

15 DEC 2001

THE TELEGRAPH

Taliban top gun's security chief held

Kandahar, Dec. 14 (Reuters): Afghan security forces have captured Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar's personal security chief as he travelled in a van to the southern city of Kandahar, provincial officials said today.

The capture of Toor Mullah Naqibullah Khan, who headed Mullah Omar's household security, could help US and Afghan forces track down his boss, one of the most wanted fugitives in the US-led war on terror. Osama bin Laden, who ran his al Qaida network in Afghanistan under the protection of the Taliban, is also believed to be at large in the region.

"We have arrested top Tal-

iban figures Toor Mullah Naqibullah Khan and Mullah Qayoom Angar on the way between Arghandab and Kandahar. They were carrying a satellite telephone and some important documents," said a senior Kandahar security official.

The official said eight more Taliban fighters were arrested in Kandahar after the two men were caught, unarmed, last evening. A cache of remote control bombs, time bombs and several other explosive devices and radios was also seized.

"We are hopeful we will arrest more Taliban figures and we hope that we can arrest their leader Mullah Omar," he

said, though he would not venture what the chances were of finding either Mullah Omar or bin Laden.

Khalid Pashtun, spokesman for the provincial government, confirmed the arrests.

With the latest captures, security forces have picked up at least 27 militants since Saturday night, including the brother of a former Taliban governor of Kandahar.

The security official said they were picked up following a tip-off from a Taliban insider.

Mullah Omar's Taliban militia have been waging an insurgency in the south and southeast of Afghanistan since

they were driven from power in late 2001 by US and Afghan forces after al Qaida attacked the US on September 11.

The Taliban's most senior military commander played down the significance of the arrests. "Maybe they are ordinary Taliban," Mullah Dadullah, one of the movement's 10-member leadership council, said by satellite telephone.

But Pashtun said Naqibullah Khan was a dangerous killer who was still in charge of security for Mullah Omar.

"During the (October presidential) election this man killed nine government intelligence agents in the Maysan sheen district of Kandahar

province," he said.

The commander of US-led forces in Afghanistan, Lieutenant General David Barno, said last week intelligence showed the Taliban in turmoil over whether to give up their fight and accept an offer of reconciliation from President Hamid Karzai.

Karzai, who won a strong mandate in the country's first presidential election on October 9, has offered to let Taliban fighters resume a peaceful life.

"We see indications that there are arguments even among the leadership about whether it's time to accept reconciliation with the Afghan government," Barno

said last Thursday.

That optimism was shared by former President Burhanuddin Rabbani, whose own government collapsed in the mid-1990s amid a civil war that paved the way for the Taliban's takeover.

"I think the Taliban problem will be solved through the negotiations started by the government ... I think there will not be big problems," Rabbani said on Sunday, adding that traditional tribal councils could play a role.

Some Taliban figures will be shown no clemency because of the gravity of their crimes against the nation, officials say.



Mullah Omar (Reuters)

Terrorism will be rooted out: Karzai

KABUL, Dec. 7. Hamid Karzai was sworn in on Tuesday as Afghanistan's first popularly-elected President, as the impoverished country tries to leave its brutal past behind and bolster a young democracy that still faces the twin threats of terrorism and drugs.

A smiling Mr. Karzai, wearing a traditional green robe and a black lambskin hat, received a standing ovation on his arrival for the solemn ceremony. The U.S. Vice-President, Dick Cheney, the highest-ranking American official to visit Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, was among the 600 guests, including 150 foreign dignitaries.

Global leaders present

After the Afghan national anthem reverberated around a restored hall of the war-damaged former royal palace, Mr. Karzai repeated the oath of allegiance read to him by Afghanistan's Chief Justice, Fazl Hadi Shinwari.

Mr. Karzai then swore in his

two Vice-Presidents, Ahmad Zia Massood and Karim Khalili, members of the country's two largest ethnic minorities.

In his inaugural speech, Mr. Karzai said the hopes of ordinary Afghans would drive him during what is likely to be a tough five-year term.

He reiterated his main pledges — cracking down on the booming opium trade, disarming militias and lifting living standards. He said he would eradicate terrorism with the cooperation of the international community.

"We have now left a hard and dark past behind us and today we are opening a new chapter in our history in a spirit of friendship with the international community," Mr. Karzai said, speaking in Pashto and Dari, Afghanistan's two main languages.

He said the fight against terrorism was "not yet over" and urged sustained foreign aid and cooperation to defeat increasing links between extremists and drug trafficking.

"The same cooperation has led to the rebuilding of the Afghan state and significant progress in restoring peace, stability and security to our country."

Tight security

Wary of attacks by Taliban or Al-Qaeda militants on the proceedings, Afghan and international forces launched their biggest security operation since the October 9 election that gave Mr. Karzai a massive victory.

Mr. Cheney, arriving at the main U.S. base north of Kabul early on Tuesday, congratulated some of the 18,000 U.S. troops here for helping give democracy a chance to take root.

"For the first time the people of this country are looking confident about the future of freedom and peace," Mr. Cheney said.

"Freedom still has enemies here in Afghanistan, and you are here to make those enemies miserable."

Mr. Karzai thanked the United States, his main sponsor, for

its help. "Without that help, Afghanistan would be in the hands of terrorists," he said after a brief meeting with Mr. Cheney. "Terrorism as a force is gone. As individuals they are all around and we will continue to look for them."

The list of 150 foreign dignitaries included the U.S. Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharrazi, and Pakistan's Interior Minister, Atab Khan Sherpao. Lakhdar Brahimi, special adviser to the U.N. Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, represented the world body.

12 die in attacks

Overnight attacks near the Pakistani frontier that left 12 dead provided a reminder of threats to Afghan stability.

Dozens of militants armed with assault rifles and rockets attacked an Afghan military base in Khost province, sparking a firefight that left four Afghan soldiers and at least six militants dead, an Afghan commander said. — AP

Karzai sworn in Afghan Prez

Kabul: Hamid Karzai was sworn in as Afghanistan's first popularly elected president on Tuesday, promising to bring peace to the war-torn nation and end the economy's dependence on narcotics.

Two of the men most responsible for easing him into power, US Vice President Dick Cheney and secretary of defence Donald Rumsfeld, were among those watching as Karzai placed his hand on the Koran to take an oath of allegiance in the heavily fortified presidential palace in Kabul.

The inauguration passed off peacefully despite threats by guerrillas from the former Taliban regime that they would disrupt Karzai's investiture, the culmination of his victory in Afghanistan's first democratic presidential poll on October 9. "With international cooperation we can root out terrorism from Afghanistan," Karzai, wearing a black lambskin hat and traditional cape, said in an acceptance speech, broadcast live.

"The relationship between terrorism and narcotics and the threat of extremism in the region... is a source of continued concern," he said, referring to worries over Afghanistan being the world's main supplier of heroin. He vowed that disarming private militias, fighting the drugs trade, stamping out corruption and forging national unity among Afghanistan's different ethnic groups and tribes would be his goals over the next five years.

