

Bearing Point AEGP Public Relations and Media Office

Weekly press review - September 24-30, 2004

Summary

- Karzai is trying to forge a deal with other candidates, including his main rival and former ally, Younis Qanuni, according to the president's aides and Western diplomats. They believe the former education minister may be ready to end his challenge, which would boost Karzai's chances of winning 50% of the vote in the first round. (By Ahmed Rashid/Islamabad)
- Leaders of a south-east Afghanistan tribe have told its members they must vote for Hamid Karzai in presidential polls or their houses will be burned. (BBC)
- PESHAWAR: Abdul Jabbar Naeemi, a former Afghan diplomat has said that refugees residing in Pakistan will participate in the election process and vote for a presidential candidate who can solve their problems and bring peace to Afghanistan. (Daily Times)
- Mohammed Mohaqiq says that he was getting prepared to participate in the October 9 presidential election when U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad offered him a deal. (Aljazeera)
- The leader of a European team going to Afghanistan to help organize next month's presidential election says he is optimistic his group can smooth the election process. (VOA News)
- The presidential elections scheduled for October 9 in Afghanistan pit on the one side the pro-US Afghan government and Washington, both desperately keen to show that the writ of law has been established in the country, against the Afghan resistance, which is equally determined to disrupt the polls. (Asia Times)

- This is politics Afghan-style, where candidates in the historic presidential poll face violence, threats and intimidation to win the support of people more familiar with weapons than ballot boxes. (The Times)
- When President George W. Bush addressed the U.N. General Assembly on Sept. 21, he declared that Afghanistan and Iraq "are on the path to democracy" and will be "a model for the broader Middle East." Afghanistan's Oct. 9 presidential election will be the first test. And the path to democracy is looking treacherous. (Business Week)
- Washington - Based on what Americans have been seeing in the news media about Afghanistan lately, there may not be many who believed President Bush on Tuesday when he told the United Nations that the "Afghan people are on the path to democracy and freedom. (NY Times)
- British combat jets have been deployed to Afghanistan for the first time ahead of October's presidential elections. (BBC)
- FAIZABAD, Afghanistan, Sept. 24, 2004 -- Recruiting for the Afghan National Army extended to the country's northeastern province that touches China with the opening of the newest National Army Volunteer Center Sept. 7. (USA)
- KANDAHAR, Afghanistan (AP) _ U.S. troops and helicopter gunships killed five suspected Taliban rebels Monday, hours after militants attacked Afghan army troops in southern Afghanistan, a provincial governor said. (AP)
- The buildings are still going up and the paint is not even dry but already questions are being asked about the role of German troops stationed in this sleepy northeast Afghan town after rioting this month. (AFP)
- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) Friday said that it would help Afghanistan to stimulate private sector activity and attract foreign direct investment by co-financing an investment guarantee facility. (Xinhua)

WASHINGTON, 24 Sept (RFE/RL) -- A U.S. State Department official says poppy cultivation in Afghanistan is expected to jump by as much as 40 percent this year, according to news agencies. (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty)

- KABUL - The Taliban and their al Qaeda allies are stepping up plans to disrupt Afghanistan's first direct presidential election on Oct. 9, the head of the U.S.-led coalition said on Saturday. (Reuters)
- PESHAWAR: Abdul Jabbar Naeemi, a former Afghan diplomat has said that refugees residing in Pakistan will participate in the election process and vote for a presidential candidate who can solve their problems and bring peace to Afghanistan. (Daily Times)
- KABUL - Suspected Taliban militants launched a string of attacks on security posts in southern Afghanistan on Saturday, killing nine soldiers, an official said. (Reuters)
- Ahead of the next general elections in Afghanistan, Germany's army intends to build a military camp south of Kabul to boost security at the start of the next year, a defense ministry spokesman said Saturday. (Deutsche Welle)
- PESHAWAR, Pakistan -- Pakistan's prime minister said Saturday the government is lifting economic sanctions in a tense tribal region near Afghanistan to encourage help in tracking down foreign militants and those who shelter them. (AP)
- HAMBURG: A German businessman under investigation for illegally exporting nuclear technology had planned to sell the material to Iran, Der Spiegel magazine reported in its issue out on Monday. (Daily Times)
- ISLAMABAD: Afghan Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah has expressed satisfaction over the cooperation being extended by Pakistan to restore peace in Afghanistan. (The News International)
- President Hamid Karzai, whom the United States supports, is by far the best-known politician in Afghanistan and is widely expected to win. His platform enjoys overwhelming popular support in public opinion polls. (NY Times)
- SHIBERGHAN, Afghanistan - Afghan President Hamid Karzai, frontrunner in next month's landmark election, traveled north on Sunday to inaugurate a road project, his first domestic trip since he survived a rocket attack 10 days ago. (Reuters)

- MAZAR-I-SHARIF - Before Shugofa Beheshti decides whom to vote for in Afghanistan's Oct. 9 presidential election, she wants to hear what the candidates have to say. (Reuters)
- Two weeks ahead of Afghanistan's presidential elections, Germany's defense minister paid a visit to Kunduz and Faizabad, where reconstruction teams are responsible for maintaining security in the unstable region. (Deutsche Welle)
- The October presidential elections in Afghanistan are a watershed moment, equal in importance to the post-Sept. 11 ousting of the Taliban. Now President Hamid Karzai has the chance to embrace -- or to squander -- this moment. (The Washington Post)
- THE Barak family reflects the divides in Afghanistan's largest southern city Kandahar, which is both the spiritual home of the Taliban and a stronghold of President Hamid Karzai. (AFP)
- KABUL - Afghan law enforcement personnel discovered 1,000 kilograms of explosive materials in a vehicle in the war-weary Afghan capital Sunday, said the country's top security official. (Xinhua)
- Afghan security forces killed a senior Taliban commander along with two other fighters in a raid on a village home in southern Afghanistan, an official said Sunday. (AP)
- ISLAMABAD: Al-Qaeda-linked fighters battling Pakistani troops along the border with Afghanistan are sophisticated and brutal combatants who carry phones and mutilate their enemies' corpses, according to a profile unveiled by an army commander. (Times of India)
- Mr Khattak said Dr Najibullah wanted to get his country free from foreign interference and in doing so he faced opposition from the east and west alike during the last three years of his reign. (Daily Times)
- Iran said Sunday more than 30,000 Afghan refugees have left the Iranian city of Isfahan to return to their country since March 20. (Big News)
- Some 30,000 people jammed a sports stadium in the northern Afghan town of Shiberghan to hear regional strongman General Abdul Rashid

Dostum launch his bid for the presidency with a call for national unity.
(Reuters)

- Tehran - The head of the Bureau for Alien and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA) in Tehran, Ahmad Hosseini, on Tuesday said that about 700,000 Afghan refugees residing in Iran are eligible to vote in their country's upcoming presidential elections. (IRNA)
- UNITED NATIONS - A U-N official says preparations for presidential elections in Afghanistan next month are on track despite a string of attacks and killings in recent weeks. (AP)
- KANDAHAR - Militants ambushed an Afghan military patrol in a Taliban stronghold Tuesday, sparking a three-hour gunbattle that left four troops and two rebels dead, an Afghan official said. (AP)
- KABUL, -- Kabul police on Tuesday dismissed earlier reports about an Afghan military helicopter crash in west Kabul as incorrect, saying eyewitnesses misunderstood the situation on the ground. (Xinhuanet)
- KABUL - The Afghan government, in a fresh bid to further restrict terror activities and chock terrorists' financial resources, has decided to introduce a new law, Presidential spokesman Jawed Ludin said Tuesday. (Xinhua)
- WASHINGTON - The Pentagon notified Congress of plans to build five bases in Afghanistan for the Afghan National Army at a cost of up to one billion dollars. (AFP)
- WASHINGTON - Thirty percent of former U.S. soldiers who have been called back to duty involuntarily to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan have failed to report on time, and eight have been declared AWOL, the Army said on Tuesday. (Reuters)
- KARACHI - Security forces have detained more than a dozen suspected militants, including some linked to al Qaeda, after killing Pakistan's most wanted man in a weekend shootout, intelligence sources said on Tuesday. (Reuters)
- SAN FRANCISCO - John Walker Lindh, serving 20 years in jail for fighting alongside the Taliban, asked the U.S. government on Tuesday to

lessen his sentence after it decided to release a second American captured in Afghanistan. (Reuters)

- MOSCOW, The Unified Energy Systems of Russian (EES Rossii) could enter Afghanistan's energy system via Tajikistan, the chief of the national electricity utility, Anatoly Chubais , said. (Itar-Tass)
- "Around 6.3 million Afghans are facing the threat of famine as the protracted drought is continuing," Mohammad Hanif Atmar told reporters here at a news briefing. (Xinhua)
- At least 6 million young children across Afghanistan will be vaccinated against polio in a three-day drive starting today that is part of a campaign by United Nations agencies to wipe out the virus in a country where it appears to be on the decline. (UN News Center)

Press clippings

Headlines

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Former diplomat campaigns for Hamid Karzai in Pakistan
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Afghanistan must break out of vicious cycle: World Bank
Asian Development Bank to help Afghanistan attract investment
New Company GroupSat Inc. announces grand opening of its New Kabul, Afghanistan

Iran Plans to Increase Industrial Exports to Afghanistan

Thursday September 30, 9:33 AM Asia Pulse

TEHRAN, Sept 30 Asia Pulse - Iran plans to increase the total value of its industrial exports to Afghanistan this year by US\$300 million, according to the English-language daily, Tehran Times.

The daily quoted Ministry of Industries and Mines Director-General Ahmad Qasemi as saying that if the plan is achieved, the amount would mean a 50 per cent growth compared to the value of exports in the previous year.

Iran's total industrial and mineral exports to countries abroad reached US\$4 billion during the said period, he added.

He said his ministry has set a target of US\$1.5 billion until the end of the year (March 20,

2005).

Currently, Iran exports more than 1000 kinds of industrial products to countries abroad such as medicines, detergents, chemical and petrochemical substances, plastics and melamine, tires, cellulose, mineral products, various kinds of metals and fabrics, thread, synthetic fibers, shoes, cars and auto spare parts.

