

107 polling centres to stay shut in Ghazni

GHAZNI CITY (PAN): Nearly 107 polling centres would remain shut in southern Ghazni province during the September 18 parliamentary vote, the Afghan election panel chief said on Sunday.

Candidates once rejected now contest Wolesi Jirga polls

KABUL (PAN): Several of the candidates who lost the presidential elections last year are now contesting the election for the Wolesi Jirga. Around 30 people were in the run for the presidential elections last year.

Four NATO soldiers killed

KABUL (PAN): Four NATO-led soldiers were killed in separate attacks in different parts of Afghanistan on Monday, the alliance said.

Six civilians dead in NATO strike

PUL-I-KHUMRI (PAN): Six civilians, including a woman and a child, were killed and as many wounded during a NATO airstrike in northern Baghlan province, an official said on Monday.

Cleric's arrest sparks protest

CHARIKAR (PAN): Hundreds of people on Monday staged a protest against the arrest of a religious school administrator by intelligence officials in the Bagram district of central Parwan province.

3 NATO soldiers killed in south

KABUL (PAN): Three soldiers of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force have been killed in separate insurgent attacks in southern Afghanistan in the past 24 hours, the alliance said in brief statements on Tuesday.

Two NATO soldiers killed, 2 wounded

Mahmood Raqi (pan): Two NATO soldiers have been killed and two others injured in central Kapisa province, NATO said in a brief statement on Tuesday.

Wali Karzai rejects allegations of money smuggling

KANDAHAR CITY (PAN): Ahmad Wali Karzai, the powerful half brother of the Afghan president, has rejected allegations he took millions of illicit dollars out through Kandahar airport.

Ex-US official charged with bribery

WASHINGTON (PAN): A former US staff sergeant has been charged with accepting a bribe to allow a government contractor to steal \$1.4 million worth of fuel from an army base in Afghanistan.

Polling stations in many northern districts under threat

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (PAN): Polling stations in several districts of northern Afghanistan would remain closed because of security concerns, officials in three northern provinces said on Wednesday, calling for the government to provide better protection.

NATO airstrike kills 6 children in Kunar

ASADABAD (PAN): A NATO airstrike killed six children and injured a seventh in the eastern Kunar province on Thursday, an official said.

Geo-Strategic Headlines Summary

US urges Afghanistan and Pakistan to work together

WASHINGTON (PAN): The US has sought to play down comments by Afghanistan's national security adviser that Pakistan was the instigator of violence and urged the neighbours to work together.

Int'l community has to fund Afghan forces for years

WASHINGTON (PAN): The international community will have to fund Afghan's security forces for

"many years" after the transition in 2014, a top NATO commander based in Afghanistan has said.

Rassoul visit to deepen India-Afghanistan ties: analysts

NEW DELHI (PAN): Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmi Rassoul arrived in India on Tuesday for a two-day visit that analysts said would provide New Delhi with a chance to expand its role and counter the presence of its arch rival Pakistan in Afghanistan.

\$30bn to be spent on Afghan forces

KABUL (PAN): The international community will spend \$30 billion to equip and train Afghan soldiers and police in 2011, in addition to \$21 billion that has already been spent over the last eight years, an official said on Tuesday.

US to be in Kandahar, Helmand for 'years'

WASHINGTON (PAN): It will be a few years before an Afghan-led force is ready to take control of security in the south, a marine commander said, reaffirming what others have suggested that July 2011 will not see a mass exodus of US troops from Afghanistan.

India, Afghanistan resolve to fight terror

NEW DELHI (PAN): India and Afghanistan pledged to work together to deny terrorists a safe haven in the region, foreign ministers of the two countries said, a thinly veiled reference to Pakistan.

Social Headlines Summary

Campaign launched to remove security barriers

KABUL (PAN): A campaign for removing security barriers from Kabul roads was launched on Saturday, but residents doubt the even-handed implementation of the drive.

Schools lack teachers in Khost

KHOST CITY (PAN): Residents of southeastern Khost province have complained about a shortage of trained teachers in government schools.

ANDMA warns of winter food shortage

KABUL (PAN): The Afghanistan Natural Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) is concerned that the country might face food shortages in the winter, but the agriculture ministry says the opposite.

Rains cause heavy losses to farmers in Parwan, Kabul

CHARIKAR (PAN): Farmers and orchard owners in some districts of central Parwan and Kabul provinces say they have lost about 80 percent of their crops due to the recent rains.

MAIL gets equipment worth \$127,000

KABUL (PAN): France provided Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) with \$127,000 in equipment on Monday.

Turkmenistan pledges 1,000 tonnes of flour

KABUL (PAN): The Turkmenistan government on Monday announced providing 1,000 tonnes of flour to the people of Afghanistan during the holy month of Ramadan, the president's office said.

Norway to donate \$36.7 million

KABUL (PAN): Norway will donate \$36.7 million to Afghanistan's education ministry over the next three years, according to an agreement signed on Wednesday.

73 schoolgirls, teachers poisoned in Kabul

KABUL (PAN): As many as 73 school girls and their teachers were taken to hospital on Wednesday in the capital Kabul in what authorities suspect is another incident of gas poisoning.

22 drugs smugglers held at Kabul airport in five months

KABUL (PAN): Twenty-two drugs smugglers, including a Tajik national and a woman caught with 38 kilograms of heroin, had been arrested at Kabul International Airport during the last five months, the border police chief said on Wednesday.

17 people killed in floods across Afghanistan

JALALABAD/PUL-I-ALAM (PAN): Floods caused by heavy rain have killed at least 17 people and damaged hundreds of homes in eastern Nangarhar and central Logar provinces, officials said on Thursday.

Economical Headlines Summary

Gas pipeline deal in October

KABUL (PAN): A deal to lay a pipeline taking gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India through Afghanistan is expected to be signed in October this year, officials said on Thursday.

Political Headlines

Thousands of Afghan refugees in Pakistan affected by flood: Tanin

Lalit K Jha - Aug 21, 2010 - 11:54

WASHINGTON (PAN): Thousands of Afghan refugees in Pakistan have been badly affected by the floods, Afghanistans top diplomat to the United Nations said, calling for the international community to do more to aid the millions of victims.

"Thousands of Afghan refugees in Pakistan are also among those suffering, as three refugee camps have been largely destroyed, affecting more than 3,000 families," Afghan Ambassador to the UN Zahir Tanin told the United Nations General Assembly on Friday.

"Our consul general in Peshawar has already distributed a thousand blankets, and is working closely with UNHCR to ensure that these families are cared for," Tanin said.

The international community should give generously in order to minimize the suffering of the Pakistani people and speed the recovery process, Tanin said. Afghanistan has already pledged \$1million in aid, despite its own difficult situation, has sent four helicopters and more than four tonnes of medical supplies, along with 48 medical and humanitarian personnel.

"The international presence in Afghanistan, both (International Security Assistance Force and the UN), have also leapt to assist the Pakistani people, both directly and by funneling aid from outside. We will continue to work closely with our brothers and sisters in Pakistan to offer them a helping hand and a shoulder to lean on during this difficult time," the envoy said.

"None of us can be disinterested in the face of such destruction. More than 14 million people have lost their homes, their livelihoods and in many cases their lives. We have a common responsibility, as human beings, to come together and assist the government and people of Pakistan however we can, so that this disaster will not result in further tragedy," he said.