"Whatever challenges may come, the people of Afghanistan can count on the friendship and support of the people of



Afghan President Hamid Karzai (second from right) proceeds for the swearing-in ceremony with former Afghan King Zahir Shah (second from left) at the Presidential palace in Kabul on Tuesday

the United States," Cheney said during a joint press conference minutes before the inauguration. Cheney and Rumsfeld both addressed US troops earlier during a visit to Bagram Air Base, north of Kabul. "Our goal is not to stay here, but to come and do the job and leave it a lot better than we found it," Rumsfeld said.

Representatives from 27 foreign delegations attended Karzai's oath-taking, including UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's special adviser Lakhdar Brahimi, NATO

secretary-general Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavron, Iranian foreign minister Kamal Kharrazi, Indian external affairs minister Natwar Singh, Pakistan's interior minister Aftab Sherpao and the presidents of neighbouring Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

During the ceremony, Karzai was seated alongside ageing former king Zahir Shah, who remained in exile after being ousted in 1973, and returned home only after the fall

of the Taliban. Reuters

Musharraf, ^{SC-11} Karzai talk terror, ^{8/11} trade and ties

KABUL, Nov. 6. — President Pervez Musharraf and Afghan President Mr Hamid Karzai today vowed to step up crackdown against the terrorists holed up on both sides of their borders and enhance bilateral trade and economic ties.

Gen Musharraf, in a surprise visit to the neighbouring country, greeted Mr Karzai on his electoral victory as President and held talks with him.

Addressing a joint press conference at the Presidential Palace, the two leaders reaffirmed a strong resolve to fight terrorism and said the steps against this menace would be in the interest of peace, stability and development of both countries and the region at large.

Gen Musharraf reiterated Pakistan's support to reconstruction in Afghanistan and said Islamabad's commitment is open-ended. He also referred to Pakistan's \$100 million package for reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and said the country will establish communication infrastructure

and build rail and road links with Afghanistan. Official media reports from Pakistan said President Musharraf is the first foreign leader to visit Kabul after Afghan elections.

Pak rocket attack

Suspected militants launched a rocket attack from Pakistan territory against US-led coalition forces in Afghanistan earlier this week, a US spokesman said today. The Pakistan military was informed about the "heavy rocketing" and immediately pounded the origin of fire, coalition spokesman major Scott Nelson said.

The rockets targeted Paktia's Shkin base, which has come under regular fire by Taliban. "Pakistani military on the other side of the border assisted us..." Mr Nelson said.

"That's a very positive thing." He said the incident showed that Pakistan, Afghanistan and coalition forces "are operating effectively."

— Agencies

7 NOV 2004

THE STATESMAN

Karzai favours bringing Taliban into mainstream

By Indrani Bagchi
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Kabul: As the dust of the Afghan presidential election settles, the focus is now on Taliban reconciliation. On the face of it, it's a plan to bring into the mainstream a large swathe of Afghans. But it is also the beginning of an exit strategy for US presence in Afghanistan.

Taliban reconciliation is being peddled by the US and supported by the country's new President Hamid Karzai. The contours of this plan are that Afghan Taliban fighters and foot soldiers be brought back under a general amnesty plan. They would be separated from the hard-core leaders who would be treated as war criminals. The plan has traction with quite a few of the policy makers within the Afghan government. "We have to bring back those people who joined the Taliban because there was no option", said a senior official.

But the process could be more difficult than

Karzai and his officials think, and Taliban activists are still sending out statements that they can't be written off. A Taliban associated group calling itself Jaish-e-Muslimeen kidnapped three international workers from the Joint Electoral Management Body on Thursday on the Kabul-Jalalabad highway. The group has threatened to execute the hostages — an Irish woman and Kosovo woman and Filipino man.

However, the driving force behind the reconciliation policy is that the threatened Taliban disruption of the elections did not really happen. There were stray attacks, including one on Karzai's helicopter during one of his rare campaigns. And in the weeks before the elections, convoys of trucks and tankers filled with explosive devices were intercepted.

But that apart, the fact that the Taliban, which, even by US reckoning, is well over a few thousand, let a largely violence-free election through, has been seized upon by most people here. According to others, Taliban leaders have been in touch with the government before the elections.



People's President

Hamid Karzai has just won the first presidential elections. In the first interview after the elections in his office in the heavily-guarded presidential palace in Kabul, President Karzai tells Indrani Bagchi that the Taliban are a spent force and free trade is the mantra for the new Afghan government:

What is your assessment of the recent elections?

As an Afghan, I am profoundly delighted to see that the people proved they were capable of taking the moment, to the benefit of their country. It was a massive turnout. But there were attempts. Just the day before the elections, we caught convoys of tankers and trucks in Kandahar and Kabul with huge amounts of explosives. God was kind. But the real winner of the elections, of the war on terror, is the Afghan people.

What are your conclusions from the break-up of the vote?

The break up of the vote is interesting. I have won in all the urban centres, the multi-ethnic centres of Afghanistan like Herat, Kabul, Nangarhar, Kunduz and Balkh. Also, I won in Iran and Pakistan (refugee camps), two other multi-ethnic centres. But more significant than my victory is that of Masouda Jalal, the only woman candidate. She won more votes in areas in which she could not campaign or send a representative. For example, in Uruzgan province, a stronghold of the Taliban, she got 1,800 votes out of a total of 60,000. Women voted independently during these elections. That was the most important thing — the empowerment of women. In my village which is very conservative, at one event a woman got up and said, I am not going to vote for a man, I am going to vote for a woman. Men have ruined this country.

What are the priorities of the new government?

I will continue with the road building project. That is extremely important. We need to connect provinces and districts and sub-districts, provide electricity, give quality education. Afghanistan has always been the hub of free trade and transit, so we need more investment in that area. We plan to open up foreign investment and my job is to make it easy for people to set up business here. For example, we built an important highway from Kabul to Kandahar and Herat. Within 20 days private transportation companies had started business. But to release the entrepreneurial spirit of the Afghans we need to have a lean but efficient government.

The surprise this time was the lack of violence. How did that happen with the Taliban around?

The Taliban were not a popular move-

ment. Otherwise, they would not have disappeared in 1-1/2 months. The desire for change, however, was a popular one. The people of Afghanistan have gone through an emergency loya jirga, a constitutional loya jirga, registration process and now the elections. This tells us there was no political prevalence in the Taliban.

But you are still fighting Taliban in large parts of the country.

I don't think the Taliban are a potent force any more. It is a dying force. I don't worry about them too much any more.

Is the hunt for Mullah Omar and bin Laden still on?

Yes, we are looking for them. Sooner or later we will find them. They cannot escape. They seem to have done pretty well for the past three years.

How long did it take you to catch Veerappan? A fugitive can be on the run for a long time.

What do you expect from your neighbours?

A recognition that this country's well-being, stability and prosperity is in their interest.

Where does India fit into your calculations?

India is an old friend of Afghanistan. We are looking forward to a very productive relationship. I met Manmohan Singh in New

York, and I will have more chats with him. I enjoy that relationship. I hope to go to India soon.

Is there an exit strategy for the large international security presence in Afghanistan? There seems to be lot of disaffection in Afghanistan against them.