Karzai Inaugurates Rebuilt Afghan Museum

Thursday September 30, 1:09 PM AP

President Hamid Karzai inaugurated Afghanistan's rebuilt national museum Wednesday, the latest effort to shed a positive light on the country's sluggish reconstruction 10 days before landmark elections.

Karzai cut a pink ribbon to mark the completion of the refit of the two-story museum, whose building was destroyed in civil war and whose collection was further decimated by the Taliban.

The U.S.-backed interim leader is the favorite among 18 candidates contesting the Oct. 9 ballot to become the country's first directly elected president.

Many Afghans are disappointed with efforts to put the country back on its feet after more than two decades of war _ dismay that Karzai's opponents hope to tap at the ballot box.

His challengers are also calling foul over the style of Karzai's campaign.

The opening of the National Museum was billed as official presidential business, rather than an election booster. Karzai says he's too busy to stump for votes.

But TV crews and photographers were allowed to join his tour of the gleaming white building, the third such event since Sunday for a leader usually confined to his fortified palace because of concerns for his safety.

Sayed Ishaq Gilani, one of the contenders hoping to at least push Karzai into a second round, echoed complaints that the United States was trying to stage-manage a Karzai poll victory.

"In a week, Karzai has suddenly become very active," Gilani said. "These opportunities are being provided by those countries funding these projects. The museum is not even finished, but Karzai wanted to inaugurate it before the election."

Flanked by a clutch of ministers and diplomats as well as his heavily armed bodyguards, Karzai inspected tables laden with pieces of artifacts smashed after the Taliban captured the capital in 1996 and banned human images as un-Islamic.

He peered over the shoulder of a white-coated restorer trying to put a statue back together.

Karzai made no public comment. But U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad pressed the message already highlighted by the presidential inauguration of a women's dormitory at Kabul University and a road project in northern Jawzjan province.

The United States is funding all three projects.

"This restoration is of course part of the reconstruction of Afghanistan," Khalilzad said. "Afghan society is now getting itself ready for the future, but it is also reclaiming its past."

The entire top floor of the museum was destroyed during the civil war, which broke out among Afghanistan's mujahideen factions after Soviet occupiers withdrew in 1989.

Officials rescued some of the collection from the destruction and looters, but Taliban-sanctioned mobs demolished much of what was left after the hardline militia captured the city in 1996.

Some \$350,000 has been spent since 2003 to fix the building, which lies in the shadow of a gutted former royal palace in the war-ravaged west of the capital.

Culture Minister Makhdom Raheen said 2,500 artifacts had been recovered from the collection, which was once one of the finest in Central Asia with 100,000 items dated back several millennia. A few dozen have been repaired.

The museum still needs display cases, security systems and trained staff before it can open to the public, officials said.

Rockets Injure Four Troops in Afghanistan

Thursday September 30, 11:58 AM AP

Two rockets slammed into a NATO military camp in northern Afghanistan, wounding four soldiers gearing up to protect the country's landmark elections, officials said Thursday.

The pair of 107-millimeter rockets hit the base in Kunduz city late Wednesday evening, said Lt. Cdr. Ken Mackillop, a spokesman for the international force in the Afghan capital, Kabul.

One soldier seriously injured was undergoing surgery at the base medical facility early Thursday, Mackillop said. He gave no further details.

A spokesman for the German Defense Ministry in Berlin said two of the wounded soldiers were German and a third was Swiss. The official made no mention of a fourth casualty.

NATO has lifted its troop strength to about 9,500 ahead of the Oct. 9 presidential election, when its soldiers will join the separate 18,000-strong U.S. force and Afghan authorities to provide security.

The alliance's troops are focused on the capital and northern Afghanistan, where factional violence has been a more serious problem than the insurgency plaguing the south and east.

Afghan and foreign officials predict that Taliban-led militants will step up their attacks to coincide with the vote, the first national ballot since the hardline Islamic regime's ouster.

Elsewhere, Taliban militants crept up to an Afghan government office under cover of darkness early Wednesday and launched a gunbattle that left four attackers and three Afghan troops dead, police said.

The mayor's office in Khaki Afghan, a district of southeastern Zabul province, was targeted by rebels armed with machine guns and rifles, deputy police chief Jailani Khan said.

In four hours of fighting, four Taliban were killed and two more captured along with their weapons, Khan said.

When Afghans vote on Oct 9, India will leave an indelible mark

Thursday, September 30, 2004 Express India

Besides supplying marker ink, former EC officials from India have been told to ensure polls are free and fair

KABUL, SEPTEMBER 29: In Afghanistan's first ever Presidential elections due on October 9, the credit for providing what an independent research group describes as "the last line of defence against fraud" goes entirely to India.

The reference by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is to the black indelible ink that will mark the left thumb cuticle of every Afghan, from among the over 10.6 million people, eligible to vote in what is undoubtedly a trail-blazing exercise in democracy. Around a million more will also vote in refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran.

And, if the full-colour ballot papers listing the 18 presidential candidates, including interim President Hamid Karzai, are being supplied by Canada and the ballot-boxes by

Denmark, the all-important indelible ink, manufactured by Mysore Paints and Varnish Ltd, is a gift from India.

“The ink will be one of the most important components in the electoral exercise since it will ensure that nobody votes twice,” said S K Mendiratta, one of the five international members on the 11-member Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB), Afghanistan’s UN-backed Election Commission. The other five foreign members are from the US, Sweden, Spain and Indonesia.

Though the ink is the same as used in India’s Parliamentary elections, it is packaged differently to ensure easier handling. It comes in around 50,000 marker pens that will be supplied to nearly 20,000 polling stations across the country. “Once it’s on the cuticle, it’s impossible to take it off,” said Jon Sifton of Human Rights Watch, displaying the left thumb he got marked at the JEMB. “This is pretty good stuff.”

All the attention being paid to the ink is primarily because of fears of massive fraud in the elections, since away from Kabul, warlords and tribal chiefs still continue to call the shots. According to the AREU, there has been significant over-registration of voters in 13 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces.

The voter registration cards carry photographs, but women have the choice to do without them. So multiple cards are said to be especially common among women. People will be free to vote at any polling station, since there will be no voters’ lists. But the voter registration card will be punched once the vote is cast.

Many people have taken out multiple cards because any government document in Afghanistan has a resale price. Fahima, a cook, for instance, has ten cards, although she does not plan to vote. She claims to have sold two of her cards for Rs 2,400 each, more than her monthly wage.

The responsibility for ensuring that the electoral process is free and fair vests on an Indian K J Rao who, like Mendiratta, is a retired official of India’s Election Commission— both are now re-employed as EC advisors. “The number of complaints so far have been very few, but I did investigate a case of multiple female cards issued in central Afghanistan and found there was malpractice,” said Rao, who is in charge of electoral investigation and enforcement for the whole country.

“One unique aspect of the Afghanistan election is that government servants are permitted to openly campaign outside office hours,” he said. “That makes my job easier (since one main source of possible electoral misconduct won’t count).”

There is one other former EC official, Thomas Mathew, who is also playing a significant role in the Afghan elections. He is in charge of elections in the Hazara-dominated central highlands of Bamiyan, where the Taliban destroyed two standing Buddhas.

The conduct of the elections is a daunting challenge for the JEMB. Besides the threat of violence from warlords and members of the deposed Taliban regime, the entire operation appears an audacious gamble in a country with low literacy, non-existent roads, poor communications, and no tradition of electoral democracy.

“Let there be bomb attacks, but we will go and vote,” said taxi-driver Mohammed Ismail, as a Bollywood song reverberated through his cab. “There are only two choices now — democracy or back to gun rule”.

The JEMB has to recruit around 100,000 polling officials, at least a quarter of them educated. So unlike in India, many of the officials would have to be private citizens. After the voting, the ballot boxes will be brought to eight regional centres for counting, and the result will be known only around the end of October. If no candidate gets 50 per cent or more of the votes in the first round, there will be a run-off between the two leading contenders in early December.

Afghanistan’s momentous presidential polls will however go largely unobserved by international experts. Due to fears about security, even the European Union has decided not to appoint a full-fledged observer mission. But the newly set-up Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan is busy training around 3,000 Afghans to act as election observers. They might be assisted by a few independent foreign observers willing to take the risk.

“Just like in Bihar, in remote areas here we may not get to know what actually went on,” said Mendiratta. “But by and large, things should go alright. All arrangements are getting into place. The only real concern is security.”

What if America Just Pulled Out?

Week in Review 29-9-04

By ROGER COHEN
The New York Times

EVEN by its own disturbing standards, this was a hallucinatory week in Iraq. Beheadings, kidnappings, bombings, outbreaks of deadly disease and everyday mayhem were accompanied by interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's upbeat statement to Congress: "We are succeeding in Iraq."

Are we? The discordant images and messages captured a central difficulty of defining an Iraq policy. In the

absence of any semblance of agreement on what the situation is, or even who is behind the insurgency, setting a course is problematic. But with more than 1,000 Americans already dead, and more dying each week, one question has begun to be posed with growing insistence: Should American forces leave?

There are several arguments for getting out, or at least setting a timetable for doing so. The status quo is unacceptable. History, from Algeria to Vietnam, suggests that no military solution to a spreading insurgency is possible. A major counteroffensive would almost certainly require a large addition to the 138,000 troops in Iraq, an unattractive prospect to politicians of any stripe.

A decision to withdraw would focus the minds of Iraqis, and perhaps their neighbors, on the need to grapple seriously with establishing security and an inclusive political system. It would also remove a chief target of the insurgents - American infidels in uniform - and so presumably undermine their cause.

"A withdrawal plan says to the Iraqis: you want this to be your country, you must make the deals to keep it together," said Leslie Gelb, president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations. "If we are there to fight, they won't do this. So a timetable should be established."

But the counterarguments are also powerful. Withdrawal in the absence of stability would amount to a devastating admission of failure and a blow to America's world leadership. The credibility of the United States, already compromised, would be devastated. More than 1,000 young lives would appear to have been blotted out for naught.

Iraq might descend into all-out civil war and split into three pieces, one Kurdish, one Shiite, one predominantly Sunni. Neighboring states, particularly Iran and Turkey, would be drawn in. A failed state - or the vestiges of one - would draw terrorists as surely as a honey-pot draws bees.