District chief kidnapped in Kunar

Khan Wali Salarzai - Aug 21, 2010 - 12:54

ASADABAD (PAN): Unidentified gunmen kidnapped a district chief in Asadabad, the capital of eastern Kunar province, on Saturday, an official said.

Haji Ghulam Nabi and his son, who were travelling from their home in Watapur district to the Sawkai town, were kidnapped in the Shagai area at 9am.

Senior police officer Col. Abdul Matin told Pajhwok Afghan News that Nabi and his 18 years old son were snatched from their car that was hit with a rocket.

Police have launched a search operation in the area, which lies about three kilometers northeast of Asadabad and has two police checkpoints.

3 civilians among 6 killed in Farah

Ahmad Quraishi - Aug 21, 2010 - 12:54

FARAH CITY (PAN): A NATO air strike killed a woman and two children, as well as six Taliban, in the western province of Farah, officials said on Saturday.

Afghan and coalition forces targeted a vehicle carrying several armed insurgents in Pusht-i-Rod district of Farah on Friday, a statement from ISAF, said.

Six insurgents were killed and several suspects detained, it said.

However, ISAF acknowledged that the air strike had also killed a woman and two children.

"We deeply regret what occurred on yesterday's operation," said US Army Col. Rafael Torres, ISAF Joint Command Combined Joint Operations Center director.

"We are taking a step-by-step approach in investigating what went wrong and are always working to reduce civilian casualties. Our condolences go out to the family of these civilians."

The NATO aircraft targeted Taliban commander Mullah Juma Gul's vehicle on Friday in a village in the Eidgah area of Push-i-Rod district, killing all six inside, administrative head of the town, Ghausuddin, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

He had no more details as the area had been cordoned by the International Security Assistance Force after the air strike.

Police have no information about civilian casualties, provincial police chief, Col. Muhammad Faqir Askar, said.

A woman and two babies were killed in the attack, an official said on condition of anonymity.

On Thursday, Taliban attacked workers of a private construction company, but police had already received a tip off and were able to fight off the insurgents.

Voters could lose faith in election due to violations: FEFA

Frozan Rahmani - Aug 21, 2010 - 17:47

KABUL (PAN): People could lose faith in the September 18 parliamentary election process if authorities do not address violations in several parts of the country, the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA) warned on Saturday.

FEFA officials had collected information from provinces over the past three weeks, and had registered 166 cases of violations, including intimidation of candidates, Jandad Spinghar, executive director of FEFA, told a press conference in Kabul.

Thirty four incidents included threats to candidates directly or indirectly by anti-government sources, such as intimidation of weak candidates by more powerful ones, threatening night letters and violations of election rules and regulations.

Spinghar said that in nine cases female candidates had been threatened and received night letters warning them to quit the race.

Spinghar did not say who was behind the threats.

"Candidates of 16 different provinces have been regularly threatened through night letters," he said.

In 14 other provinces, candidates said they did not dare campaign outside the provincial capital due to security concerns.

Spinghar said all of the recorded concerns had been shared with the Electoral Complaints Commission

(ECC). However, they had an unsatisfactory response from the ECC so far, he said. He hoped that relevant authorities would heed their report and assure the remaining days of electioneering passed without challenges. "Otherwise, people will lose faith in the transparency of the election campaign process." Around 2,492 candidates are contesting 249 seats in the Wolesi Jirga. The campaign period will run until two days before the September 18 election day.

3 NATO soldiers killed in south

Hakim Basharat - Aug 21, 2010 - 18:15

KABUL (PAN): Three NATO-led International Security Assistance Force service-members were killed in separate incidents in the country's volatile south, taking the number of foreign troops killed this year to 446, the alliance said on Saturday. The fatalities were a result of roadside bombings, NATO said in separate statements. The dead included two Australians, the alliance added. Of the 446 troops killed this year, 281 are Americans. Last year, 520 soldiers were killed in Afghanistan.

Kerry leaned on Karzai to curb corruption, say analysts

Abdul Qadir Siddiqui - Aug 21, 2010 - 16:51

KABUL (PAN): The key objective behind US Senator John Kerry's flying visit to Kabul on Friday was to review a presidential decree banning operations of all private security companies in Afghanistan, believe political analysts.

Also the chairman of the US Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, Kerry flew into Kabul for talks with President Hamid Karzai and other officials last week. He left for Islamabad two days back and returned to the Afghan capital on Friday.

Following his meeting with Karzai yesterday, the Presidential Palace said the visiting US senator supported the government's decision to dissolve the private security firms in four months.

But political analysts insist the purpose of Kerry's trip was to pressure the Afghan government into allowing the security companies to operate. Their closure will have a negative impact on foreign NGOs and diplomatic missions, according to Waheed Muzhda.

Foreigners could not trust the Afghan police they blamed for killing outsiders and other illegal acts, he added. "If the firms are really dissolved in four months, I think many countries will close down their diplomatic missions in Afghanistan."

Kerry sought to convince Karzai into withdrawing or reconsidering his orders, according to Muzhda, who explained the private companies better protected NATO logistic convoys than the Afghan police force.

Parliamentarian Noorul Haq Uloomi said the US senator had been in Afghanistan to keep the government from taking any "inappropriate step" against the private firms. However, the real aim was to lean on the Karzai administration to combat graft.

"Kerry asked Karzai to exempt from dissolution the security firms which really served the Afghan nation and resolved its problems," the lawmaker said, adding the visiting dignitary underlined an alternative arrangement before any action was initiated against the companies.

All foreign organisations and embassies were concerned at the decision, because the Afghan police force

was not trustworthy, he continued.

Abdul Kabir Ranjbar, a member of the Wolesi Jirga, held a similar view. Kerry wanted to pressurise Karzai to purge his administration of corruption. "The whole world knows that Afghanistan's insecurity is linked to corruption"

Ranjbar did not believe Kerry's trip was aimed at discussing the issue of dissolving the private security companies. He said the US senator had supported Karzai's call for eliminating the firms before the decree was issued.

Another political analyst, Moeen Mrastyal, said Kerry's agenda included a stepped-up anti-corruption campaign and the establishment of a clean administration. The US was mounting pressure on Karzai to take more meaningful steps against the scourge of corruption, he added.

Mrastyal believed Kerry also wanted to share with Karzai concerns of foreigners at the dissolution of the private security firms. He agreed with Karzai that security should be handed over to Afghan forces as soon as possible.

A statement from the Presidential Palace said both sides agreed to improve the Major Crimes Task Force and Sensitive Investigation Unit and evolve a framework according to the Afghan constitution for the two departments.

Voters concerned over polling centres closure

Abaseen Zaheer - Aug 22, 2010 - 11:09

KABUL (PAN): Residents in areas where polling centres are unlikely to open for the September 18 election say the government should do more to improve security so they can cast their vote.

The Independent Election Commission on August 18 announced that 937 centres would be closed for the poll due to instability in those areas.

However, locals say that it is their constitutional right to be able to vote.

Haji Talib, a resident of Noor Muhammad village in Marja district of Helmand province, said people would not be able to cast their votes if there were no polling centres in their area. "I want to use my vote and elect a person to serve us," he said.

Haji Abdul Ahad, who lives in Mir Mandab village of Grishk district, said they would not be able to go to other areas to vote. "We want the polling centres to be kept open so that people may use their right to vote," he said.