No, there isn't. The Afghan people know that without the international presence they would be in far worse conditions. Nobody likes intrusive security and in the heat of the moment they may say we don't like them. Do you think elections could have been held without the presence of the international security forces? But Afghanistan has to stand on its own feet. We need our own army, police, our own security. Out of a 70,000-strong army we have managed to train only 15,000 personnel in the last two years. It will be another three years before we can get 70,000. Then we need intelligence, police and other instruments of state control. And we need a strong economy.

Afghanistan sits in the middle of a region of tremendous energy potential. How will you tap this?

We are working on the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan gas pipeline. I hope the pipeline can come to India. We have signed an agreement and are looking for international finance. But it will be especially easy if India and Pakistan can be friends and we can sell this gas to India. That will give Afghanistan and other countries a lot of benefits. There is a lot of oil and gas here. But we need people to come and explore.



Udayshankar

Q&A

More significant than my victory is that of Masouda Jalal, the only woman candidate. Women voted independently during these polls. That was the most important thing — empowerment of women.

Of free trade and pomegranates

By Indrani Bagchi/TNN

Kabul: He loves Indian democracy, and he wants India and Pakistan to be friends so he can sell oil and gas to the huge Indian market. And to bring home the significance of the most important elections in his country, Afghan president Hamid Karzai on Wednesday said the Taliban was a spent force, and its ideology unacceptable to Afghanistan.

Karzai has just won his first big election in his country, without a private army of his own and heavily dependent on international support. But his spirits are soaring, and he is looking forward to free trade, education and non-interfering neighbours.

His deal with India has remained unchanged years after he left Shimla, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is savouring some of the choicest Kandahari pomegranates that Karzai has sent him. The

In His First Interview Since Afghanistan's Presidential Elections, Hamid Karzai Tells TOI About His Future Plans And His Love For India

PM was one of the first to call Karzai even though the official victory signal will have to wait for a couple of days more. And in a month's time, Karzai's first, no second, inauguration ceremony might see Manmohan Singh making his maiden trip to Afghanistan.

In his first interview after the elections, President Karzai said the Taliban was no longer a potent force

present, Karzai is looking at ways to breathe life into Afghan economy. He confirmed that Afghanistan would soon farm out exploration blocks for international companies to have a go. As of this week, Afghanistan has overtaken Colombia as the world's largest producer of opium. Karzai wants to crush this, though his plan of replacing poppy crops with pomegranates is unlikely to find many takers.

A breakup of votes shows expected voting along ethnic lines. But Karzai dismissed conclusions that the voting had been only an expression of ethnic loyalties and insisted that both he and rival Yunus Qanooni, of the Tajik-dominated erstwhile Northern Alliance, had won nationally in the famous Panjshir valley in the north, the fiefdom of Ahmad Shah Massoud, voters whose



that could threaten Afghanistan. Terrorism and Al Qaida are there. But not a movement with people or popular support. An 18,000-strong US military presence is currently scouring the mountains of Afghanistan looking for Osama bin Laden and Mullah Qasab. How long can they hide? asked Karzai, confident of nabbing the two most wanted men in the world. But, for the

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Rival concedes crown to Karzai

Afghanistan

Kabul, Oct. 24 (Reuters): Hamid Karzai's main rival for the Afghan presidency conceded defeat on Sunday with less than 6 per cent of the vote count remaining.

A spokesperson said Yunus Qanuni would accept Karzai's victory despite irregularities in the October 9 election — Afghanistan's first ever direct presidential ballot.

"We accept in the interests of the nation, because we don't want to face another crisis," Sayed Hamid Noori said when asked if Qanuni was conceding.

The move comes a day after an American woman and

an Afghan girl died from wounds suffered in a Taliban suicide attack in a popular Kabul shopping street.

With under 6 per cent of the votes left to count, incumbent Karzai remained on course to win a simple majority to avoid a run-off against the second-placed Qanuni with 16.2 per cent.

"They should be finished by today and by tomorrow, probably the total boxes would have been finished and reconciled and counted," said Reginald Austin, head of the Joint Electoral Management Body's technical and logistics operations.

Several ballot boxes were set aside for an investigation into complaints of ballot-stuffing and multiple voting, but the UN spokesperson said an investigative panel recommended most of them should be released for counting.

The suicide attack on Chicken Street followed a lull in militant activity over the past couple of months as US-led troops, international peacekeepers and Afghan forces stepped up security ahead of the October 9 poll.

Three Icelandic soldiers serving with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and two other Afghan



Hamid Karzai

were among the wounded when the attacker detonated a string of grenades strapped to his waist, according to Lieutenant-Colonel

Patrick Poulain, spokesperson for the Nato-led mission.

A Taliban spokesperson claimed responsibility for the attack. Witnesses said the attacker was disguised as a beggar as he roamed Chicken Street, popular with foreigners shopping for carpets, jewellery and antiques.

The US embassy confirmed an American had been killed in the blast but was unable to release further details, though other media reported the dead woman was in her early twenties and worked for a translation company. The Afghan girl was between 10 and 12 years old, according to

hospital workers.

Karzai's share of the vote has slipped to 55.3 per cent after holding around 60 per cent for most of the time since counting began. But votes from several provinces dominated by fellow ethnic Pashtuns had still to be tallied, giving Karzai's camp confidence that the slip was a temporary blip.

Perceived as handpicked by Washington since being placed at the head of an interim government after the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, Karzai was hoping for a mandate that will improve his credentials as a leader to all of Afghanistan's ethnic groups.

SFB
M/10

Afghan polls

Trouble from an unexpected quarter

Disruptions to Afghanistan's landmark elections were expected, but they have come from an unexpected quarter. It wasn't the Taliban launching terrorist attacks to cow voters and keep them at home — Afghans came out in large numbers and voted enthusiastically. Neither was it warlords making trouble, at least not overtly. Rather it was marker pens which were supposed to apply indelible ink on voters' fingers, but didn't in many places as the ink could be washed off. That led many candidates to allege that multiple voting had taken place, and all 15 challengers to President Hamid Karzai announced a boycott. Later Karzai's main challenger Yunus Qanuni, and other heavyweights such as Mohammad Mohaqiq were brought around to accepting the poll results after an independent inquiry, when Zalmay Khalilzad, America's top troubleshooter in the region, met with them. If indeed there has been large-scale malfeasance in voting, this in itself is a cause for worry. President Bush is neck and neck with John Kerry in his own electoral fight, and if he can showcase a successful Afghan election, he can argue that the "war on terror" is working.

A lot depends on what the inquiry committee decides about the mystery of the indelible ink that could be washed off. Since it was supplied by an Indian company, there will be diplomatic repercussions for Delhi if the ink was defective. Another possibility, however, is that Afghan polling officials could have confused indelible ink markers with ballot markers, whose ink is washable. If this is the case, then accident or inexperience need not be the only explanations. A genuine democracy in Afghanistan would be revolutionary, and there would be many both within Afghanistan and in the neighbourhood interested in seeing that it does not come about. For Pakistan, having neighbours on both eastern and western flanks who elect their leaders would portend trouble. Those troubled by this prospect would have reason to subvert the electoral process in Afghanistan. Plus points could be scored against Delhi by alleging that it supplied faulty ink to make a quick buck. Delhi needs to be on its diplomatic toes on this one.