There is a troubling recent precedent for such a retreat. When the Soviet Union, confronted by an intractable insurgency, pulled out of Afghanistan, Kabul soon became terrorism central. The Taliban took control, offering sanctuary to Al Qaeda and terrorist training camps. The Soviet Union, sapped by its Afghan adventure, never fully recovered.

Is this the trauma the United States wants from its foray into Iraq?

"Iraq would be worse than post-Soviet Afghanistan," said Philip Gordon of the Brookings Institution. "Its oil and geostrategic importance ensures that. The Lebanese civil war dragged in Syria, and just as surely the civil war that would result from an American withdrawal would drag in Iran and Turkey. You'd see ethnic strife that would make Kosovo look like a picnic. It's hard to fathom how bad it would be if we left."

Under President Bush, the prospect of such a pullout appears remote for now. He told Mr. Allawi this week that, "America will stand with you until freedom and justice have prevailed." The president has shown no sign, at least in this electoral season, of wavering from the we-will-stay-the-course message that has been constant since the invasion last year.

John Kerry, the Democratic candidate, has tried to stake out a distinct position, saying he would aim to

bring American forces home within four years, beginning next year. But while lashing out at the administration for what he has portrayed as disastrous incompetence, he has been cautious on the question of withdrawal.

As Richard Holbrooke, a foreign policy adviser to Mr. Kerry, put it: "Troops are dying at an unacceptable rate, but to pull out now would be crazy and beyond dangerous. We have to work harder on a political power-sharing arrangement, because there is no military solution to this thing."

That proposition is not accepted by commanders in Iraq, who are focused on the rapid development of the Iraqi army. For now, the military is contemplating reinforcements not withdrawals. Gen. John P. Abizaid, the American commander in Iraq, told Congress last week that "we will need more troops than we currently have to secure the elections process in Iraq that will probably take place in the end of January."

He added that he hoped enough Iraqi or international forces could do the job, but "we can't discount" the possibility that more United States soldiers would be required. A temporary increase of troops, perhaps by as much as 15,000, might be achieved through overlap during the planned rotation of forces in January.

Another factor is behind the idea of possible reinforcements: Areas of central Iraq, in the so-called Sunni Triangle, are no longer under government control. At some point, probably toward the end of the year, they will have to be retaken. This may not be doable with current troop levels.

But American commanders are hopeful that the nascent Iraqi army - 50,000 combat-ready troops today and 145,000 by January, according to Mr. Allawi - will help do the job and then patrol cities like Falluja that are now strongholds of the insurgency. The retaking of places like Falluja is viewed as urgent because they provide havens for the resistance to plan, plot and pounce.

"Either you leave or you control the country," said Javier Solana, the former NATO secretary general who is now the European Union's foreign policy chief. In New York last week for the United Nations General Assembly, he met with several senior American officials. "You cannot be in a situation like this," he said in a brief interview.

Several factors complicate that situation for the stay-the-course school. Resentment of America is such that any Iraqis - and that includes Mr. Allawi - who ally themselves with the United States probably have dim long-term political prospects, to say nothing of the more basic difficulty of staying alive.

Relations between the insurgents and the rest of the Iraqi community often appear so seamless that it can be hard to know which side the police and soldiers being trained will end up fighting on.

An important potential source of reinforcement - Muslim troops from allied nations - remains elusive because of the American presence. Gen. Pervez Musharraf, the Pakistani president, last week refused a request from Iraq's interim administration to send troops.

"We cannot be seen as an extension of the present forces there," he said. In other words, an explosion of anger from anti-American Islamic radicals in Pakistan would result from any Iraqi deployment. Saudi

Arabia has been evasive for similar reasons.

America's Western allies are also divided. One foreign minister of a major European power suggested that the United States should reinvent its fight on terrorism through a three-pronged approach: set a timetable for Iraqi withdrawal while working to broaden Mr. Allawi's coalition; inject new energy into the quest for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement; focus on coming up with a joint American-European plan to engage with Iran and so defuse its nuclear-weapons program.

"Iraq," the minister, who insisted on anonymity because of the sensitivity of his country's ties to the United States, said, "is the wrong battle and a losing one."

Insurgents in the predominantly Sunni cities of Falluja, Baquba and others know that this division exists, even if NATO is sending a small, noncombatant training mission to Iraq. The Western powers are weakened because they are less united than in many years. That gives the insurgency more leverage.

Are these difficulties insuperable? If so, should American forces pack their bags? No believer in the ultimate beneficence of American world leadership can easily accept that outcome. But one thing is certain: Independent Arab states like Iraq are largely a 20th-century creation, places with vivid memories of colonial rule and a visceral abhorrence of the presence of foreign troops.

"Independence and freedom from foreign forces is a major political value," said Abdel Monem Said, director of Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo. "So the insurgency enjoys some support in the Arab world, because someone must resist, some manhood is needed."

Robert Cooper, a British diplomat and author, said: "If you don't even know exactly who you are fighting, winning can be very tricky. So we have to go. But how to get out is the great question. Somebody should write a book about military withdrawals because they are so much more difficult than invasions."

Violence expected ahead of landmark Afghan polls: UN

Sept 29, 2004 09:44:00 AM

New York, Sept 29 (PTI) Though violent incidents remain a threat ahead of the landmark Afghan presidential elections next month, massive security arrangements have been made to counter any such occurrence, the United Nations has said.

"We're very much aware that this is a tough environment. We know that it's not going to be an incident-free election," Under Secretary General Jean Marie Guehenno told reporters yesterday.

"Despite the killing of 10 Afghan and two foreign electoral workers, the preparations are on track and the security forces have been conducting special training exercises to test their response strategy," he said.

Guehenno said he could not exclude multiple incidents in the country on or around the election day. "But all efforts are being made to react to attacks, especially on the polling sites and provide security to transportation of ballot and counting centers." Security forces have been stationed at key polling booths to

enable them to respond fast and tribal and community leaders were being used across the country to help determine local security arrangements, he said briefing the Security Council.

President Hamid Karzai, whom the United States backs, is expected to win the October nine elections though he has 17 challengers.

More than 10 million Afghans, including at least four million women, have registered to vote to choose a president. PTI.

Drought affects over six million Afghans: minister

Xinhua

09/28/2004

KABUL - The successive drought has affected the life of over six million Afghans across the war-shattered central Asian state, Afghan Minister for Rural Development and Rehabilitation said Tuesday.

"Around 6.3 million Afghans are facing the threat of famine as the protracted drought is continuing," Mohammad Hanif Atmar told reporters here at a news briefing.

The majority of the war-weary Afghanistan has lamented in the grip of a sever drought for the last six years.

"This year's drought is the severest one in the living memory of Afghans," he added.

"Some 5,000 families have been migrated to safer places in Daikundi, Bamyán and Faryab provinces," the minister further said.

The UN food agency (WFP) has already begun providing foodstuff to parts of southwest Ghor province and neighboring areas.

To fight the impact of the drought, the Afghan transitional government appealed for 71.3 million US dollars in aid last August. Of these 31 millions dollars have been pledged.

Except Takhar, Kunduz and Badakhshan, the remaining 31 provinces of war-battered country have been affected by the prolonged drought.

The money, he added, would be spent on providing potable water, foodstuff, rebuilding irrigation system and assisting displace people throughout the country.

Afghan team arriving to discuss cess issue

Daily Times 28-9-04

ISLAMABAD: A ten-member official delegation from Afghanistan is due to arrive in Islamabad on Wednesday (today) to convince the government to immediately withdraw infrastructure cess imposed by

the Sindh government on Afghan Transit Trade (ATT) goods, an official source said.

“Ghulam Jilani Popal, Afghanistan’s deputy minister customs, and Ghulam Nabi Farahi, deputy minister (finance), along with other eight members are arriving in Islamabad to seek a solution of the infrastructure cess imposed by government of Sindh,” the source said.

Meanwhile, the ministry of commerce has opposed 0.5 percent levy on the total cost and freight value slapped by Sindh government, saying it is against the Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA). Afghan importers have stopped clearance of transit goods from September 1 awaiting a final decision on the issue. Number of containers piling up at the port had reached around 3,000, the source said. The source said the commerce ministry has recommended to the Prime Minister Shukat Aziz to ask the Sindh government to withdraw infrastructure cess as Sindh government has turned down the request of the ministry.

The official said that Afghanistan’s delegation would take up this issue with Prime Minister Shuakat Aziz and hopefully the government of Pakistan would take the decision as per the Afghan Transit Trade Agreement.

It is feared that in case the cess was not withdrawn imports under the Afghan Transit Trade will decline during the current 2004-05 fiscal year.

Afghanistan’s delegation would also take up the issue of demurrage problems that Afghanis are facing at seaports, the official said and added Afghanistan would also seek transportation of containers on trucks.
staff report

Pentagon announces billion-dollar plan to build five Afghan army bases

Tue Sep 28, 5:52 PM ET Politics - AFP

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The Pentagon notified Congress of plans to build five bases in Afghanistan for the Afghan National Army at a cost of up to one billion dollars.

The Pentagon said Afghanistan had requested the bases be built for the Afghan army's Central Corps in Kabul and four regional commands planned in Gardez, Kandahar, Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif.

"The total value, if all options are exercised, could be as high as one billion dollars," the Pentagon's Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said in a statement.

It said the project would be carried out by the Army Corps of Engineers.

The description provided to Congress indicated that plans call for building a large walled base in Kabul with training barracks, medical and dining facilities and buildings to store vehicles and supplies.

The other bases also would have training barracks, dining facilities, medical clinics, and communications centers as well as basic utilities -- power, water, and sewage treatment plants.

The Pentagon did not say where the money would come from for the project, or how soon construction might begin.

"The proposed sale will contribute to the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping to improve the security of a friendly country that we hope to help become an important force for political stability and economic progress in South Asia," the DSCA said.

It said Afghanistan "needs these services to support the recruitment, training, bed-down, and operational effectiveness of a military capability to establish security and stability throughout Afghanistan, and to promote the stability and development of a friendly, democratic central government."

The creation of the Afghan National Army has been the centerpiece of US efforts to gradually offset the power of regional warlords.