In Ghazni province, where 107 polling centres are to close, Haji Aminullah, a resident of Qarabagh district, urged the government to keep the centres open.

Adam Khan, who lives in Zargar of Ghazni City, said they would not be able to cast their votes if the security situation remained the same. He demanded the government ensure a peaceful atmosphere during the elections.

In Kandahar province, Abdul Malik, a resident of Panjwayee district, said people would not be able to vote at district polling offices because they feared attacks by the Taliban.

In Dand district, Abdul Sattar said only close relatives or friends of the candidates would cast their votes if polling centres were not open in convenient areas.

Human rights expert Gul Rahmand Qazi said it was the government's duty to ensure every citizen has the right vote in a peaceful manner. However, he said that as there were still many polling centres open, the move to shut nearly 1,000 would not deprive citizens of their rights.

Spokesman for the IEC, Noor Mohammed Noor, said the people could go to nearby polling centres if the one in their area is closed. He added that the government would increase the number of polling booths in secure areas.

He said all polling centres would be open in Kabul, Kapisa, Parwan, Jauzjan, Balkh, Bamyan, Panjshir and Badakhshan provinces. In the rest of 25 provinces, polling centres ranging from four to 107 would remain closed.

The Wolesi Jirga election is scheduled to be held on September 18. Nearly 2,500 people are competing for 249 seats.

Hundreds of polling centres closed despite troop surge

Khwaja Basir Ahmad - Aug 22, 2010 - 18:29

KABUL (PAN): Despite recent surges in levels of Afghan and foreign soldiers, insecurity has forced the Independent Election Commission (IEC) to shut down 938 polling centers across the country.

Addressing a press conference, a defence ministry spokesman acknowledged the security situation, compared to last year's presidential election, had deteriorated.

During last year's presidential elections, about 150,000 Afghan soldiers were deployed to maintain security and only 900 polling centers were declared unsafe and subsequently closed.

For the parliamentary election scheduled for September 18, more than 300,000 soldiers will be deployed across the country. As many as 938 polling centers have been closed in different provinces.

However, Gen. Zahir Azimi said the Afghan forces, together with their international counterparts, would try to maintain security of polling centers even in vulnerable areas.

For his part, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) spokesman Josef Blotz acknowledged growing attacks and violence against Afghan and foreign forces. He said they were trying to improve the situation.

Currently, 120,000 international forces were stationed in the country and that in coming month, more troops would arrive, the ISAF spokesman added. However, he did not mention the number of incoming troops.

107 polling centres to stay shut in Ghazni

Mirwais Himmat - Aug 22, 2010 - 18:11

GHAZNI CITY (PAN): Nearly 107 polling centres would remain shut in southern Ghazni province during the September 18 parliamentary vote, the Afghan election panel chief said on Sunday.

Fazl Ahmad Manawi said this after a closed-door meeting with provincial officials for an hour, including the governor and candidates, in the provincial capital. He added the closure of polling centres would deprive many of exercising their franchise right.

Manawi said in the presidential election they had sent ballot papers and boxes to polling stations in troubled areas, but the stations remained closed and no voting took place.

He called on the security organs to protect voters and polling centres so that people could cast votes without any fear.

He assured they would not allow anyone to misuse their influence on the voting day. He warned election officials of stern action if they worked in favour of a particular candidate.

Ghazni Governor Musa Khan Akbar promised tight security arrangements on election day. He hoped real representatives of the nation would make their way to the Wolesi Jirga.

For better security, the governor said, American troops would be deployed in three troubled districts, including Giro, Andar and Deh Yek.

Although officials say tight security arrangements would be in place on election day, candidates and voters remain skeptical. They even doubt the transparency of the poll.

Former Ghazni governor, Faizullah Faizan, said the prevailing conditions could cast doubt on the credibility of the vote. "People are under threat, and they are worried they may be targeted by opposition elements."

Candidates once rejected now contest Wolesi Jirga polls

Abaseen Zaheer - Aug 22, 2010 - 18:31

KABUL (PAN): Several of the candidates who lost the presidential elections last year are now contesting the election for the Wolesi Jirga. Around 30 people were in the run for the presidential elections last year.

Bashir Bezhan is one among the candidates for the presidential slot, who is now contesting the Wolesi Jirga election. Bezhan, who managed to grab only a few hundred votes in the election, believed he failed because of rigging in the polls.

Asked if he would again contest the elections if could not manage to the Wolesi Jirga, the candidate said he was not a commission agent. "The people want me and so I nominate myself for the polls," he added.

He said the people were casting votes in favour of him, but he could not succeed in the election because of the rigging.

Abdul Hakim Torsan is another candidate for the Wolesi Jirga who also participated in the presidential elections. Torsan also believed that he was contesting the upcoming election on the demand of his supporters. Torsan said he could not win presidential elections because of rigging and compromises by some sides. He hoped he would win if the elections remained transparent this time. Torsan said he would continue his political struggle even if he again fails to win the parliamentary poll. He said his struggle would create awareness about the laws among the people at least. Shehla Ata, member of the Wolesi Jirga and candidate for the upcoming election, said she nominated herself for the upcoming polls to serve the people.

Shehla also contested the presidential polls last year. Asked if she could not serve the people without being member of the Wolesi Jirga, Shehla said this was the most proper way of serving the people. Like other candidates, Shehla said she would win the presidential elections if there was no rigging. However, spokesman for the Independent Election Commission Noor Muhammad Noor rejected the allegations regarding rigging in the presidential elections. Noor said special measures had been adopted

to ensure transparency in the Wolesi Jirga election.

Like the election commission's spokesman, a number of residents also believe that the allegations from the candidates were baseless.

Ahmad Fahim, a shop owner at the Lisa Maryam area in this central capital, said there might be some rigging in the presidential polls, but the candidates were leveling baseless allegations. "Every candidate says he or she would be the winner in case of transparent elections. If it was so, then the country will have several presidents now," he added.

In the same token, student of the Kabul University Mirwais said even family members of those candidates did not vote for them during the presidential elections. He said the elections were satisfactory keeping in view the security situation in the country.

Besides Bezhan, Torsan and Shehla Atta, Abdul Jabbar Sabit, Mirwais Yasini, Dr. Farooq Nijrabi, Abdul Latif Pidram, Abdul Qadar Imami Ghauri and Frozan Fana are the other candidates for the upcoming Wolesi Jirga election who contested the last year's presidential polls.

Elections for the Wolesi Jirga are scheduled to be held on September 18. A total of 2550 candidates have nominated themselves for the 249 seats of the lower house.

Four NATO soldiers killed

Pajhwok Report - Aug 23, 2010 - 17:48

(Update 1)

KABUL (PAN): Four NATO-led soldiers were killed in separate attacks in different parts of Afghanistan on Monday, the alliance said.

"Two International Security Assistance Force servicemembers died following an insurgent attack in eastern Afghanistan today," a NATO statement said.

Earlier in the day, two international soldiers were killed in roadside bomb attacks, a weapon of choice for the Taliban insurgents. One improvised explosive device attack took place in the north and the second in the south.

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

Monday's fatalities bring up to 43 foreign troops' death toll. A day earlier, four American soldiers were killed in insurgent attacks in different parts of the country.