THE STATESMAN

14 OCT 2004

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2004

10-10
14/10 ✓
AN EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRACY ✓

THE FIRST PRESIDENTIAL election in Afghanistan's history is back on course with the candidates contesting against the incumbent Hamid Karzai giving up their demand for the polls to be annulled. Mr. Karzai's 15 rivals alleged that the election had been vitiated by widespread malpractices and declared that they would boycott the vote count if the exercise was not cancelled. They set aside their demand after the Joint Electoral Management Board (JEMB) promised to set up an independent body to investigate the charges. The offer by the supervisory body, consisting of officials of the Kabul Government and the United Nations, provided the protesters an opportunity to back down without losing face. The candidates are well aware that a thorough investigation cannot be held in a country divided into different fiefdoms. With communications still in a state of disrepair, the investigators will be hard put to complete the task before the votes are counted and the results announced. International observers who monitored the polls did draw attention to several flaws in the electoral system. However, they were of the view that the shortcomings were not of such a magnitude as to warrant annulment of the election.

While the counting of ballots is not likely to be completed before the end of October, an exit poll conducted by an international group showed that Mr. Karzai was poised to win by a significant margin. However, the validity of this finding is questionable given the difficulties of carrying out surveys in Afghanistan and refugee camps in the neighbouring countries. As the leading candidate of the Pakhtoon community, which makes up almost half the population of the country, Mr. Karzai was always expected to have an electoral edge. But it was not certain

that the incumbent would cross the 50 per cent mark, which he needs to do if a run-off with the second placed candidate is to be avoided. The nominee of the Northern Alliance and main challenger, Younis Qanooni, had hoped he would be able to persuade the other candidates to withdraw from the race so that he could confront Mr. Karzai directly in the first round. While this hope did not materialise, Mr. Qanooni remains optimistic that there will be a second round and that he will win. The Northern Alliance leader is not likely to make another attempt to have the electoral process annulled even if his calculations go wrong. In turning out in impressive numbers, Afghan voters demonstrated that they have embraced the democratic system. Mr. Qanooni's decision not to boycott the vote count appears to have been influenced by an anxiety not to be seen at odds with the public mood rather than by the JEMB's promise of an investigation or the external monitors' observations on the validity of the election.

A verdict on the future of democracy in multi-ethnic Afghanistan will have to be withheld until a parliament is duly constituted. In holding the presidential election while repeatedly postponing parliamentary polls, the Karzai Government opened itself to the criticism that it was pursuing the agenda of someone else. The timing of the Afghan election was certainly convenient for the United States President, George W. Bush, who will cite the successful completion of the exercise as a foreign policy triumph. Mr. Bush is bound to play up the developments in Afghanistan in the few remaining weeks of his re-election campaign. However, the real winners are the Afghan people who put the horrors of the past behind them and moved decisively to build a new future.

THE HINDU

14 OCT 2004

Afghan election back on track

By Declan Walsh

KABUL, OCT. 12. Afghanistan's election crisis seemed to be over yesterday when the main Opposition challenger, Yunus Qanooni, withdrew his threat to boycott the result.

His decision cleared the way for the votes to be counted. An American-conducted exit poll has predicted a handsome margin of victory for the interim President, Hamid Karzai.

Mr. Qanooni plunged the election into chaos on Saturday when he led 14 other candidates in declaring the poll illegitimate because of allegations of possible fraud.

Indelible ink

An indelible ink system de-

signed to prevent multiple voting proved faulty — some voters washed the ink from their hands easily — provoking the suggestion that the election would have to be held again.

But yesterday Mr. Qanooni withdrew and said he had agreed to make his complaints to an investigation by the electoral body run by the Afghan Government and the U.N.

The ethnic Hazara leader, Mohammed Mohaqeq, and the only woman candidate, Masouda Jalal, had already backed out. Others are expected to follow suit. "I do not want to be against the election and I appreciate the goodwill of the people of Afghanistan," Mr. Qanooni said.

His chance of being elected

was low, according to the preliminary findings of the election's only exit poll, by the International Republican Institute (IRI), which predicted that Mr. Karzai would win enough votes to avoid a run-off against Mr. Qanooni.

The IRI, which is linked to the Republican party, said more than 10,000 voters in 26 of Afghanistan's 38 provinces had been questioned. The poll was paid for by the U.S. Government agency USAid.

The U.S. President, George W. Bush, is keen to demonstrate that Afghanistan is a foreign policy success during next month's U.S. election, particularly against the backdrop of Iraq.

Observers said the election,

in which millions of Afghans ignored threats of Taliban violence to go to the polls, was imperfect because of official blunders, inexperience and some reported vote rigging.

Inspiring experience

But in general, they said, it was an inspiring experience. "It is easy to be cynical but I thought it was a really amazing day," a diplomat said.

But it may be the only indication of the result for several days. With ballot boxes being transported from remote mountainous areas by road, helicopter and mule, counting is not due to begin until tomorrow at the earliest.

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THE HINDU 13 OCT 2004

Bush hails Afghan polls; Karzai says fair

Prods Trust Of India

WASHINGTON/KABUL, Oct. 10. — President George W Bush has said the election in Afghanistan was a remarkable achievement made possible to some extent by his administration. "Great things are happening around the world. A really great thing is happening in Afghanistan. The people of that country, who were suffering under the Taliban regime, are going to the polls."

Hamid Karzai — widely favored to win the election, said an independent electoral panel must decide on the opposition complaints, but that he felt "the election was free and fair ... it is legitimate." "Who's more important, these 15 candidates, or the millions of people who turned out to vote?" he said.

Thousands of election workers began the process of tallying the results of Afghanistan's first-ever presidential election today,

even as controversy swirled over the vote's legitimacy.

What was supposed to be a historic day in the war-ravaged nation turned sour yesterday when all 15 challengers to interim President Hamid Karzai withdrew in the middle of voting with allegations of fraud and incompetence because of faulty ink used to mark voters' thumbs.

Millions flocked to polling stations in remote mountain hamlets, dusty refugee camps and in thousands of bullet-pocked schools and hospitals in every corner of the nation. Electoral officials said turnout appeared to be extremely high — a victory in itself in a nation with no experience at direct elections.

"I don't think we will see a trend as to who is leading for about a week," electoral spokesman Mr Aykut Tavsel said. He said a final result could take until 30 October. Threats by the Taliban to disrupt the vote never materialised.

The UN said today that Afghanistan's electoral management body is working on a mechanism to investigate complaints about the conduct of the vote.

"I believe that the intention is to have a mechanism that expands into what is already in place in order to review all the complaints and have all the transparency required," Manoel de Almeida e Silva, a UN spokesman said.

The candidates in the election have alleged fraud and declared the vote illegitimate. Some have called for an inquiry including UN officials.

"A fairly democratic environment has generally been observed in the overall majority of the polling centres," the Free and Fair Elections Foundation of Afghanistan declared.