Only about 13,500 Afghan army troops have been trained and fielded so far, but plans call for a force of some 70,000 troops in five year.

"Afghanistan 'breaking backbone' of warlords" - Khalilzad

AFP

09/27/2004

Khalilzad conceded the US and President Hamid Karzai's government was still cutting deals with unsavoury characters

KABUL - Afghanistan is breaking the back of warlords and speeding up the disarmament of militia forces ahead of the country's historic elections next month, US ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad said.

"We are breaking the backbone of this problem. Some of the most powerful of these warlords are no longer as they were," Khalilzad told reporters in Kabul on Monday.

With less than two weeks to go before Afghanistan's first presidential election, Khalilzad said the country had made progress at facing down military strongmen who have held sway over much of the country since the Islamic Taliban regime was ousted by a US-led military campaign in 2001.

Khalilzad pointed to the ouster of powerful warlord Ismael Khan who governed western Herat province with an iron hand for more than two years but was dismissed two weeks ago and replaced with a technocrat

by President Hamid Karzai.

"With the change of governor in Herat, a significant progress is taking place," Khalilzad said, adding heavy weapons such as tanks were being seized and disarmament had speeded up.

In addition, in northern Afghanistan General Abdul Rashid Dostam -- a warlord who is standing for president, had agreed to disarm all but 600 of his militiamen, Khalilzad said without explaining how many soldiers Dostam had commanded.

Ismael Khan and Dostam were two of the Northern Alliance generals who allied with the US to throw the Taliban from power in 2001 and then consolidated regional powerbases despite having known records of human rights abuses.

However, despite his upbeat statements Khalilzad acknowledged Afghanistan's elections faced significant obstacles.

"That's our anticipation that Afghans will have as fair and free an election as possible. We have to recognize that Afghanistan right now is a country that being built," he said.

Observers have said one of the main threats to a successful democratic election is the presence of regional warlords likely to intimidate voters unprotected by either sufficient foreign troops or international election monitors.

Khalilzad also conceded the US and President Hamid Karzai's government was still cutting deals with unsavoury characters.

"We worked with people so as long as they are in power and they have responsible positions, we have to deal with somebody who is the chief of police of a province, of course we have to deal with them," Khalilzad said.

However, he added, "the day will come when that person will not be chief of police if he has not reformed his behavior, if he's behaving as a warlord, and is behaving in a lawless manner."

Afghans go to the polls on October 9 but there is widespread concern regional warlords in the north and west and Taliban insurgents in the south and southeast will intimidate voters.

The US-led military will have more than 18,000 troops here to secure the polls in addition to 8,000 NATO (news - web sites)-led peacekeepers but western analysts have said the numbers are inadequate to provide security for elections.

New report alerts donors to reality of the economy

IRIN

09/27/2004

Kabul - Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world with a continuing vicious cycle of insecurity, an informal economy and drug trafficking, according to a World Bank report released last Friday.

The first economic report on Afghanistan by the World Bank in a quarter of a century indicates that up to 90 percent of the country lives in an informal economy, denying the government much needed taxes and other revenue needed for development.

The report - "Afghanistan must break out of a vicious cycle of insecurity, informal economy and drugs" - finds that the country's future prospects depend on whether the political leadership can free Afghanistan from this cycle in which a largely informal economy, the opium trade and violence reinforce each other.

"The development strategy of Afghanistan need to be based on the real situation on the ground, so this report is aimed at government donors, the World Bank itself and the wider public as well," William Byrd, senior economic adviser and principal author of the report, told IRIN.

He said the report was meant to provide some analytical framework ideas for institution-building and policies.

The report stresses that addressing the key problems of insecurity, state building, reconstruction and drugs in a timely, coordinated manner is absolutely pivotal to determining which path the country will follow in coming years.

Byrd described the Afghan economy as recovering. "But 80 to 90 percent of it, including the opium trade, is informal - meaning that entrepreneurs cannot become sizeable registered businesses, and the government cannot collect revenue," he said. The report identifies insecurity as the main reason forcing entrepreneurs to stay informal.

"In turn, a weak government with insufficient funds and technical expertise cannot provide the economy with the support it needs to grow, nor can it provide the people with the security from violence and the social services they need to thrive."

The report indicates that average per capita income is roughly US \$315, including the opium economy, and \$200 without it. Meanwhile, average life expectancy is given as 43 years, one of the lowest in the world.

The opium economy is described in the report as the lynchpin of the vicious cycle "with adverse effects on security, political normalisation, regional relations and state building".

"Sustained and well-coordinated international support for the Afghan government in these areas is critical to the future of the country," Byrd maintained.

The report underlines ideas and suggestions for development of Afghanistan, including more specific programmes for women.

Southern Afghan women urged to vote despite threats, fears

by Michaela Cancela-Kieffer

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan, Sept 27 (AFP) - Female election commission educators in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar are persistent and brave, ignoring threats each day they criss-cross the city to convince women to vote.

"Don't miss this chance. We are independent, we are human beings, we have rights. There is an election and it is up to us to decide who should be president," Shukria, 34, tells a small audience of women bakers in this former stronghold of the Islamist Taliban regime.

They listen from behind their veils because a man has slipped into the courtyard where they have gathered near the bread oven.

"What happens if you put crosses for two or three candidates?" asks one of the women.

"Can one woman take several (voting) cards and vote for the others?" asks another.

Holding a ballot paper, Shukria patiently explains the voting system for the historic October 9 election in which President Hamid Karzai and 17 others are contesting the presidency.

This morning, the main question concerns threats of violence around the polls which Taliban militants have pledged to disrupt.

"We have great concerns about our security," says one woman. "We have small children, we are scared for them."

"We are happy with Karzai. Since he came to power women can work, go to school, but we are concerned about security and suicide attacks," explains another.

"If you are scared about security, we have security. It is just propaganda. Don't be afraid. Please, for God's sake, this is a golden chance. It is not a Taliban government where you could not go out even if you were sick," Shukria says.

Some of the women have already taken the major step of getting a voter registration card to take part in the election.

But contrary to national statistics which show 42 percent of registered voters are women, the Pashtun women of the south have often avoided the registration centres.

In the five southern provinces including Kandahar by mid-August, five days before registration ended, 1.2 million cards had been distributed with just 230,000, or 20 percent, going to women.

However, decades of conflict have left many widows, and women make up the majority of the population.

"This country has had two-and-a-half decades during which both males and females have been left uneducated. You cannot change their minds overnight," says Safia Amajan, a women's representative in Kandahar.

"They have not seen anything else but killing of people and mortars ... and machine-guns ... we need some time to reconstruct their minds."

Paradoxically, according to her, the better-off women are the ones who are least likely to vote.

"Those who have to work outside are the ones to register. Some people don't even like their wives to go outside," she says.

Of four average family women questioned by AFP in Kandahar who said they wouldn't vote, one said her husband prohibits her from leaving the house, two others because their mother does not want them to vote and the fourth said she was against the election.

Another, more obvious, division is displayed between urban and rural residents, explains Fatima Jailani, who supervises the civic education of the women of Kandahar.

In the village of Loya Wala, near Kandahar, "Three months ago, a woman was given a (registration) card.

"Her husband came home and she showed the card. She was beaten and sent back to her mother's house with the two children," she says.

Afghans Dying for Lack of Healthcare

IWPR

09/27/2004

By Belqis Omarya

Acute shortage of medical facilities has dire consequences for public health

Kabul - In the mountains of Bamyan province in central Afghanistan, two men slowly lead a donkey along a narrow road. The dead body of a pregnant woman lies across the animal's back.

"We were taking her to the clinic, but it was too far and she died on the way," said the woman's husband. "Now we are taking her back home."

Afghan women live in fear of death even as they wait for a new life to be born. On average, 1,600 women will die out of every 100,000 pregnancies. For every 1,000 children born, 165 will die within the first year of life, according to official statistics. Dr Hidayatullah Stanakzai, head of the planning department in the ministry of health, calls this rate "shocking" and "a silent disaster".

But the high rates of death among pregnant women and infants are just two of the many health problems faced by Afghans, the majority of whom live far away from clinics, doctors and medicine.

The life expectancy for Afghans was only 46 years, according to figures provided by the Population Research Bureau in 2000.

An IWPR nationwide survey of 3,000 people in 21 provinces - conducted in mid-August by 100 journalists, as part of a workshop organised by IWPR on civic journalism and the presidential election - found that many people were concerned about the state of healthcare in the country.

People in rural areas especially complained that they had no access to doctors or clinics and that they needed to travel long distances to get medical treatment. They said that many patients often died before they could get healthcare.

They also expressed disappointment with the lack of trained, professional doctors. Women felt there were insufficient female medics.

Related problems cited by those interviewed for the survey were the shortage of clean water, poverty and lack of roads.

"The health problem in our country is multi-dimensional, and the other ministries should help us in this," Stanakzai said.

Residents of Kunar province have to travel to Jalalabad for treatment, said Haji Azamuddin, 60, of Noorgal district. "After a journey of one day we reach Jalalabad, [but] when we reach there either our patient dies or his sickness gets worse," he said.

Kunar is one of the mountainous provinces in eastern Afghanistan and, like many others, it has few roads for vehicles.

Paghman district is only 20 kilometres from Kabul, but the major roads are so rutted that "it takes one and a half hours to reach the main road to Kabul and the patients who are in serious condition die", said a 50-year-old woman from the district.

The lack of safe drinking water has also led to the spread of many diseases, such as diarrhea, typhoid and other intestinal diseases. Young children have been especially hard hit by these illnesses.

In Chamtal district of Balkh province, a woman said her children have all been struck down with by these ailments. "Our children are suffering from diarrhea and we do not have any way to boil water," she said.

Even where healthcare facilities are available, the demand is often too great.

Muhammad Sadiq said he traveled from his village in Ali Abad district to Kunduz city and then waited for five hours for treatment at the new clinic there. But before he could see a doctor, the facility had closed for the day.

"If we had a clinic in our village, we would not have to come to Kunduz [city]," he said.

Under the constitution, the government is required to provide free healthcare but there are not nearly enough public facilities available to meet the need. To fill the gap, some private clinics have opened, but they are largely unregulated.