So far during the current year, more than 455 international troops have died in Afghanistan, where 141,000 US and NATO are fighting the Taliban insurgents.

Six civilians dead in NATO strike

Habib Rahman Sherzai - Aug 23, 2010 - 10:51

PUL-I-KHUMRI (PAN): Six civilians, including a woman and a child, were killed and as many wounded during a NATO airstrike in northern Baghlan province, an official said on Monday.

NATO helicopters pounded the Tirgaran village of Tala Wabarfak district, killing and wounding the civilians and burning 20 houses, the district chief, Muhammad Ismail, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

There were no militants in the area at the time of the predawn strike, he said, adding International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) soldiers did not inform district officials prior to the air raid.

"NATO helicopters struck our village at about 2:00am, killing six and wounding as many. Twenty houses were torched and foreign troops arrested four residents," said Mullah Muhammad, a local imam. All victims were civilians, he alleged.

Meanwhile, the alliance said a dozen individuals killed in the operation were insurgents and. Two Taliban commanders, known to lead attacks on Afghan and coalition forces, were the target of the operation.

"Combined forces located and destroyed a rocket-propelled grenade launcher, several RPGs and several boxes of small arms ammunition," the International Security Assistance Force said.

Cleric's arrest sparks protest

Farid Tanha - Aug 23, 2010 - 16:23

CHARIKAR (PAN): Hundreds of people on Monday staged a protest against the arrest of a religious school administrator by intelligence officials in the Bagram district of central Parwan province.

Nearly 600 protestors, coming from the Ghulam Ali area at 8am, blocked the Bagram-Mahmood Raqi highway. Students of the Hazrat Bilal Madrassa gave the call for the protest.

Afghan intelligence operatives arrested Qari Muhammad Kazim two days ago, said the protestors, who chanted 'death to the National Directorate of Security, the district chief and America'. The demonstrators blocked the road with heavy stones.

Qari Mohibullah, a 12th grade student at the madrassa, said intelligence officials arrested Kazim on Saturday. He added they had waited for two days for Kazim's release, but he remained in detention. He said no reason had been assigned for the arrest of Kazim. "Today we have run out of patience and have taken to the streets."

Another participant of the protest, Qari Mehraban, an eighth-class student, alleged religious scholars were being arrested and insulted in Bagram on different pretexts.

A resident of the Ghulam Ali village, Noor Agha who took part in the protest, said Qari Kazim led a madrassa where 500 students were receiving Islamic education, including memorisation of the Holy Quran.

He said Kazim was a pious person and people of the area had a great respect for him.

The protestors vowed to continue demonstrations and road blockades until Kazim was freed.

Head of Bagram Ulema Council, Maulvi Ahmad Shah who did not participate in the demonstration, claimed Kazim had been arrested without any reason.

He said the government had also held three others religious scholars over the past three months in Bagram. He said the arrest of ulema was a conspiracy.

When asked why he did not participate in the protest, Shah replied the protestors had stones and sticks in their hands.

Parwan Governor Abdul Basir Salangi defended the NDS action, saying the spy agency did not arrest people without any reason. "Investigations and evidence prove Kazim is involved in terrorist attacks."

3 NATO soldiers killed in south

Abdul Qadir Siddiqui - Aug 24, 2010 - 11:33

KABUL (PAN): Three soldiers of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force have been killed in separate insurgent attacks in southern Afghanistan in the past 24 hours, the alliance said in brief statements on Tuesday.

In line with its policy, ISAF did not reveal the nationality of the fallen soldiers or the exact location of the attacks.

Since the beginning of 2010, 456 foreign soldiers have been killed, including 291 Americans and 87 British. Last year 520 foreign soldiers were killed in Afghanistan.

Two NATO soldiers killed, 2 wounded

Navid Waqif - Aug 24, 2010 - 13:00

Mahmood Raqi (pan): Two NATO soldiers have been killed and two others injured in central Kapisa province, NATO said in a brief statement on Tuesday.

In line with its policy, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) did not reveal the nationality of the casualties.

However, a foreign military source in Kapisa confirmed the death of two French soldiers and injuries to as many others during a clash with militants.

A member of provincial council, Najibullah Rahimi, said the soldiers were killed and wounded in an insurgent attack in Garmkhel area of Tagab district. The assailants suffered no harm, he added.

France has 3750 soldiers in Afghanistan, most of them stationed in Kapisa and Kabul and a small number at the Kandahar Air Field (KAF). As many as 45 French soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan so far.

Wali Karzai rejects allegations of money smuggling

Bashir Ahmad Naadem - Aug 24, 2010 - 16:46

KANDAHAR CITY (PAN): Ahmad Wali Karzai, the powerful half brother of the Afghan president, has rejected allegations he took millions of illicit dollars out through Kandahar airport.

A former CIA official, quoted in the Washington Post last week, accused Wali Karzai of funneling drug and other illicit money out of Kandahar.

"The direct Ariana flight from Kandahar to Dubai in its cargo hold carries many bales of US dollars wrapped in burlap," said the official, who spoke to the paper on condition of anonymity. "No hand carry. This is AWK's preferred route," he said, using Wali Karzai's initials.

However, Wali Karzai said the allegations were politically motivated, coming at a time when the Afghan government had issued an order to ban private security companies in the country. He said the story in the Post was a reaction to the presidential decision.

"The decision was a blow for those foreigners owning the security companies and earning millions of dollars each month," Wali Karzai, head of the Kandahar provincial council, told reporters at a press conference.

He said there had been no bad press against him for the past three or four months while relations between the US and Afghanistan were good. However, since his older brother set a deadline for the closure of private security companies, the majority of which provide security for military convoys, embassies and aid organizations, the papers in the US had again been leveling accusations at him.

He said the allegations against him were ridiculous.

He questioned why an official of the secretive CIA would disclose something to a newspaper.

He also said the report was contradictory as in one part, he was described as a CIA agent himself.

However, in another part, they say I give money to the CIA."

Why would the CIA want to defame him if he was one of their agents, he said.

He said the western media should focus on the real problems in the country, instead of such spurious accusations.

He accused foreigners of coming to Afghanistan to fulfill their own designs instead of working for the development of the country.

Wali Karzai has come under criticism in the western and US media before. Earlier, he was accused of involvement in smuggling of narcotics followed by allegations of land grabbing in the country. The younger Karzai had already rejected the allegations as baseless and propaganda against him.

Ex-US official charged with bribery

Lalit K Jha - Aug 25, 2010 - 11:18

WASHINGTON (PAN): A former US staff sergeant has been charged with accepting a bribe to allow a government contractor to steal \$1.4 million worth of fuel from an army base in Afghanistan.

Stevan Nathan Ringo, 26, was indicted by a federal court in the US state of Virginia on Tuesday. He was charged with one count of soliciting bribes totaling \$400,000, one count of theft of government property and one count of conspiracy to commit theft and bribery, Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer of the justice department said.

Ringo was arrested June 25.

If convicted Ringo, who was arrested June 25, could face 15 years in prison and a fine up to twice the value gained or lost from the scheme.

According to the indictment, Ringo was stationed at Forward Operating Base Shank, a US army installation in Logar province that stores large quantities of fuel to be redistributed. Ringo's responsibilities included supervision of that fuel redistribution process.