The demand by some presidential candidates for the election to be held again is unjustified, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe said.

THE STATESMAN

10 OCT 2004

Monitors try to wipe stain off Afghan poll

Clean chit after row over ink

Kabul, Oct. 10 (Reuters): Independent observers described Afghanistan's historic presidential election as mostly fair today despite turmoil over possible multiple voting that led most of the candidates to call for a general boycott.

From the southern plains to the Hindu Kush mountains and northern steppes of the impoverished Islamic nation, millions of Afghans turned out yesterday to choose a leader for the first time, despite threats by Taliban rebels to sabotage the election.

The largest group of independent poll observers, the Free and Fair Election Foundations of Afghanistan, made of 13 local non-governmental organisations, said the vote was fair despite the complaints. "While the reasons for the ink correctly applied indelible ink remain to be seen, a fairly democratic environment has generally been observed in the overall majority of polling centres," it said.

Midway through yesterday, all 15 rivals of US-backed interim President Hamid Karzai had announced they were boycotting the poll because a system to prevent voting fraud had failed. Many demanded a new vote but Karzai, favourite to win, rejected the demand.

At issue was indelible ink put on the finger of everyone

who voted to stop them voting again. Some election workers used the wrong pen to mark voters, and the ordinary marker ink was quickly washed off.

And with questions over the late and rapid registration of 10.5 million voter cards in a population of about 28 million, there were accusations of illegal multiple voting.

Karzai said today that some of the candidates who called for a boycott had changed their mind and were willing to accept its legitimacy.

"Some of the esteemed candidates have rejected the boycotting of the election," Karzai told a news conference. "And we are hopeful that other candidates do not ignore the national jubilation and let votes be counted. The Afghan people voted yesterday in millions and that is what I see," he added. "I am blinded to everything else. It was a celebration."

Some 850,000 Afghan refugees voted in Iran and Pakistan, about half the number eligible in Iran and 80 per cent of those registered in Pakistan, the International Organisation for Migration's refugee voting operation said in Islamabad.

"The millions who came to the polls clearly wanted to turn from the rule of the gun to the rule of law," said the Organisation for Security and Cooperation of Europe.



Afghan election workers carry ballot boxes to a counting centre in Kabul on Sunday. (Reuters)

Marker pens erase fear of militants

Kandahar, Oct. 10 (Reuters): When the main talking point of Afghanistan's landmark election is marker pens and not militant attacks, you know the Taliban have failed.

For all the fiery threats of suicide bombs and bloodshed overshadowing the country's first experiment with democracy, violence by remnants of the ousted militia was limited to minor skirmishes and some landmine attacks in remote areas. Afghan officials and international experts say it is too early to write off the hard-line Islamic movement, and a low-level insurgency will continue to undermine rebuilding efforts, especially in the restive south and southeast.

Mullah Obaidullah, former Taliban defence minister, said shortly before the poll that the Taliban were here to stay "Our jihad (holy war) will continue even after the election," he said from an undisclosed location.

But many believe yesterday's election, which saw men and women ignore warnings and turn out to vote even in the most unstable districts, dealt the insurgents an ideological and operational blow.

"I don't think they can motivate people in large numbers to support them," said Rahimullah Yusufzai, a jour-

nalist and expert on the Taliban who is based in Peshawar, Pakistan. "The Afghan people know very well if the Taliban returned to power, the country would again be isolated."

Now that the cosy relationship that once existed between the Taliban and Pakistan has match words with actions, may erode their support base.

A symbolic election

Will the polls change the course of Afghanistan's tortured history?

Afghanistan
of 8
SATURDAY'S presidential polls in Afghanistan — although it may not compare to our normal understanding of democratic elections — constitute a landmark in the tortured history of Afghanistan. The challenge has been monumental and the success or otherwise of the electoral process must be judged in the context of the existing situation in that country. Nearly three years after the US-led coalition waged the war in Afghanistan, the Taliban and its leader are still around and reportedly gaining strength and support. The joint US-Pakistani offensive on the Afghanistan-Pakistan borders has yielded few results except for high Pakistani casualties. There is little security in the country and less stability. The Taliban and the Al Qaeda have been active with their guns killing and threatening anyone who has indicated an interest in the electoral process.

The security of the country is far from normal and the American media and experts, including Senator John Kerry, have been extremely critical of the Bush administration for having taken the focus off from the Taliban and Al Qaeda — the reason for the war against terror. Reconstruction is far from becoming a reality. Out of the \$4,500 million reconstruction funds pledged by the international community, only \$700 million have actually flowed to Afghanistan so far. The Tajik and

Uzbek areas in the north are comparatively more secure and stable, primarily because it is the support base for the Northern Alliance. Nearly 100,000 troops and security forces have been deployed to ensure security and there was confidence, that as many as five million voters would cast their votes. The exact figures may never be known, and is perhaps are not that important in the context of Afghanistan. That Hamid Karzai, the interim president, is likely to win overwhelmingly, is also a foregone conclusion. What is important is that the country has started the long march to democracy which many countries in the region have found difficult to adopt even after decades. Karzai would gain some legitimacy by becoming an elected president instead of just an interim head of state.

Institutions are the bedrock of every society and state. In Afghanistan, they have remained tribal in nature. And moving toward a western style democracy is the last thing we should expect if the country is to move toward secular peace and moderation in its domestic and external outlook. Building institutions in Afghanistan, therefore, would have to be based on the foundations of its tribal society with a devolution of power over time. It is more sustainable to formalise traditional power distribution patterns rather than impose a system that would remain alien for decades.

38 die as Afghanistan goes to polls

10/9 ASSOCIATED PRESS

KABUL/KANDAHAR, Oct. 9. — Gun battles, mine blasts and US air strikes on the day of Afghanistan's first post-Taliban election left 38 people dead today, Afghan officials said, including three police officers escorting freshly filled ballot boxes.

The three died in Uruzgan province, a Taliban stronghold where US forces earlier fought militants in a battle which reportedly left 25 rebels and one civilian dead. In neighbouring Kandahar province, eight more police died when their vehicle hit a mine, another mine killed an Afghan soldier, and security forces arrested two men.

ing a hand grenade. ^{SC 10} The violence did not affect actual voting in the presidential election, which went ahead without any major security problems, though rivals to interim leader Hamid Karzai claimed it was fraudulent.

Some 100,000 Afghan, US and Nato security forces were on duty for the vote, which remnants of the Taliban had threatened to attack.

Rebels opened fire on four pickup trucks carrying ballot boxes from Chura to Tirin Kot, as it passed through a mountainous area at about 5 p.m., police said.

Three policemen were killed and four others wounded, but the country was able to continue

to Tirin Kot, where the US military or the UN are expected to collect the votes by helicopter for counting in Kandahar.

Afghanistan's first direct presidential election was under a crisis when 15 candidates announced a boycott over fraud allegations, but interim leader Mr Hamid Karzai sought to salvage the historic ballot, declaring it "free and fair."