All across the country, individuals have donated 300 plots of land to the government for the construction of hospitals and clinics. But Stanakzai said the authorities don't have enough money to build health facilities.

"I contributed my land for the clinic and the ministry of health had approved the [project]," said a 42-year-old man in the Daman district of Kandahar province. "They brought some construction materials. But they left a few months ago, and it is still unfinished."

Belqis Omaryar is a trainer for IWPR in Kabul

Without opium, Afghan farmers see little hope of living

Daily Times
26 Sept 04

A television, a video-recorder, a new roof, new house, new car, education for five children, without opium, such things are mere dreams for farmers in remote northeast Afghanistan who see little hope for a better life without the black gold.

"I have a house, other farmers have a car, and since we began to grow opium everything has changed. I can

send my children to school,” said Basir, a turbaned farmer in his 40s standing in the middle of his fields of illicit poppy plants, which bear the raw ingredient for heroin.

Poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, the world’s leading supplier of illicit opium, morphine and heroin, is expected to jump by 40 percent this year, according a US State Department estimate released Thursday.

According to farmers in Baharak, a district in mountainous Badakhshan province, as increasing numbers of people take up poppy cultivation, farmers are having to plant yet more of the crop to make a good living.

“In the beginning you could just plant a couple of rows of opium and make good money, now you need to plant a field,” said a Badakhshan farmer, who did not want to be named.

Pointing to his peach and apple orchards and fields of wheat, he showed the blight on the fruit.

“Everything is diseased. All of our trees, our plants are sick but the government gives us no fertiliser, no pesticides, seeds or equipment. Perhaps if we had that, farmers could grow something else.

The yields farmers can make on opium compared with wheat or rice are stratospheric. There is little incentive to grow anything else as law enforcement is poor and hundreds of senior officials are allegedly involved in the multi-billion-dollar drug business themselves.

According to the governor, farmers stand to make only 5,000 Afghanis (35 dollars) from planting half an acre with wheat or rice, but 10 times that amount for harvesting opium.

Ikramuddin said local farmers could trade the poppy business for growing legal crops or work in reconstruction projects in the poverty-stricken province.

But four hours drive away from the provincial capital Faizabad, farmers said there were few alternatives to opium cultivation and no government help for growing other crops.

An Afghan aid worker for a European organisation in Baharak district said opium was appealing not just because it was lucrative.

“People grow opium here because they can make oil, the stalks can be used for firewood in winter, they can make soap to wash their hands and they can make hundreds of dollars for traffic in heroin,” he said, on condition of anonymity.

Heroin processing factories have sprung up across the province in the past 18 months as the trade has become more sophisticated.

Although the border with neighbouring Tajikistan tightened its controls eight months ago, it has made little difference for local growers.

“It’s not very different for us. It’s harder for the traders coming from Kandahar to sell to Pakistan because they have to give more money to people on checkpoints,” he said.

In the bazaars of Badakhshan’s dirt-road towns, opium is traded freely.

Pakistan Says It Killed Suspect in Daniel Pearl Murder

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Published: September 26, 2004

KARACHI, Pakistan (AP) -- Paramilitary police killed a suspected top al-Qaida operative, wanted for alleged involvement in the kidnapping of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, during a four-hour shootout Sunday at a southern Pakistan house, the information minister said. At least two other men were arrested.

Amjad Hussain Farooqi was wanted for his alleged role in the kidnapping and beheading of Pearl in 2002 and two assassination attempts against President Gen. Pervez Musharraf in December 2003.

"I as chief spokesman for the government of Pakistan confirm that our forces have killed Amjad Hussain Farooqi," Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed told The Associated Press by phone from Amsterdam, where he has gone on an official trip with Musharraf.

Ahmed said "two or three other people were also arrested during a big gunfight." He declined to identify them but said they were still being questioned by authorities and were "very important."

"This is the work of our security agencies, and they have done a great job," Ahmed said.

An intelligence official in Karachi identified the arrested men as Abdul Rehman and Yaqoob Farooqi. It was not clear what relation, if any, Yaqoob Farooqi had to Amjad Hussain Farooqi. Other officials could not immediately confirm that information.

However, Interior Minister Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao said three associates of Farooqi, all Pakistanis, were arrested.

Pakistan is a key ally of the United States in its war against terrorism and has arrested more than 600 al-Qaida suspects, including several senior figures in the terror network. Many of them have been handed over to U.S. authorities.

Since mid-July, Pakistan says it has arrested at least 70 terrorist suspects, including Mohammed Naeem Noor Khan, an alleged al-Qaida computer expert, and Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani, a Tanzanian suspect in the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in east Africa that killed more than 200 people.

Earlier Sunday, intelligence officials said authorities launched a raid on the house in Nawabshah, a town about 125 miles northeast of the main southern city of Karachi, after police received a tip that Farooqi was hiding there.

Two men who tried to flee -- one of whom was injured in the gunbattle -- were arrested, said local police official Ismail Jamali, adding that intelligence officials led them away in blindfolds.

A paramilitary official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the siege lasted four hours.

The official said the suspect who was killed -- presumably Amjad Hussain Farooqi -- had shouted in Urdu, the main language in Pakistan, that he'd prefer death to capture. The suspect also pointed to the sky and shouted: "I fulfilled my promise to Allah," he said.

One woman and two children were also taken from the house. Firefighters were called to put out a blaze in one room that broke out during the gunbattle.

After a search, officials left the house carrying three boxes. It was not immediately clear what they contained.

Farooqi was believed to have been an associate of Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the reputed al-Qaida No. 3 captured in Pakistan last year.

Farooqi had been missing since Pearl was abducted in Karachi in January 2002.

Pearl's captors beheaded the journalist and released a videotape of the killing. Four Islamic militants have been convicted of his kidnapping but seven other suspects -- including those who allegedly slit his throat -- remain at large.

Farooqi, thought to be 32, was born in a village in eastern Punjab province. His family says he was radicalized by a visit to Kashmir, where he trained with Islamic militants fighting against Indian security forces. He later visited Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

``We pray to God Almighty to accept my brother's sacrifice," Mohammed Javed, Farooqi's elder brother, told the AP by phone from the village.

Javed said the government had not informed them about Farooqi's death, and he demanded that the body be returned to allow its burial according to Islamic ritual.

Javed said the family did not know whether Farooqi had been involved in acts of terrorism.

``We have no confirmation about these allegations," he said.

In May, security officials identified Farooqi as an organizer, with Libyan al-Qaida suspect Abu Faraj al-Libbi, of two attempts to assassinate Musharraf last December by blowing up his motorcade in Rawalpindi, a city near the capital, Islamabad. Musharraf, who has enraged Islamic militants through his support of the U.S.-led war on terrorism, escaped injury both times but several other people were killed.

Farooqi is also suspected of taking part in the hijacking of an Indian airliner to Kandahar, Afghanistan, in 1999 that resulted in a hostages-for-prisoners exchange that freed British-born militant Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh from an Indian prison. Sheikh has been sentenced to death for his role in setting up the Pearl abduction.

Senior Taliban commander killed in southern Afghanistan, says Afghan official

Associated Press / September 26, 2004

Afghan security forces killed a senior Taliban commander along with two other fighters in a raid on a village home in southern Afghanistan, an official said Sunday.

Maulvi Abdul Ghaffar, reportedly a former inmate at the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, died in a gunbattle Saturday night in Pishi village in the southern province of Uruzgan, said Jan Mohammed Khan, governor of Uruzgan.

Khan said authorities had received intelligence that Ghaffar was hiding in the village and was planning an attack against the government. Security forces launched a raid after surrounding a house, and three men, including Ghaffar, were killed in gunfire. None of the security forces were hurt.

The governor said Ghaffar had been a senior Taliban commander in northern Afghanistan and was arrested about two months after a U.S.-led coalition drove the militia out of power in late 2001. He was held for eight months at the U.S. detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, but was subsequently released and returned to Afghanistan.

Khan said that after release, Ghaffar was appointed as the leader of Taliban fighters in Uruzgan, a rugged

region believed to be a stronghold of the hardline Islamic militia.

U.S. military said it could not yet confirm the report.

Taliban-led insurgents are active in much of southern and eastern Afghanistan and frequently launch attacks on the U.S.-backed government despite the deployment of thousands of U.S. forces to hunt them down. Officials are predicting an upsurge in violence before landmark presidential elections on Oct. 9.

On Saturday, suspected Taliban rebels attacked a convoy of coalition and Afghan forces in Uruzgan, who were on patrol to tighten security ahead of the elections, and killed a district chief, Khan said.

The rebels opened fire on a vehicle carrying Char Cheno district chief Wali Jan, killing him and seriously injuring two Afghan soldiers in the Yakhdan area, he said. The rebels fled into surrounding mountains after the attack.

No coalition forces were hurt, Khan said.

Maj. Mark McCann, a U.S. military spokesman in Kabul, confirmed the attack on the convoy near Deh Rawood _ a town in Uruzgan where there is a small U.S. base _ in which one district official was killed and three other Afghans wounded, but had no details on the identity of the official.

Officials say it is common for district and local police chiefs with a knowledge of the terrain to accompany coalition forces on patrol in remote areas of Afghanistan.

The U.S. Has a Favorite in Afghanistan. That's a Problem

NY Times

By DAVID ROHDE and CARLOTTA GALL

Published: September 26, 2004

KABUL, Afghanistan — Taliban attacks aside, a huge question looms over Afghanistan's first-ever presidential election on Oct. 9. Will the country's hopeful electorate see it as an exercise in democracy, or an exercise in American political theater?

President Hamid Karzai, whom the United States supports, is by far the best-known politician in Afghanistan and is widely expected to win. His platform enjoys overwhelming popular support in public opinion polls. After a quarter-century of civil war, his calls for national unity, peaceful resolution of disputes and reconstruction clearly resonate across this expectant society.

But Afghans remain unfamiliar with the democratic process, accustomed to rumor and distrustful of rivals and outsiders. Members of its elite, some military commanders and Mr. Karzai's challengers are warning that American officials are imperiling the election's credibility by trying too hard to get a show of broad support for Mr. Karzai and doing too little to assure Afghans that the electoral playing field is level.