The indictment alleges that between December, 2009 and February, 2010, Ringo solicited and accepted approximately \$400,000 in cash from a government contractor in exchange for submitting fraudulent paperwork permitting the contractor to steal \$1.4 billion worth of fuel.

Polling stations in many northern districts under threat

Zabihullah Ihsas - Aug 25, 2010 - 21:24

MAZAR-I-SHARIF (PAN): Polling stations in several districts of northern Afghanistan would remain closed because of security concerns, officials in three northern provinces said on Wednesday, calling for the government to provide better protection.

Governors, police chiefs and election commission officials from Faryab, Jawzjan and Saripul provinces held a meeting in Mazar-i-Sharif, capital of northern Balkh province, to discuss the security situation.

Lal Muhammad Ahmadzai, a police spokesman for the northern zone, said the districts of Ghormach, Pashtunkot and Qisar in Faryab; Siyyad and Kohistan districts in Saripul and Qoqchi and Darzab districts in Jawajan were a high security risk.

Saripul governor, Rahmatullah Rahmati, said six polling stations in the Siyyad district would remain shut on September 18 election day due to security concerns.

He said there was a need to establish 40 more polling stations in his province in safe areas to compensate.

Saripul provincial head of the Independent Election Commission, Amanullah Farabi, called the meeting a significant development. Of 136 polling stations in the province, six would remain closed due to security problems, he said.

According to Ahmazai, more security personnel would be dispatched to the insecure areas.

He said a search operation would be conducted in the troubled parts so that ground could be paved for voting there.

NATO airstrike kills 6 children in Kunar

Khan Wali Salarzai - Aug 26, 2010 - 19:39

ASADABAD (PAN): A NATO airstrike killed six children and injured a seventh in the eastern Kunar province on Thursday, an official said.

The air raid came as Taliban fighters attacked a coalition troops' base in the Kandgul area of Manogi district, said provincial police chief, Khalilullah Ziaee.

He told Pajhwok Afghan News another child was killed when a rocket fired by the Taliban hit a house in the area.

Six children were killed in the air strike and one in the rocket attack, he explained.

He said the foreign troops suffered no casualties in the militant attack. He had no information about casualties suffered by the Taliban.

When contacted, NATO's media office in Kabul said they were looking into the claims.

Meanwhile, Taliban claimed killing four foreign troops during an attack on their convoy in the Takai area of the Asadabad district on Thursday.

A fifth foreign soldier was wounded in the assault, the movement said.

However, NATO's media office in the east in a statement rejected the fatalities, saying only a vehicle was damaged in the attack.

Geo-Strategic Headlines

US urges Afghanistan and Pakistan to work together

Lalit K Jha - Aug 24, 2010 - 10:15

WASHINGTON (PAN): The US has sought to play down comments by Afghanistan's national security adviser that Pakistan was the instigator of violence and urged the neighbours to work together.

Rangin Dadfar Spanta, in an opinion piece in the Washington Post, had accused Islamabad of providing sanctuary for insurgent groups, such as the Haqqani network, Taliban and Al Qaeda.

"How can we persuade Afghans, or the parents of young soldiers from coalition countries, to support a war where our 'partners' are involved in killing their sons and daughters?" he wrote and urged the US to stop sending billions of dollars in aid to Pakistan.

However, the state department spokesman, PJ Crowley, said the US was satisfied with the steps Pakistan was taking to tackle the threat within its border, however he added, "obviously, the offensive that Pakistan has started needs to continue".

In response to Spanta's charge that the US stop aiding Pakistan while it continues to support the insurgency in Afghanistan, Crowley told reporters on Monday that it was not that simple.

"One cannot look at this in isolation and one cant look at this through the lens of a zero-sum calculation."

He said that the US needed to work with Islamabad to deal the "that extremist threat within Pakistan's borders" just as Washington needed to work with Kabul to deal with a threat "that is of direct consequence to the US, a threat from Al Qaeda".

If Pakistan and Afghanistan collaborated and took action on both sides of the border, that threat would be reduced, Crowley said.

Int'l community has to fund Afghan forces for years

Lalit K Jha - Aug 24, 2010 - 15:57

WASHINGTON (PAN): The international community will have to fund Afghan's security forces for "many years" after the transition in 2014, a top NATO commander based in Afghanistan has said.

With a gross domestic product of \$10 billion a year and a slew of civil project that need funding, Afghanistan will not be able to pay the salaries of its army and police officers, said Lt Gen Caldwell, commander of NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan.

"I don't know for how long, but there is a requirement that they currently will not be able to pay themselves out of their current GDP, that will require international assistance," he told Pentagon reporters in a video conference from Afghanistan.

"Right now, the entire gross national domestic product is about \$10 billion a year here in Afghanistan. And out of that, when you look at what their expendable capability is to put into programmes and different things for the people of Afghanistan, it's obviously much less. So the current security force that is being built will require assistance from the international community for many years after the transition has been

complete."

The NATO commander said the recruitment and training of Afghan security forces is on track and moving much faster than in previous years. Over the past nine months, the number of new army and police recruits has more than doubled the average of any previous year, with 58,000 in 2010.

However, the commander said it would not be until October 2011 that the security forces would match the number set by US President Barack Obama to start pulling troops out of the country.

He said that keeping soldiers was much harder than recruiting them and that for every one soldier that remains in the security force, they need to put at least three through training.

Caldwell said he was aware of the July 2011 date that Obama had set for the beginning of a drawdown of US forces, and while Afghan security forces may be able to take the lead in some areas, building up the Afghan National Army as a whole would not be complete until the end of the October, 2011.

"As we see them demonstrate that ability to take the lead in the institutional side, we will in fact pass that off to them, and then take those resources that were committed to that and reinvest them into other training aspects of what we're doing inside the country here," he said.

Rassoul visit to deepen India-Afghanistan ties: analysts

Sujoy Dhar - Aug 24, 2010 - 10:52

NEW DELHI (PAN): Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmi Rassoul arrived in India on Tuesday for a two-day visit that analysts said would provide New Delhi with a chance to expand its role and counter the presence of its arch rival Pakistan in Afghanistan.

Rassoul was to meet Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Tuesday evening at his residence. He would also meet his counterpart, Indias External Affairs Minister S M Krishna, on Wednesday before returning to Kabul that night.

An Indian foreign ministry official said the two sides would discuss how to improve their relationship, regional security issues and countering the threat of the Taliban.

"Indias Afghan policy has been very constructive and it is one country that is using aid to spread its influence in Afghanistan instead of bombs or terrorists," said Sundeep Waslekar, president of the Strategic Foresight Group, an Indian think tank.

"So discussing security issues vis--vis Pakistan and Taliban, India's role in offering aid to rebuild Afghanistan will weigh in favour of the hosts to strengthen the already trusting relationship," Waslekar said.

India has spent about \$1.3 billion in Afghanistan since the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, making it one of the biggest foreign donors.

But it is wary of the growing influence of its nemesis Pakistan, especially with the Afghan government's move to open negotiations with the Taliban and the recent WikiLeaks documents showing ISI nurturing the Taliban.

India accuses Pakistan of supporting militants who carry out attacks on its interests in India, Kashmir and recently, Afghanistan,

Nine Indians were killed when suicide bombers attacked a guesthouse used by Indian doctors in Kabul in February this year, an attack that the Indian external affairs minister said was "a matter of deep concern".