All the candidates challenging the USA-backed Mr Karzai, who was heavily tipped to win, demanded that the election be abandoned, arguing that the ink to mark people's thumbs and ensure they vote only once was flawed, opening the way for widespread fraud. Electoral officials resisted the demand, sav-

ing the UN-Afghan panel over-seeing the election would rule later on its legitimacy, adding, that workers at some voting stations mistakenly swapped the permanent ink meant to mark thumbs with normal ink meant for ballots, and the problem had been dealt with quickly.

Mr Karzai said, the fate of the election was in the hands of the electoral panel, but added that "the election was free and fair".

The boycott cast a pall over what had been a joyous day in Afghanistan. Millions of ethnically diverse voters braved threats of Taliban violence to cram polling stations for an election aimed at bringing peace and prosperity to a country ruined by war.



Mr Hamid Karzai at a press conference in Kabul on Saturday. — AFP

Howard wins historic fourth term

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SYDNEY, Oct. 9. — Prime Minister Mr John Howard scored a convincing victory in Australia's federal election on Saturday, winning a historic fourth term in a vote that will ensure that the staunch USA ally will keep its troops in Iraq in the foreseeable future. "My fellow Australians ... I am truly humbled by this extraordinary expression of confidence in the leadership of this great nation by the coalition," Mr Howard told cheering supporters of his conservative alliance in Sydney.

"In accepting their charge to lead the nation I rededicate myself and all of my colleagues to the service of the Australian people."

With more than 70 per cent of votes tallied, Mr John Howard appeared likely to increase his government's majority in

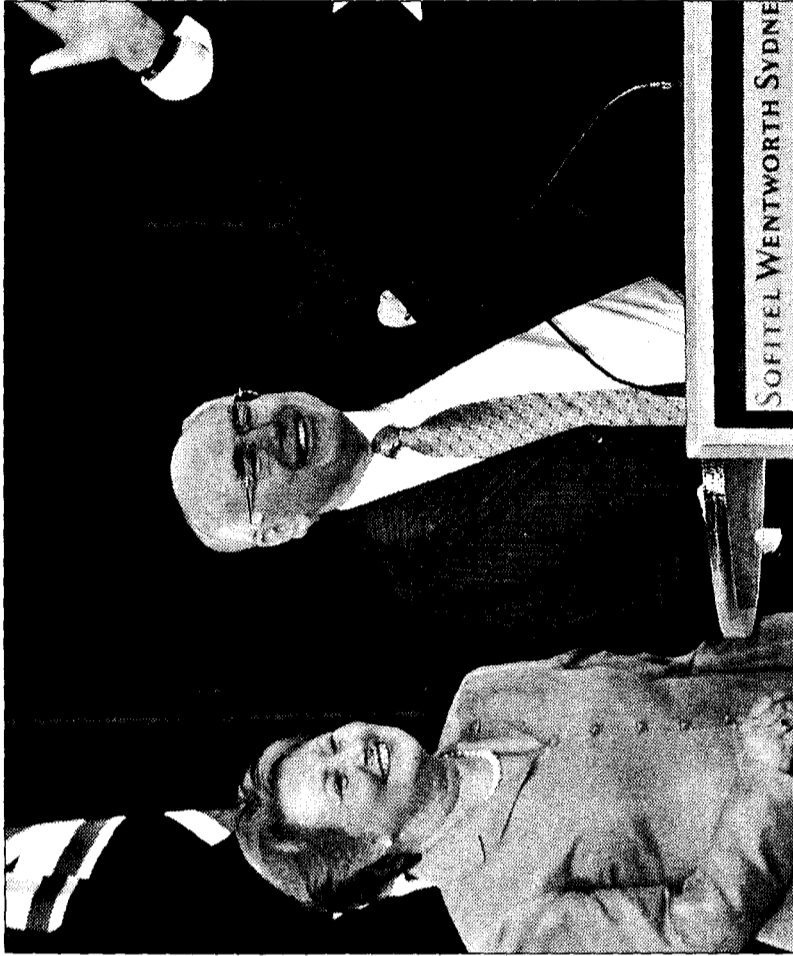
Parliament, exceeding most analysts' predictions that the result would be very tight.

Labour Party leader Mr Mark Latham earlier conceded defeat before supporters in western Sydney, saying he had called Mr Howard to congratulate him.

"Tonight was not our night," Mr Latham told the crowd.

The election was widely seen abroad as the first referendum for the three leaders who launched the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, with US President Mr George W. Bush facing a ballot next month and British Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair probably facing voters next year.

Labour Party had vowed to bring the roughly 900 Australian troops deployed in and around Iraq home by Christmas, while Mr Howard insisted they will stay until Iraqis ask them to leave.



Mr John Howard celebrates his election victory with his wife, Janette, in Sydney on Saturday. — AFP

HND-1
10/10

Afghanistan goes to polls

KABUL, OCT. 9. Afghanistan's first direct Presidential election began on Saturday, with people across this ethnically diverse land casting the first ballots in an improbable experiment with democracy.

After 25 years of near constant war — and under a Taliban threat of ruinous violence — voters descended on bombed-out schools, blue-domed mosques, and bullet-pocked hospitals to choose their leader for the first time in their history.

The Interim leader, Hamid Karzai, is widely expected to win the vote against 15 rivals, among them warlords, royalists and even an Islamic poet. But the size of the field could deny Mr. Karzai the outright majority needed to avert a run-off.

A 19-year-old Afghan refugee in Pakistan became the election's first voter early Saturday, casting a ballot in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad.

"I cannot explain my feelings, just how happy I am," said Moqadasa Sidiqi, a science student whose family escaped Kabul in 1992 during the Afghan civil war. "I would never have thought I would be able to vote in this election."

Some 7,50,000 Afghan refugees registered to vote in Pakistan, and another 4 lakh to 6 lakh were eligible in Iran. Initial re-

sults were not expected until late Sunday or early Monday, but anything approaching a full count could take as much as two weeks.