Some leading challengers to Mr. Karzai say that the American ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad and other Western officials have urged them to drop out of the race and back Mr. Karzai days before the vote. American officials flatly deny the charges, but the reports continue to feed deeper suspicions. "How will the Americans fix it?" asked a close aide to one of Mr. Karzai's main challengers.

Abdul Latif Pedram, a writer who is one of 17 candidates challenging Mr. Karzai, says a truncated Afghan election process is designed to benefit two incumbents, Mr. Karzai and President Bush. A comfortable win

by Mr. Karzai in a carefully controlled election will boost Mr. Bush's re-election chances and that is why an uneven electoral playing field exists in Afghanistan, he says.

In fact, challengers operate at a disadvantage. Mr. Pedram pointed out that they have not been given resources to visit the country's 34 provinces, while Mr. Karzai is being flown around Afghanistan by the American military. "Mr. Karzai can go with American helicopters and American bodyguards to 10 provinces in one day," he said. "What can we do?"

While that inequity might seem unavoidable to Americans eager to keep Mr. Karzai from being assassinated, Mr. Pedram is not alone when he criticizes preparations for the voting itself. Afghan and Western analysts say pressure from the United States and Mr. Karzai has forced United Nations officials, who are organizing the vote, to create a form of instant democracy that cuts corners.

"It's hard not to conclude that this was so much about getting an end result and not having a meaningful process," said Andrew Wilder, head of the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, an independent research group here.

United Nations officials organizing the vote say the effort here is a mere shadow of past efforts in Cambodia and East Timor. "This is much bigger, much more dangerous, much less money," said one official.

The lack of funds, combined with security problems, have left the country with only 100 to 200 international observers for an election in which there will be 5,000 polling centers.

Mr. Wilder and others warn that members of the country's educated elite, the backbone of the effort to reform the country, are cynical about the elections, calling them a "done deal" for Mr. Karzai.

Such critics point to figures that show that while Afghanistan received only meager reconstruction financing in fiscal 2002 and 2003, the Bush administration has pumped an additional \$1.76 billion in reconstruction funds into the country in fiscal 2004. Speaking privately, American officials say the effort to rapidly build roads, schools and clinics has been designed to increase Afghans' confidence in the West, and in Mr. Karzai.

Critics of the election preparations say the problems go beyond bias toward Mr. Karzai. Outside of Kabul, local warlords and tribal elders are expected to order whole communities to vote for their candidate of choice.

In an essay last July, Nancy Hatch Dupree, an expert on Afghanistan's cultural heritage, predicted that Afghans will vote as they are told, not as they think.

"The majority therefore will continue to follow tribal, community and kin directives, as they did in the past," she wrote. "Or they will be intimidated by new sources of influence based on unsavory local struggles for power and riches."

Mr. Karzai and Mr. Bush have hailed a surge of voter registration in August as a sign of eagerness among Afghans to vote. While 1.8 million Afghans registered over the winter months, the number ballooned over the summer to more than 10 million.

But in some provinces this brought registration numbers that were so high - up to 140 per cent of the estimated number of eligible voters - that it raised fears that there may be massive vote rigging on polling day. In the end, if current public opinion polls are accurate, Mr. Karzai will win a landslide victory that would accurately reflect the broad support that exists for him, or at least his agenda.

But analysts warn that if challengers drop out at the last moment and the process is seen as American-directed political theater designed to impress American voters instead of Afghan ones, a landslide could undermine Mr. Karzai's his legitimacy rather than enhance it.

Pakistan wants aid for Afghan DPs to continue

Dawn - Pakistan

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 25:

Pakistan on Friday called on the international community in general and the Islamic world in particular to continue to maintain its support for humanitarian relief and refugee repatriation in Afghanistan.

Addressing the Organization of Islamic Conference's contact group on Afghanistan, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan Makdoom Khusro Bakhtiar noted that "there are still millions of Afghan refugees living in neighbouring countries who, now more than ever, deserve complete and sustained support from the international community to allow them to return to their homes in security and dignity."

He pointed out that inspite of resource constraints, "Pakistan is trying to do all it can to help Afghanistan. It has pledged \$100 million for assistance to Afghanistan at the Tokyo Conference."

"Some of the financial assistance has been extended already. The bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan in various fields, including trade, road construction, telecommunications, healthcare, postal services, media development and power generation, is continuing and expanding. Within the cooperative process initiated by the international community, Pakistan has offered facilities and equipment for the training of the Afghan army and police as well as strengthening of Afghanistan's judicial system and narcotics control mechanisms."

He also referred to the construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan gas pipeline project "which has great potential for facilitating the economic recovery of Afghanistan as well as promoting economic integration in the region.

U.S. Hand Seen in Afghan Election

Los Angeles Times By Paul Watson, Times Staff Writer (25 sep)

KABUL, Afghanistan - Mohammed Mohaqiq says he was getting ready to make his run for the Afghan presidency when U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad dropped by his campaign office and proposed a deal. "He told me to drop out of the elections, but not in a way to put pressure," Mohaqiq said. "It was like a request."

After the hourlong meeting last month, the ethnic Hazara warlord said in an interview Tuesday, he wasn't satisfied with the rewards offered for quitting, which he did not detail. Mohaqiq was still determined to run for president - though, he said, the U.S. ambassador wouldn't give up trying to elbow him out of the race.

"He left, and then called my most loyal men, and the most educated people in my party or campaign, to the presidential palace and told them to make me - or request me - to resign the nomination. And he told my

men to ask me what I need in return."

Mohaqiq, who is running in the Oct. 9 election, is one of several candidates who maintain that the U.S. ambassador and his aides are pushing behind the scenes to ensure a convincing victory by the pro-American incumbent, President Hamid Karzai. The Americans deny doing so.

"It is not only me," Mohaqiq said. "They have been doing the same thing with all candidates. That is why all people think that not only Khalilzad is like this, but the whole U.S. government is the same. They all want Karzai - and this election is just a show."

The charges were repeated by several other candidates and their senior campaign staff in interviews here. They reflected anger over what many Afghans see as foreign interference that could undermine the shaky foundations of a democracy the U.S. promised to build.

"This doesn't suit the representative of a nation that has helped us in the past," said Sayed Mustafa Sadat Ophyani, campaign manager for Younis Qanooni, Karzai's leading rival. "You have seen Afghanistan suffering for 25 years, from the Russians, then the Taliban. Why is the U.S. government now looking to make people of Afghanistan accept whatever the U.S. government says?"

Qanooni said he and 13 other presidential candidates planned to meet today in Kabul, the capital, to air complaints about Khalilzad's interference.

In a statement released this week, Khalilzad denied the allegations that he and his staff were meddling in the election.

"U.S. Embassy officials regularly keep in touch with all presidential candidates, and we listen to their ideas and proposals," he said in an e-mailed response from New York, where he was attending the opening of the U.N. General Assembly.

"Officials from the U.S. mission support the elections process, not individuals," the statement added. "No U.S. official can or will endorse or campaign on behalf of any individual presidential candidate."

Khalilzad also said he "has never asked a candidate to withdraw - this is a decision for each candidate to make for him or herself."

Since coming to power after the American-led invasion that overthrew the Taliban in 2001, the interim Afghan government largely has been beholden to the United States for its survival. The U.S. has deployed about 18,000 troops and is spending about \$1 billion a year on reconstruction in the Central Asian nation. Karzai depends on the Americans for his safety: DynCorp, a Virginia-based firm, has provided his bodyguards since November 2002 under a contract with the State Department.

Khalilzad has been nicknamed "the Viceroy" because the influence he wields over the Afghan government reminds some Afghans of the excesses of British colonialism. Some of Karzai's rivals think that the ambassador has taken on a new role: presidential campaign manager.

This is not the first time Khalilzad has been accused of meddling in Afghan politics. Delegates to gatherings that named Karzai interim president in 2002 and ratified Afghanistan's new Constitution last December also accused the ambassador of interfering, even of paying delegates for their support. Khalilzad denies the claims.

The latest allegations are perhaps more serious because the Bush administration is portraying Afghanistan's presidential election as a democratic victory for the country's people, who suffered under more than two decades of strife. President Bush has touted bringing Afghan democracy as a foreign policy success in his election campaign.

There are 18 candidates in the Afghan election. Such a divided field is expected to favor Karzai, whom Afghans hear and see frequently on state-controlled radio and television.

The president, who is usually holed up in his heavily fortified palace because of threats to his life, has made only one campaign trip outside Kabul since the election campaign began Sept. 7. That trip last Thursday was aborted when a rocket missed the U.S. military helicopter in which he was traveling.

Mohaqiq commands strong loyalty among Hazaras and, if he chooses to step aside and endorse Karzai, probably could deliver a large bloc of votes. Mohaqiq said Tuesday that he might still do so - for the right deal.

Mohaqiq said his senior aides met the U.S. ambassador at the presidential palace, without Karzai. The aides agreed try again to persuade their candidate to drop out of the race and throw his support behind the incumbent, Mohaqiq said.

The pressure was so intense that he agreed to quit under certain conditions, he added.

Mohaqiq said his demands, in the event of Karzai's victory, would be four Cabinet posts for his party, four governorships in the mainly Hazara provinces of central Afghanistan and a new road from Kabul into the region, informally known as Hazarajat.

Mohaqiq said Khalilzad told him that the new road would not be a problem, but that his party would have to settle for two ministerial posts, two deputy spots in other ministries and one governorship.

"I was very interested in taking part in the elections, but since many of my men were asking me to accept Khalilzad's ideas - and he was also telling me to do so - I didn't have much choice, and I was ready to agree," Mohaqiq said.

"But a good thing happened, and Karzai didn't agree with those terms," he added. "I don't know why."

Several leaders of the Northern Alliance, whose troops ousted the Taliban regime in late 2001 with the help of U.S. air power, met in Kabul on Friday to discuss what they said was Khalilzad's electoral arm-twisting, said Mohammed Qasem Mohseni, one of presidential candidate Abdul Latif Pedram's two running mates. Mohseni said the summit participants included Foreign Minister Abdullah, who goes by one name; former

President Burhanuddin Rabbani, who like Abdullah is a member of the Tajik minority; and Ustad Abdul Rasul Sayyaf who, like Karzai, is a Pushtun, Afghanistan's largest ethnic group.