According to B Raman, former chief of Indias spy agency, the RAW (Research and Analysis Wing), the insurgency in Afghanistan is likely to be a topic for discussion. "There is a fear that the huge international funds for the flood relief in Pakistan will reach Taliban hands," Raman said.

"So the Taliban will figure prominently in the discussions," he said. According to various estimates, about 4,000 Indians are engaged in various construction activities and medical facilities in Afghanistan and India will be looking for assurances from Kabul that they will not be targeted again. India is also expected to play on an editorial in the Washington Post written by Afghanistans national security adviser Rangin Dadfar Spanta, blaming Pakistan for supporting terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Spanta accused Pakistan of supporting the Taliban, while at the same time taking billions of dollars in aid from the US to fight militants.

\$30bn to be spent on Afghan forces

Khawaja Basir Ahmad - Aug 24, 2010 - 11:14

KABUL (PAN): The international community will spend \$30 billion to equip and train Afghan soldiers and police in 2011, in addition to \$21 billion that has already been spent over the last eight years, an official said on Tuesday.

The amount would be spent on weapons, training and salaries for soldiers and police and to reinforce the ministries of interior and defence, the director of the Security Assistance Office-Afghanistan, Col. Larry Avery, said.

He said \$20 billion had been spent on security forces between 2003 and 2009.

"Recruiting new forces, professional training and better equipping of security forces are the main reasons to spend \$30 billion dollars in one year," he said.

Avery discussed the "Afghan First" policy which helps Afghan companies to produce equipment such as boots, uniforms and other military gear for the local forces while encouraging the creation of new Afghan businesses and increasing competition.

"The contracts of weapons and ammunitions will not be given to Afghans as there is no possibility to make weapons in Afghanistan."

He said the \$30 billion would be spent on Afghan forces, not US or NATO soldiers in Afghanistan.

The number of Afghan army recruits is expected to reach 171,600 by September, 2011 and the number of police will reach 134,000, he said.

Asked about the likelihood of corruption in the contracts for equipping the national forces, Avery said all contracts would comply with international standards.

Three types of buildings will be used by local forces: wooden buildings, ready for mobile brigades; containers, which are constructed to American standards and more permanent structures which would stand for 50 years, he said.

Currently the Security Assistance Office-Afghanistan is trying to prepare the buildings which could be used for long term, he said, admitting that buildings constructed for Afghan soldiers were not of high quality.

All equipment to be bought or constructed will be carried out through an agreement with the Afghan government, he added.

New vehicles would also be bought for the defence and interior ministries. Currently they rent vehicles for the ministries, based on Afghan requests, but that was adding to the costs he said.

One armoured vehicle costs about \$500 to rent a day, he said.

On training of new recruits, he said they focus more on better training.

Currently there are 134,000 Afghan soldiers and 90,000 police in Afghanistan.

US to be in Kandahar, Helmand for 'years'

Lalit K Jha - Aug 25, 2010 - 12:26

WASHINGTON (PAN): It will be a few years before an Afghan-led force is ready to take control of security in the south, a marine commander said, reaffirming what others have suggested that July 2011 will not see a mass exodus of US troops from Afghanistan.

"I certainly believe some American unit somewhere in Afghanistan will turn over responsibilities to Afghan security forces in 2011, I do not think they will be marines, retiring marine corps commander, Gen. James Conway, told reporters at a Pentagon briefing.

"Helmand and Kandahar, adjacent, are the birthplace of the Taliban. I honestly think it will be a few years before conditions on the ground are such that turnover will be possible for us," Conway said.

The US president, Barack Obama, has set July 2011 as a date for the start of the withdrawal of US forces with full transition to Afghan security in 2014. Obama has never said how many US forces will go home in July, but several top military commanders in the past few days have said Afghan security forces are not yet ready to take control.

Conway said that the 2011 deadline was also making it harder for the marines to engage the Taliban.

"We think right now it's probably giving our enemy sustenance. We think he may be saying to himself -- in fact, we've intercepted communications saying 'Hey, you know, we only have to hold out for so long!'" the general said.

Whatever the end game, the government needs do a better job of convincing Americans why the military should remain in Afghanistan, he said. Citing a recent opinion poll in which showed 60 percent of Americans against the war, Conway said citizens were tired of seeing their countrymen brought home in coffins without a clear sense of why.

"I don't think that we have done a strong enough job in convincing the American people there are good and just reasons why we have to destroy Al Qaeda and the associated Taliban in Afghanistan, similar to what we did in Iraq, certainly to the point where there is no future opportunity for safe haven, certainly to the degree that we can create conditions for that Afghan government to rule the country and avoid safe

haven," Cornwall said.

India, Afghanistan resolve to fight terror

Sujoy Dhar - Aug 26, 2010 - 17:50

NEW DELHI (PAN): India and Afghanistan pledged to work together to deny terrorists a safe haven in the region, foreign ministers of the two countries said, a thinly veiled reference to Pakistan.

Afghanistan Foreign Minister Zalmay Rassoul met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his Indian counterpart, S M Krishna during his two-day visit to India. The Afghan diplomat leaves for Kabul on Thursday.

In a joint statement issued after a meeting with Krishna late Wednesday night, the two top diplomats resolved to combat terrorism in the region.

"They also emphasised the need to ensure that terrorist and extremist groups targeting Afghanistan and other countries in the region are denied safe havens and sanctuaries," the statement said.

India conveyed its desire to see a strong, stable, peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan and reiterated its commitment to assisting Afghanistan in its development efforts.

"They underlined the need for an early operationalization of the India-Afghanistan Partnership Council to widen and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries," the statement said.

India has already provided approximately \$1.3 billion in assistance to Afghanistan since the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001.

But it is wary of the growing influence of Pakistan, who both countries accuse of harbouring Taliban militants.

Nine Indians were killed when suicide bombers attacked a guesthouse used by Indian doctors in Kabul in February this year, an attack that the Indian external affairs minister said was "a matter of deep concern".

On Wednesday, an Indian newspaper reported that the medical mission which had been closed since the February attack would reopen.

"The medical mission in Kabul will resume full-scale operations shortly," an anonymous source told the Times of India. "The staff who had been injured are being replaced."

Social Headlines

Campaign launched to remove security barriers

Muhammad Hassan Khitab - Aug 21, 2010 - 13:51

KABUL (PAN): A campaign for removing security barriers from Kabul roads was launched on Saturday, but residents doubt the even-handed implementation of the drive.

Almost every Kabul-based organisation has protected itself by erecting cemented walls around its office. The drive was launched with the removal of barricades around the Border Police Headquarters in the Deh Mazang area.

Present at the ceremony were Interior Minister Gen. Bismillah Muhammadi, Kabul police chief, Lt. Gen. Abdul Rahman Rahman and Mayor Muhammad Yunus Nawandesh.

"In the first step, barricades around government institutions will be removed," Nawandesh said, promising the campaign would go on until all barriers were cleared.

In the past, President Hamid Karzai and the interior ministry have tried several times to eliminate the barriers but such campaigns are generally stopped days after their launch.

With the past experience in mind, Kabul residents fear the latest drive may also fizzle out.

But Nawandesh assured they would hold talks with those who have realistic security threats and might find another solution to their concerns. He warned those refusing to remove the barricades would be dealt with under the law.