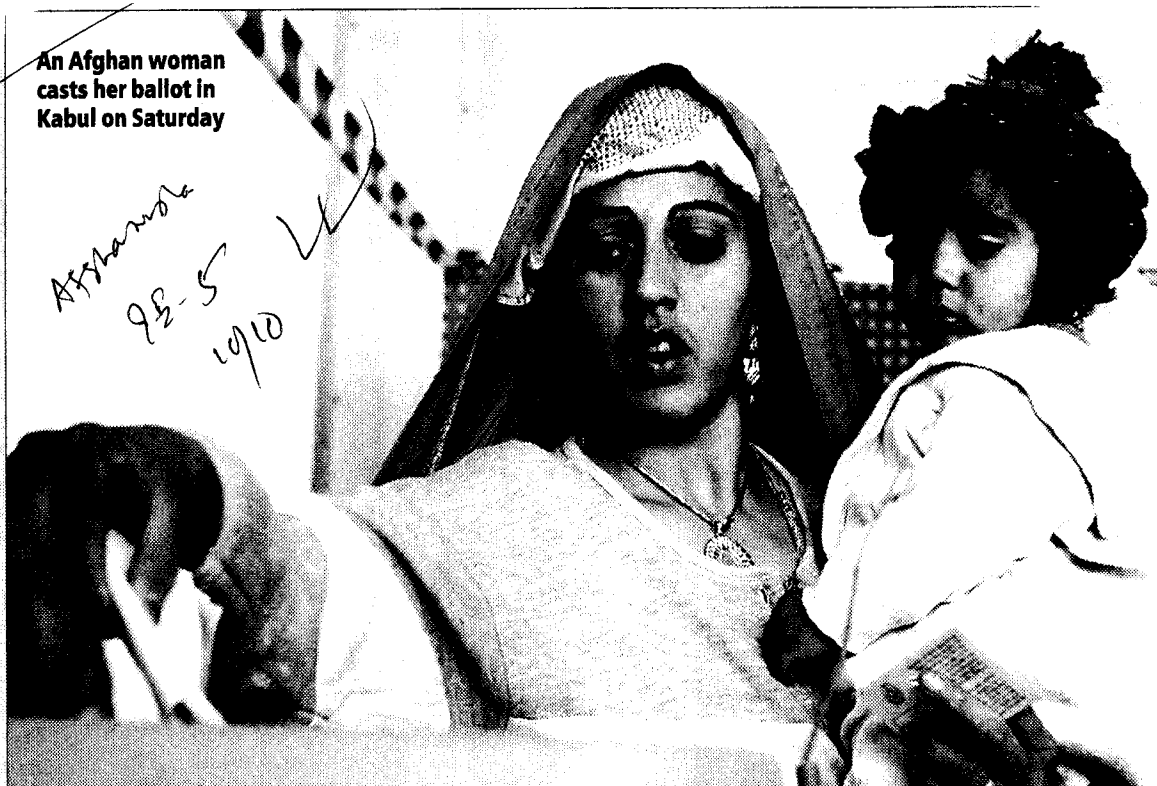
While the Taliban threat of an overwhelming attack had not materialised by early Saturday, there were plenty of signs the rebel group was trying. On Friday, a bomb-sniffing dog in southern Kandahar discovered a fuel-truck rigged with anti-tank mines and laden with gasoline. Election officials arrested three Pakistanis and said they planned to detonate the truck in the centre of the city on polling day. "This would have caused hundreds of deaths ... and the electoral process would have been derailed in the area," said Ishaq Paiman, Defence Ministry deputy spokesman.

Respect people's will

Mr. Karzai criticised a decision by rival candidates to boycott the election and said they must respect the will of the people. "Just because 15 people have said 'no', we can't deny the votes of millions," he told a news conference after all his rivals announced a boycott because of irregularities.

"It's too late in the day for a boycott. Millions have voted in the rain, the snow and the dust storm and we should respect their decision," he said. — AP

An Afghan woman casts her ballot in Kabul on Saturday



Boycott mars Afghan poll

Workers use wrong pen to mark voters. The ink could just be washed off.

SAYED SALAHUDDIN
KABUL | OCTOBER 9

ALL of Afghan President Hamid Karzai's rivals said on Saturday they would boycott the first direct presidential election in the Islamic nation because systems to prevent illegal multiple voting had gone awry. Afghans were voting in a historic poll that aimed to give the mountainous and impoverished country its first elected president and perhaps end over a quarter-century of war.

Fears of sabotage by Taliban militants who have vowed to disrupt the polls were overtaken halfway through the voting day when it became clear some workers were using the wrong pen to mark people's fingers after they voted. This meant the ink

could just be washed off and the voter could cast a ballot again.

During the campaign, many candidates expressed surprise that as many as 10.5 million out of the country's 28 million people had registered to vote, and said many people had received multiple voter cards.

The use of indelible ink was to prevent them voting more than once.

The decision by Karzai's 15 rivals to boycott the poll was made at an emergency meeting. Eighteen candidates are on the ballot but two withdrew this week in favour of Karzai.

It was not immediately clear how the poll could go ahead. Members of the Joint Election Management Body (JEMB), a group of UN-appointed and Afghan election officials who are

conducting the poll, were holding an emergency meeting.

Polls opened at 7 am and were scheduled to close at 4 pm. There were only scattered reports of violence. Some injuries were reported but no deaths. The focus had been on how many people voted in defiance of the Taliban and whether Karzai, the US-backed favourite, would be able to get the 51 per cent win he needed to avoid a November runoff.

Karzai's team was reportedly hoping that at least 60 per cent of the almost 12 million eligible voters would turn out. That would have gone a long way toward proving democracy had made a strong start in a nation invaded by US-led forces three years ago and still

controlled in large part by regional warlords.

Despite the boycott, voting was held in an upbeat atmosphere in most places.

In Kandahar city, the former headquarters of the Taliban and still the source of much of its support, large crowds of men pushed to get into a voting site near the blue-tiled Kherqi Sharif mosque.

On the other side of the street, only a trickle of women covered in burqa veils entered a school to vote, as many in the deeply conservative region have said they would not allow their women folk to vote. "We came here to vote for peace and stability and freedom for women," said Raihana, a 37-year-old mother of eight who lived in exile in Iran for 14 years to flee war. —Reuters

Clash of visions in Afghan race

PAMELA CONSTABLE

Sinzari (Afghanistan), Oct. 6: More than 1,000 leathery, turbaned men gathered in a cavernous village mosque for a presidential campaign rally.

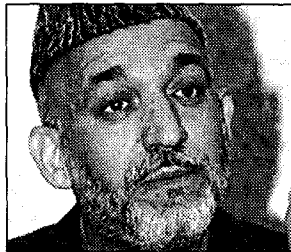
They no longer carried rifles, and some had even brought their small sons. But the assembly of mujaheddin, or former anti-Soviet fighters, crackled with esprit de corps.

The veterans were all ethnic Pashtuns, and the rally was held in Kandahar province, the heartland of Afghan Pashtun culture and the birthplace of President Hamid Karzai, who comes from a prominent Pashtun tribe and has courted Pashtun votes in his bid to be elected president this Saturday.

But these tough ex-fighters had come to show their support for someone else: Yonus Qanooni, the former interior and education minister and an ethnic Tajik, who is Karzai's major challenger. To them, the candidate's ethnicity mattered far less than his credentials as a fellow mujahid.

"We have all sacrificed a great deal, and we all lost brothers and fathers in the fight for our country," said Asadullah, a farmer in the crowd. "We want a leader who is a true mujahid, so our rights will be protected. We are all one tribe and one nation. We don't like Karzai. We want Qanooni."

With Afghanistan's first-ever presidential election just days away, analysts here predict that Karzai, 47, will garner the most votes. He remains by far the best known of the 18



Hamid Karzai (top) and Yonus Qanooni

candidates in the race, he is widely regarded as the American choice, and he has the power and perquisites of incumbency.

But the unexpected inroads made by Qanooni make it increasingly likely that Karzai will not win more than 50 per cent of the vote. This would require an expensive run-off election that could take several months to arrange.

The popularity of Qanooni among some Pashtun mujaheddin, moreover, suggests that the race may not break down along ethnic lines, as has been widely predicted, but instead become a contest between two clashing visions of Afghan society: one that is modern and western-leaning and one that is protective of traditional Islamic values.