"In this meeting, Ustad Sayyaf said that we have been under pressure for 25 days by the U.S. government, by Khalilzad, to make Younis Qanooni resign from the post of candidate for the presidency," Mohseni said.

Qanooni is not expected to win the race. However, he could prevent Karzai from gaining more than 50% of the votes, forcing a runoff and prolonging a campaign that already has drawn violent attacks by Taliban and other insurgents.

Qanooni's campaign aides said Khalilzad was trying to persuade the candidate to accept defeat before any ballots were counted and to agree to join Karzai in a coalition government after the vote.

"Our hearts have been broken because we thought we could have beaten Mr. Karzai if this had been a true election," Ophyani said. "But it is not. Mr. Khalilzad is putting a lot of pressure on us and does not allow us to fight a good election campaign."

Some say Khalilzad is working to draw Rabbani, the former president, to Karzai's side, which would deepen the split in Qanooni's Northern Alliance.

Qanooni supporters say that Rabbani, whose son-in-law is one of Karzai's running mates, visited Badakhshan province last month with Khalilzad and urged local militia commanders to back the incumbent. The former president insists that the discussions in his home province dealt only with reconstruction.

"I told Mr. Khalilzad, 'The people of Badakhshan are waiting for you, and they are always asking, what is the U.S. government doing?' " Rabbani said. "I told him to go there and see the people, and he promised to construct a road and a dam for them."

There is nothing wrong with the U.S. ambassador working closely with Afghanistan's president as long as he only offers advice and doesn't make decisions, Rabbani added.

"I believe that Mr. Karzai and Khalilzad are linked very closely with each other now and they were in the past too," Rabbani said. "And when they have links, they probably have political links or any other kind of links."

Germany Plans New Camp in Afghanistan

Deutsche Welle
25 September 04

Ahead of the next general elections in Afghanistan, Germany's army intends to build a military camp south of Kabul to boost security at the start of the next year, a defense ministry spokesman said Saturday.

Prior to the 2005 general elections, Germany's Bundeswehr will have set up a temporary garrison south of the Afghanistan capital. A spokesman for the defense ministry said an army patrol would travel to the town

of Surobi, 60 (36 miles) kilometers outside of Kabul to discuss the parameters of the new camp with local authorities.

The military facility is scheduled to be up an running by January next year.

German Defense Minister Peter Struck, who is set to travel to Afghanistan on Sunday to visit German troops stationed there, said the security situation in the country remained "unstable" two weeks ahead of the country's October 9 presidential election.

With its 1,480 soldiers, Germany provides the largest national troop contingent within the NATO-run International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In addition to a headquarters in Kabul, the Bundeswehr has also deployed soldiers to the northern towns of Kunduz and Faizabad (photo), where the security situation is considerably more unstable due to constant fighting among provincial warlords.

The 400 troops stationed outside Kabul are responsible for managing provincial reconstruction teams charged with improving security, fostering reconstruction work and boosting the influence of the central government. But these troops have been accused of failing to tackle security problems, in particular after they did not intervene during recent clashes targeting aid workers in Faizabad.

Minister Struck is expected to address the issue of security in the run-up to the historical presidential elections, the first since the overthrow of the Taliban by US forces in December 2001.

Pakistan Lifts Tribes' Economic Sanctions

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Published: September 25, 2004

PESHAWAR, Pakistan (AP) -- Pakistan's prime minister said Saturday the government is lifting economic sanctions in a tense tribal region near Afghanistan to encourage help in tracking down foreign militants and those who shelter them.

The sanctions, including the closure of shops and seizure of vehicles, were imposed in South Waziristan this year to punish tribesmen for failing to evict suspected foreign terrorists from their areas.

Under a Pakistani law based on centuries-old customs, an entire tribe can be held responsible for crimes committed by one of its members -- and can be punished collectively.

``We are lifting these economic sanctions for development in South Waziristan," Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz told more than 500 elders from various tribes at a meeting in Peshawar, a city in Pakistan's northwest. ``We hope you will help us in evicting foreign elements."

Suspected foreign militants often target troops in the area, which is considered a possible hiding place for al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden and has been the scene of stepped-up military operations seeking militants over the past year.

``The foreign elements are enemies of Pakistan and our tribes, and we need your help against them," Aziz said.

Tribal elders welcomed the announcement, saying they would extend full support to the government and the army, Pakistani officials said.

The government believes hundreds of Central Asian, Arab and Afghan militants are hiding in the tribal areas, including many who moved there from Afghanistan after a U.S.-led military campaign drove the Taliban regime from power in late 2001.

Earlier this year, the government offered to give the foreigners permission to settle in Pakistan if they surrendered their arms, registered with authorities and agreed to respect the laws.

So far, the militants have refused the amnesty offer, but Interior Minister Aftab Ahmed Sherpao said Saturday he was hopeful that talks would lead militants to lay down their arms.

Elders from the Mahsud tribe in South Waziristan met last week with fellow tribesmen who are allegedly harboring foreigners, Sherpao said. "There is some progress in the talks," he told The Associated Press in a telephone interview.

Former diplomat campaigns for Hamid Karzai in Pakistan

September 24, 2004

PESHAWAR: Abdul Jabbar Naeemi, a former Afghan diplomat has said that refugees residing in Pakistan will participate in the election process and vote for a presidential candidate who can solve their problems and bring peace to Afghanistan.

"I have been authorised to canvass refugees residing in Pakistan to support.

Mr Karzai," Mr Naeemi told a news conference at a guesthouse. He had approached a large number of refugees, their representatives, teachers and others to vote for Mr Karzai and they had assured him of their support, he said.

Mr Naeemi, who has lived in Pakistan as an Afghan diplomat, said it was good news that other Afghans like Haji Daud, son of Haji Qadeer , were also campaigning for President Karzai in Pakistan. "There are no differences among us," he said.

The campaign for the president was also underway in Kabul and expatriates were being convinced to support Mr Karzai, Mr Naeemi said. Former president Burhanuddin Rabbani's and Abdur Rab Sayyaf's political parties would also support Mr Karzai, he added.

"These people (Rabbani and Sayyaf) have tremendous influence in refugee camps in Pakistan and because of them, refugees will support Mr Karzai," said Mr Naeemi. They would soon open a media office here, he added.

The diplomat said that pamphlets distributed by groups loyal to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and former Taliban persuading Afghans not to participate in the presidential elections would not have any effect on the electoral process.

"A massive number of Afghans have themselves registered as voters in Afghanistan," he said. International observers and the United Nations staff would monitor the elections and Pakistan would not interfere in the process, he added.

Afghan tribe threatens house-torching for those who don't vote for Karzai

(AFP) 24 September 2004

KHOST, Afghanistan - "Vote for President Hamid Karzai, or we will burn your houses down" - that is the message a Pashtun tribe has broadcast on radio a fortnight ahead of Afghanistan's first presidential elections.

The threat, broadcast by the Terezey tribe in southeast Afghanistan's Khost province, competes with conflicting threats from Taliban insurgents roaming the border region who have vowed to kill people who take part in the vote.

Elders of the Terezey tribe, part of the Pashtun ethnic group to which Karzai belongs, called on fellow tribal members to support the incumbent and threatened arson if they voted for one of his 17 rivals.

"All the Terezey tribes' people should vote for Hamid Karzi ... if anyone from Terezey tribe votes for other candidates, the tribe will burn their houses," said the statement, broadcast live on local radio.

Meanwhile "night letters" distributed by loyalists of the ousted Taliban rulers threaten to kill all of the 18 candidates and anyone who supports the October 9 election.

In a tape of the Terezey tribe's broadcast, obtained by AFP, the elders urged male and female members of the tribe to throw their support behind Karzai.

"All of Terezey tribe people, including males and females, have to vote for Hamid Karzai, because he is the only suitable person for the presidential post," it said.

Some 120,000 to 150,000 Terezays are scattered throughout the mountains of southern and eastern Afghanistan.

Terezey elder Wakil Said Anwar, 55, said the threatening statement was jointly drafted by 300 tribal chiefs.

"We will back Karzai at the vote. No one from our tribe should ignore the decision," he said.

Afghanistan's UN-backed electoral commission condemned the tribe's call and said the elections should be free and fair.

Spokesman Sayed Mohammad Azam said the elections should be secret and people should not be forced to take part.

"It's the right of each Afghan citizen whether to take part in the election or not, and which particular candidates he or she should vote for," Azam told AFP.

Hamid Elmi, Karzai's campaign spokesman, urged his supporters to respect voters' freedom to choose, but

stopped short of condemning the Terezay broadcast.

“We are grateful for those who support us, but we want a peaceful and democratic election and we request our brothers and sisters not to violate the process and respect each others’ opinions, ideas and wishes,” Elmi told AFP.

Karzai, the favourite, is relying for victory on support from the same communities that the Taliban militants hail from.

Taliban-led insurgents, from the regime which was ousted by a US-led military campaign in late 2001 for sheltering Al-Qaeda chief Osama Bin Laden, have killed at least 12 electoral workers since May as they carry out their vow to disrupt the polls.

They claimed responsibility for a rocket attack against Karzai last week in southeast Paktia province, another Pashtun homeland.

The English-speaking leader faces his biggest election threat from former education minister Yunus Qanooni, an ethnic Tajik who enjoys wide support in northern Afghanistan.

A Chance of Success Slips Away

The New York Times 09/24/2004 By J Alexander Thier

President Bush describes Afghanistan, the first front on the war on terrorism, as a success. In comparison to Iraq, perhaps it is. But if you look at Afghanistan on its own merits, the lack of progress is disheartening. In 2002, President Bush promised a "Marshall Plan" for the country, with the goal of turning Afghanistan into a stable, democratic state. On Tuesday, before the United Nations General Assembly, the president said that "the Afghan people are on the path to democracy and freedom." Yet in nearly three years we have failed to create security, stability, prosperity or the rule of law in Afghanistan.

These failings are not just a reflection of the great difficulties of nation-building in places like Afghanistan, they are also the direct result of the Bush administration's policy decisions. Our efforts in Afghanistan are underfinanced and undermanned, and our attention is waning.