Kabul City, originally made for half a million people, is presently home to more than four million individuals.

Subhanullah, a resident of Deh Mazang, welcomed the move. "These barriers have created traffic problems for us." He said if the government successfully implemented the plan, people would support it.

However, he feared the drive might not come to a logical conclusion because such efforts had failed in the past.

Ghulam Muhammad, another resident, held a similar view. "If implemented in a determined manner, the campaign would enormously help Kabul dwellers."

Schools lack teachers in Khost

Maiwand Fida - Aug 22, 2010 - 16:28

KHOST CITY (PAN): Residents of southeastern Khost province have complained about a shortage of trained teachers in government schools.

Most of teachers in the Spera district are university students, who lack professional skills, according to residents.

Janat Gul, a tribal elder, said there were three schools in the district, with a population of 10,000. The schools cannot meet the needs of the area. Due to long distance, many children could not reach schools

on time, he added.

One major problem was a shortage of teachers in government schools, said another elder, Haji Mirdad. "Teachers at the schools are students of grade-12, some of them even less qualified."

He said the rising generation would be deprived of their right to standard education if the situation continued to prevail.

Education Director Syed Musa Majrooh said there were eight schools in the district. The lack of teachers was a problem faced by the whole province, he said, linking the shortage to meagre salaries and security problems.

Nearly 225 schools are operating across Khost, bordering Pakistan's tribal region of Kurram. As many as 166,000 students, including 40,000 girls, are enrolled in the schools.

ANDMA warns of winter food shortage

Frozan Rahmani - Aug 22, 2010 - 14:10

KABUL (PAN): The Afghanistan Natural Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) is concerned that the country might face food shortages in the winter, but the agriculture ministry says the opposite.

ANDMA Director Abdul Matin Idrak told a press conference on Sunday unprecedented flash floods in Pakistan and wildfire in Russia would have a great impact on the food supply situation in Afghanistan.

He said agricultural crops in 17 provinces had been damaged by recent floods. "With these facts in mind, we fear Afghanistan may experience the food shortage problem this coming winter."

He warned the Afghan government and United Nations to be prepared for dealing with the looming crisis. Afghanistan did not have large stocks of edible items and that was why it would not be able to provide emergency assistance for the people, Idrak said.

He added they needed 250,000 tonnes of food items for the coming winter.

But an agriculture ministry spokesman says there is no cause for concern and the country will not face any problem. Majeedullah Qarar said despite recent torrential rains, the country saw an 11 percent increase in wheat production.

He said they had a stock of 75,000 metric tonnes of wheat and would ask the Council of Ministers to approve the purchase of another 100,000 metric tonnes.

Qarar said there was fear that Afghan wheat might be smuggled to Pakistan. He said they had asked the Ministry of Interior to foil such bids at the border.

Rains cause heavy losses to farmers in Parwan, Kabul

Farid Tanha - Aug 22, 2010 - 20:37

CHARIKAR (PAN): Farmers and orchard owners in some districts of central Parwan and Kabul provinces say they have lost about 80 percent of their crops due to the recent rains.

Flash floods and incessant rainfalls over the last couple of months which hit the capital, Kabul, and other provinces have killed hundreds of people and livestock, besides washing away hundreds of acres of

farmlands and orchards. One of the worst hit provinces was central Parwan.

"I had 500 grapevines in my garden but all of them turned black due to the heavy rains," said Malak Mirza, 50, a resident of Dahan-i-Maidan area of Bagram district.

Usually Mirza can sell 7,000 kilograms of grapes and 560 kilograms of raisins, from which he earns 80,000 afghanis, but this year he does not expect to sell even 70 kilograms. The rainfall and humidity also destroyed his less than half an acre of tomato fields, he added.

The humidity and rainfall destroyed 70 percent of grape orchards, wheat crops and vegetables in Sayaran-i-Payeen, an area on outskirts of the provincial capital, Charikar, a resident of the area, Abdul Azim, 40 said.

Grape vines, potato fields, tomato and wheat crops were also destroyed in Shakardara, Guldara, Farza, Qarabagh, Deh Sabz and Estalif districts of Kabul province.

Zaki Ahmad, a resident of Haji Bag area of Shakardara district in Kabul, said he only expected to make about 10,000 afghanis this year from his grape harvest instead of the usual 150,000 afghanis.

For most the residents in Parwan province, agriculture is their main source of income. Shah Mir Amiri, head of the provincial agriculture department, said most farmers had lost about 50 percent of their income due to the rains.

He said his department could not compensate all of those who had been affected, however, he said the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock had been informed.

The rain had also adversely impacted the price of vegetables at the market. Last year, the price of seven kilograms of grapes was about 120 afghanis, but now it is 80 afghanis, and the price of seven kilograms of tomatoes had fallen from 80 afghanis to 25 afghanis.

MAIL gets equipment worth \$127,000

Rahmatullah Afghan - Aug 23, 2010 - 18:40

KABUL (PAN): France provided Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) with \$127,000 in equipment on Monday.

The equipment including two pick-up vehicles, 8 tractors, 10 motorcycles, as many solar energy plants, six desktop computers, a photocopy machine, tables and chairs were handed over the MAIL officials at a ceremony held in this regard.

Deputy financial and administrative affairs head at the ministry, Saleem Kunduzi, told the gathering that spraying machines, artificial sperm producing centre and containers were part of the assistance. However, he did not elaborate.

He said one vehicle and the tractors would be provided to Kabul provincial agriculture department while the rest would be handed over the Kapisa irrigation, irrigation and livestock department.

Kunduzi said about 25, 00 farmers would benefit from the new equipment in Kabul's Sarobi and Kapisa's Tagab, Allah Sai and Nijrab districts.

Turkmenistan pledges 1,000 tonnes of flour

Haseeb Noori - Aug 23, 2010 - 22:01

KABUL (PAN): The Turkmenistan government on Monday announced providing 1,000 tonnes of flour to the people of Afghanistan during the holy month of Ramadan, the president's office said.

Turkmen President Gubanguly Berdimuhammadov made the pledge in a telephone conversation with his Afghan counterpart, President Hamid Karzai, the Karzai's office said in a statement issued here.

The flour would be handed over to the Afghan government as a gesture of the long-term friendly relations between the two countries, it said, adding the two leaders also agreed to meet on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York.

They would talk about extending economic ties between the two nations, the statement said.

Berdimuhammadov also invited Karzai to visit his country in the near future. The invitation was accepted by President Hamid Karzai, the statement said.

During their talks, Karzai insisted on further expanding the relations between the two countries.

Norway to donate \$36.7 million

Sultana Rahim - Aug 25, 2010 - 15:01

KABUL (PAN): Norway will donate \$36.7 million to Afghanistan's education ministry over the next three years, according to an agreement signed on Wednesday.

Education minister Faroq Wardak and the ambassador of Norway, Kare R Aas, signed the agreement in Kabul.

About 8.5 percent of the money will be used to construct school buildings in Faryab where the Norwegian Provincial Reconstruction Team is stationed.

The remaining amount will be used to improve education, build schools, train teachers and pave the way for women and girls to be educated.

"Our aim is to provide a good education facility to all Afghan children," the Norwegian ambassador said.

Wardak said that there were seven million children in school in Afghanistan, but added that another five million who should be in school did not have access.