The root of the problem is that we invaded Afghanistan to destroy something - the Taliban and Al Qaeda - but we didn't think much about what would grow in its place. While we focused on fighting the terrorists (and even there our effectiveness has been questionable), Afghanistan has become a collection of warlord-run fiefs fueled by a multibillion-dollar opium economy. We armed and financed warlord armies with records of drug-running and human rights abuses stretching back two decades. Then we blocked the expansion of an international security force meant to rein in the militias. These decisions were made for short-term battlefield gain - with disregard for the long-term implications for the mission there.

Our Army continues to hunt insurgents in the mountains, but we have refused to take the steps necessary to secure the rest of the country, and it shows. More coalition and Afghan government soldiers and aid workers have died this year than in each of the previous two. This summer, Doctors Without Borders, which has worked in the most desperate and dangerous conditions around the world, pulled out of Afghanistan after 24 years. In other words, the group felt safer in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation and the civil war that followed than it did three years after the United States-led coalition toppled the Taliban.

Last month, after a United Nations-backed voter registration office was bombed, the vice president of the United Nations Staff Union urged Secretary General Kofi Annan to pull employees out of Afghanistan. The opium trade is also out of control, fueling lawlessness and financing terrorists. Last year, the trade brought in \$2.3 billion; this year, opium production is expected to increase 50 to 100 percent.

Amid terrorist attacks and fighting among regional warlords, the country is preparing for presidential elections on Oct. 9. A recent United Nations report warned that warlords were intimidating voters and candidates. This month, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which has monitored post-conflict elections in trouble spots like Bosnia and Kosovo, declared that Afghanistan was too dangerous for its election monitors (it is sending a small "election support team" instead). President Hamid Karzai narrowly escaped assassination last week on his first campaign trip outside Kabul, and eight other presidential candidates have called for elections to be delayed, saying it's been too dangerous for them to campaign.

Many of these problems flow from early mistakes. Rather than moving quickly to establish security and then gradually turning over control to a legitimate domestic authority, we have done the opposite. As fighting among warlord militias in the countryside intensifies, we are slowly expanding our presence and being dragged into conflicts. The American "advisers" in Afghan Army units, the ubiquitous heavily armed "private" security forces and the fortress-like American Embassy are garnering comparisons to the day of the Soviets.

Poppy crop in Afghanistan to jump 40 percent this year: State Department

AFP 09/24/2004

WASHINGTON –

Poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, the world's leading supplier of illicit opium, morphine and heroin, is expected to jump by 40 percent this year, a State Department official said.

The CIA's counternarcotics center had estimated the crop last year at 61,000 hectares (150,000 acres).

"My guess is this year, although the numbers are not in and they will be released in the next several weeks, it is probably 100,000 hectares (247,000 acres)," Robert Charles, the assistant secretary of the bureau of international narcotics and law enforcement affairs, told a congressional hearing.

Opium production this year could see a 20 to 40 percent jump, he said.

US-backed Afghan President Hamid Karzai had repeatedly warned that drug trafficking and corruption may be the biggest threat to his landlocked country's long-term security and democratic future.

The trade of narcotics from Afghanistan has spiralled since the ouster of the harsh Taliban regime in late 2001, sparking warnings from the United Nations that the country could turn into a failed narco-state.

A bumper crop last year generated 2.3 billion dollars and produced three-quarters of the world's heroin, including 90 percent of the heroin in Europe.

Afghanistan must break out of vicious cycle: World Bank **24-9-04**

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Afghanistan must break out of its vicious cycle of insecurity, informal economy and drugs to end poverty and violence gripping the country for three decades, the World Bank said in a report. It was the bank's first economic report on Afghanistan in a quarter century and came ahead of landmark presidential elections October 9.

The World Bank said up to 90 percent of Afghanistan was an informal economy, denying the government of much needed taxes and other revenue to develop the country.

Furthermore, most donor funding do not cover cost of crucial government administrative functions.

The report said the country's future prospects "depend on whether the political leadership can free it from a vicious cycle in which a largely informal economy, the opium trade, and violence reinforce each other.

"This has hindered state-building activities, and undermined development efforts," it said.

William Byrd, the bank's senior economic advisor, said addressing the key problems of insecurity, state building, reconstruction, and drugs in a timely, coordinated manner was "absolutely pivotal" to determining which path the country would follow in coming years.

The World Bank re-entered Afghanistan in 2001 after shunning work there during the more than two decades of conflict there.

Byrd, who has spent the last three years working on Afghanistan issues, said the Afghanistan economy was recovering "but 80 to 90 percent of it, including the opium trade, was informal.

This meant entrepreneurs cannot become sizable registered businesses, and the government cannot collect revenue, he said.

"In turn, a weak government with insufficient funds and technical expertise cannot provide the economy with the support it needs to grow, nor can it provide the people with the security from violence and the social services they need to thrive," Byrd said.

Poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, the world's leading supplier of illicit opium, morphine and heroin, is expected to jump by 40 percent this year, according to State Department.

US-backed Afghan President Hamid Karzai, front-runner among 18 candidates in the presidential race, had repeatedly listed drug trafficking and corruption as among the top threats to his landlocked country's long term security and future.

The World Bank report also pointed to the continuing power of warlords and unchecked violence as undermining efforts to develop a strong central government, citing insufficient international security assistance outside Kabul.

The opium economy is described in the report as the lynchpin of the vicious cycle -- "with adverse effects on security, political normalization, regional relations, and state building."

The report also underlined the need for development programs focusing particularly on women.

Asian Development Bank to help Afghanistan attract investment

MANILA, Sept. 24 (Xinhuanet) -- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) Friday said that it would help Afghanistan to stimulate private sector activity and attract foreign direct investment by co-financing an investment guarantee facility. The ADB said in a statement that it had approved a loan of 5 million US dollars and a guarantee of 10 million dollars to provide political risk guarantees to eligible investors and financiers.

"We are very pleased with this cooperative effort among different partners to create an innovative solution to the needs of Afghanistan, leveraging each other's strength and making use of ADB's political risk guarantee instruments in a catalytic and innovative way," says Werner Liepach, ADB's Director of Co-financing Operations.

Citing an analysis by the World Bank, the ADB said that there is an encouraging potential level of foreign direct investment in Afghanistan, with demand coming from sectors such as energy, telecommunications, Internet services, banking, hotels, housing, food and agribusiness, textile, steel, oil and gas, and mining.

Although the international community is exerting considerable efforts to support Afghanistan's rebuilding and development, available official flows are not enough to sustain the reconstruction effort, the bank said.

"A vibrant and active private sector is needed to generate jobs and support long-term economic growth for poverty reduction in Afghanistan. But without insurance against selected political or non-commercial risks for investment projects, many potential investors are reluctant to do business in the country and are taking a wait-and-see attitude," says Veronica John, an ADB Senior Structured Finance Specialist.

Private sector development is a key ingredient of ADB's strategy in Afghanistan. ADB projects in support of a private sector-led growth in the country are expected to amount to 53 million dollars by the end of the year.

At an international conference in Berlin earlier this year, ADB President Tadao Chino pledged up to 1 billion dollars in assistance to Afghanistan for 2005-2008.

PRESS RELEASES

New Company GroupSat Inc. announces grand opening of its New Kabul, Afghnaistan

(PRWEB) September 23, 2004 -- In order to provide dedicated and reliable communication services to the growing Afghan market, GroupSat Incorporated announced the grand opening of its new office in Kabul, Afghanistan. From this new facility, GroupSat will provide communication services to the region and respond quickly to the needs of its many new customers in the area. GroupSat has taken communications in Afghanistan to a new level today with the commercial launch of its new high-speed broadband via service. The offering provides fast, high-quality Internet access for e-mail, web browsing and e-commerce applications for small- and medium-sized businesses in Afghanistan.

Today's launch of GroupSat's Broadband Service comes immediately following a successful feasibility and market study involving approximately 100 end customers, including real estate services companies, agribusinesses, municipal governments, Internet cafés, political pollsters, Hotels, and a wide range of others.

GroupSat's Broadband Service is comparable to DSL service, providing high-speed Internet connections that are up to 10 times faster than the fastest dial-up connections. It enables service providers to offer their business customers direct access to the Internet.

"We're very excited about the prospect of providing the highest level of personalized service to our present as well as our future customers in the Middle East and Asia. By opening this new office in Kabul, GroupSat has shown its commitment to the region and to the penetration of its technology into this ever-growing market," said Mr. N. Ameeriar, president of GroupSat.

Cutting the ribbon which will symbolize the formal opening of the new office in Kabul will be held in late October and approximately 100 guests, NGOs, employees and press are invited to attend.

"We are pleased to welcome to this ceremony our current and future customers, as well as the many people who have helped us with the licenses, certification testing, the representatives from AISA, Canadian and US chamber of commerce and local embassies who have worked so hard to bring us to this point." said N. Ameeriar "GroupSat is committed to working throughout Afghanistan and other regions in the Middle East and Asia to provide high quality, efficient and secure broadband wireless Internet, IP telephony , video conferencing and mobile services via ."

GroupSat has announced major communication contracts in Kabul, Mazar and various other regions in Afghanistan, and is actively working on numerous other projects throughout

Afghanistan and the Middle East.

The Kabul office is phase one of GroupSat's growing network of sales, marketing and customer support other offices are to open in Mazar, Herat and other major cities in 2005.

GroupSat develops, manufactures, markets, licenses and operates advanced communications services and products based on its proprietary broadband wireless technologies. The Company's primary product areas are a proprietary broadband Internet called G-Force Internet. G-Force has been designed to preserve the end-to-end model and provide performance improvements over the link without compromising international standards. Encryption of clear-text traffic (for example a VPN service configuration) across the link is supported thus, providing secure links for our clients. G-Force controls and monitors the sending rates of the link, thereby increasing the bandwidth utilization and providing two-way rapid, reliable and secure data communication. In conjunction with partners, the development of the IP telephony, point to point connectivity, VSAT, video and audio streaming are some of the specialized products and services GroupSat offers to its client base via . For more information on GroupSat products and technologies, please visit the Company's web site at www.groupsat.com