Norway has donated \$18 million since 2004 to improve education in Afghanistan, money that has been spent on 109 school buildings, he said.

Norway has 480 soldiers under the ISAF command in Afghanistan.

73 schoolgirls, teachers poisoned in Kabul

Khwaja Basir Ahmad & Frozan Rahmani - Aug 25, 2010 - 17:44

KABUL (PAN): As many as 73 school girls and their teachers were taken to hospital on Wednesday in the capital Kabul in what authorities suspect is another incident of gas poisoning.

Initially a crime branch official told Pajhwok Afghan News that 41 girls at the Tawtia middle school had fallen ill. He said that someone had thrown a poisonous substance into the school at 9:45am, although it was not immediately clear what that was.

Public health official, Dr. Kabir Amiri, said that number had risen to 73, including three teachers and the school principal. Health officials said the girls reported vomiting, feeling sick and that some had passed

out.

"I smelled something foul in the corridor and I thought it was from the bathroom. Later I got a fever and our teacher told us all to leave the classroom. After that I don't know what happened as I later found myself in hospital," said Farida, a class seven student.

Initially students, teachers and the principal were taken to the Rahman Mina Hospital, but then sent to specialist hospitals of Jamhoriyat, Wazir Akbar Khan and Ibni-i-Sina, Amiri said.

Although the victims were not in critical condition, they were being monitored, he said.

He said the cause of the poisoning would be clear after 72 hours.

Director of the Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health, Dr. Noorul Haq Yousufzai, said they received two groups of patients at about 11am. They had kept 25, while the rest were sent to other hospitals, he said.

According to him, blood samples had been taken to verify what caused the girls to fall ill.

Two schoolteachers and a principal were among those poisoned, spokesman for the Ministry of Education, Muhammad Asif Nang, said.

The Kabul incident follows several others in the country in which an airborne substance has been thrown into a school for girls, sickening the students. The last reported incident was in June when about 50 girls at a school in southern Ghazni province fell ill. In May, about 100 girls were taken to hospital after a suspected gas poisoning in Kabul.

Although the Taliban, who ruled the country from 1996 to 2001, were against girls' education during their tenure, they have denied carrying out the attacks.

22 drugs smugglers held at Kabul airport in five months

Khwaja Basir Ahmad - Aug 25, 2010 - 15:23

KABUL (PAN): Twenty-two drugs smugglers, including a Tajik national and a woman caught with 38 kilograms of heroin, had been arrested at Kabul International Airport during the last five months, the border police chief said on Wednesday.

Maj. Gen. Muhammad Asif Jabbarkhel said as many as 73 cases of fake visas had also been registered in the same period.

He said the smugglers were changing their tactics, but police were still one step ahead of them.

"In addition to the smugglers trying to shift narcotics in their stomachs, they have also used some other tactics," he said, adding that while in the past smugglers concealed narcotics in the shells of almonds, now they were trying to make them look like sweets.

Jabbarkhel cited the example of a smuggler from western Herat province who made the drug look like tobacco for a water pipe.

Although three of suspected smugglers arrested last week were paraded before journalists, reporters were not allowed to interview them.

The three residents of Kabul, Kandahar and Paktia provinces had tried to smuggle heroin and swallowed separately 84, 68 and 117 packets of the drug.

"Border police will treat them equally, whether he is ordinary man or official, who smuggles narcotics," Jabbarkhel said.

Kabul's international airport is well equipped to prevent smuggling, but provincial airports were not so secure, he said, calling for more high tech equipment to prevent smuggling.

17 people killed in floods across Afghanistan

Abdul Moeed Hashmi & Abdul Maqsood Azizi - Aug 26, 2010 - 14:53

JALALABAD/PUL-I-ALAM (PAN): Floods caused by heavy rain have killed at least 17 people and damaged hundreds of homes in eastern Nangarhar and central Logar provinces, officials said on Thursday.

Thousands of arable land was also washed away in Behsud, Khewa, Surkh Rod, Hesarak, Rodat and other districts of Nangarhar after recent rains, the governor's spokesman, Ahmad Zia Abdulzai, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

Fifteen people were confirmed killed, while two children, swept away by the floods, were reported missing and feared dead. Another seven people were injured.

Dr. Muhammad Naeem, head of the Hesarak District Development Council, said 300 houses had been destroyed, 80 animals killed and 1,000 acres of cultivable land washed away by the floods.

In Khewa district, up to 60 houses were destroyed and hundreds of acres of land swamped. The floods also washed away a pump station and four mills for refining rice and maize in Achin district, police spokesman, Col. Abdul Ghafoor, said.

Separately, hundreds acres of land, orchards and houses were destroyed in Alishang, Qarghaee and the capital Mehtarlam of neighbouring Laghman province.

Emergency committee workers had reached the affected areas to assess the damage, the governor's spokesman of Laghman, Gul Rahman Hamdard, said.

Elsewhere, the floods hit Maghulkhel, Alozai, Pul-i-Kandahari, Kutabkhel areas of Muhammad Agha district and Dakht-i-Babus, Pyarokhel and Mohajreen villages of Pul-i-Alam, the provincial capital of central Logar on Wednesday evening.

Two children were swept away by the floods and were feared dead, the governor's spokesman, Din Muhammad Darwaish, said.

As well, thousands of acres of cultivable land and orchards were inundated and 130 homes destroyed.

"We were preparing for iftar when the flood washed through our house," a resident of Maghulkhel village, Faqir Ahmad, said.

They stayed in the house of a villager that night, he added.

He said the government had blocked the flow of water under bridges with gabions cement blocks encased in wire mesh which were supposed to prevent insurgents planting bombs there.

They had tried to destroy the blocks, but Afghan soldiers were not allowing them.

The floods destroyed 2,800 houses in the country two weeks ago, according to officials.

Around 130 people were killed, thousands of house and as many acres of cultivable land was washed away by floods in last month in different parts of the country.

Economical Headlines

Gas pipeline deal in October

Rahmatullah Afghan - Aug 26, 2010 - 12:07

KABUL (PAN): A deal to lay a pipeline taking gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India through Afghanistan is expected to be signed in October this year, officials said on Thursday.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Mines, Jawad Omar, said the deal would be signed among mine ministers of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Turkmenistan.

With the signing date and venue still being discussed, Omar said nine meetings had been held on the project among officials from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. India joined the project later on.

The official called the upcoming October meeting an important event which would see the four countries inking an agreement on the implementation of the \$3.6 billion project. Work on laying the 850-kilometre pipeline will start after the agreement.

President Hamid Karzai will meet his Turkmen counterpart Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, his spokesman said.

Hamid Elmi added the leaders were expected to discuss the pipeline project. Turkmen Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov is due in Kabul next week.

According to government sources, Meredov will confer on the pipeline scheme and other issues of bilateral interest with his Afghan interlocutors.

The Afghan government will earn \$350 to \$400 million in transit fee from the export of gas per annum and may take over the ownership of the pipeline after 30 years.

Work on the project, which will create jobs for 3000 Afghans, has been delayed due to security problems in Afghanistan.

The pipeline will be laid from western Herat province, bordering Iran, and extended to Pakistan through Farah, Helmand and Kandahar provinces.

The pipeline is expected to be built with funds from donor countries, as well as loans from the Asian Development Bank, which has been surveying routes for the project.