In Kandahar, Karzai's cam-

paigned aides seemed confident of his success at the polls. Ahmad Wali Karzai, one of the President's brothers and a wealthy Kandahar resident, has been receiving a steady stream of Pashtun tribal leaders from across the south pledging the support of their communities at the polls.

"Ninety-nine per cent of the provincial elders have guaranteed us they will vote for the President," Karzai said.

"We don't see any strong challenger in any of the six southern provinces. From every district, they keep coming to volunteer. And the local cable channel has given us two channels free to use 24 hours for campaign messages."

Karzai suggested that any local support for Qanooni was limited to a small number of former militia commanders—principally from one Pashtun tribe, the Alokozai—who he said oppose the government programme to disarm and demobilise militias nationwide.

"They are against the programme, because they want to stay in business with their weapons and troops," he said. He complained that officers under the city police chief, a Qanooni supporter, had taken down thousands of Karzai campaign posters in the city.

Two new election surveys by international groups found that most Afghans responding were far more concerned about pressure or abuse from military commanders than about terrorist violence on election day.

LOS ANGELES TIMES-
WASHINGTON POST NEWS SERVICE

THE TIMES OF INDIA . 7 OCT 2004

Karzai bounces back on poll trail

Ghazni (Afghanistan), Oct. 5 (Reuters): Afghan President Hamid Karzai hit the election trail today for the first time since an assassination attempt last month, telling supporters a historic vote in four days would be a turning point for the war-torn nation.

While the President and his main rivals campaigned ahead of Saturday's landmark presidential election, the local AIP news agency reported seven policemen were killed when their vehicle drove over a land mine in the southern province of Kandahar. There were no immediate details, but the Taliban guerrillas who have vowed to disrupt the poll were believed responsible.

Hundreds of troops, police and security guards, including special American bodyguards, were on alert as Karzai spoke to a cheering crowd of about 10,000 people in the town of Ghazni, southwest of Kabul.

Speaking alternately in the country's two main languages, Dari and Pushto, Karzai said: "This vote is not just to choose a President, but for peace and stability in Afghanistan. "Instead of fighting, we are campaigning for our elections. We should be proud that we have freedom at last." It will be the first time that Afghans will directly elect their own leader. Eighteen candidates, including Karzai, are in the fray.

His main challenger, Yunus Qanuni, campaigned in Kabul, addressing about 4,000 supporters in the city's main stadium.

"Dear brothers and sisters,



Afghan President Hamid Karzai waves during a campaign stop in Ghazni, 120 km south of Kabul. (Reuters)

you are the ones who will elect the President of Afghanistan," the former education minister said. "I want your support, I want your vote." In the northern town of Mazar-i-Sharif, another candidate, Uzbek General Abdul Rashid Dostum, addressed about 2,000 people. The flurry of electioneering comes as the campaign, which has been lacklustre so far, is scheduled to close tomorrow.

All this is very new to Afghanistan, which has been torn by war since the 1979 Soviet invasion and has not held any form of election since the late 1960s. More than 10.5 million people have signed up to

Kabul, Oct. 5 (Reuters): US-based Human Rights Watch said today women were still persecuted in Afghanistan, where many hope Saturday's presidential election will be a milestone in the drive to end decades of violence.

"Regional military factions and religious conservative leaders, as well as the Taliban and other insurgent forces, are limiting Afghan women's participation in society through death threats, harassment and physical attacks," the rights group said in a report.

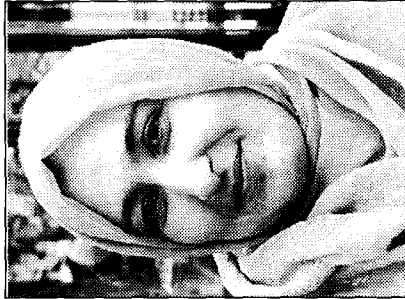
While the Islamist rule of the Taliban militia in the impoverished nation ended in late 2001, Human Rights Watch said change had been far too slow.

There had been little follow through on women's rights since US-led forces vanquished the Taliban in the wake of the September 11 attacks, the rights group said. Article 22 of the Afghan Constitution adopted this year reads: "The citizens of Afghanistan — whether man or woman — have equal rights and duties before the law".

Human Rights Watch said the constitution, registration of more than four million women voters and one million girls at school were all encouraging.

But Afghan women were victims of sexual violence, girls and young women were still exchanged to settle feuds or repay debts and there were still many cases of early and forced marriages.

Vote crucial for ending violence on women



Presidential candidate Massouda Jalal

"In 2001, after the fall of the Taliban, improving the rights of women was at the top of the international agenda," the group said. "In 2004, despite many well-intentioned programmes for women, women's human rights appear to be more of an afterthought."

A study conducted by the ministry of women's affairs and a non-government organisation showed around 57 per cent of women are married before they turned 16.

A liberal candidate for the presidential election, Latif Pedram, was almost barred

after he supported giving women rights of divorce. Hardliners accused him of being un-Islamic.

Over 41 per cent of more than 11 million registered voters in the Islamic nation are women, but Human Rights Watch said that figure should be treated with caution.

In a country where illiteracy is the norm, women, who have had no political say before, are particularly disadvantaged. At a college in Kabul today, the UN ran a programme teaching women what to expect at polling centres.

"We even explain how to hold a pen," said Amandine Roche, who was overseeing the exercise.



10-19
6/10 **WAVING AWAY THREATS:** The Afghanistan President, Hamid Karzai, at an election campaign meeting in Ghazni, 100 km south of Kabul, on Tuesday. — AFP *Al-Sharq*

Polls will deliver us from war: Karzai

GHAZNI, OCT. 5. The Afghan President, Hamid Karzai, made his second successful campaign stop outside the safety of the capital today, telling a crowd of 10,000 people that historic elections this weekend will deliver them from a quarter-century of war.

Security was extremely tight, with U.S. bodyguards — machine guns strapped around their shoulders and wraparound sunglasses covering their eyes — and hundreds of Afghan security forces on hand. American helicopters flew overhead and every participant in the rally had to

pass through security checkpoints. Mr. Karzai said the election was a golden opportunity to build a new future for a country that has known nothing but war, drought and poverty for more than two decades. “Brothers and sisters of Afghanistan, I ask you to vote for me freely, with no pressure,” Mr. Karzai told the crowd in Ghazni, about 110 km south of Kabul. “We want a proud Afghanistan, a stable Afghanistan, a peaceful Afghanistan.”

Mr. Karzai, the overwhelming favourite to beat 17 rivals and win Saturday’s vote, has largely

remained ensconced in his heavily guarded palace since he survived a rocket attack on his helicopter at a campaign stop in eastern Afghanistan in September. His vice-presidential running mate was targeted later, surviving a bomb attack on his convoy in north-eastern Afghanistan.

Tribal support

But after the rally on Tuesday, the President mingled with the crowd, shaking hands with an old man who pressed closer to meet him.

Hundreds of tribal elders and

village chiefs gathered under a giant canopy on the arid, sun-baked plains outside Kandahar today and promised to support Mr. Karzai.

The incumbent, whose family is from the deeply conservative south, has not been to the region for more than four months, even though he is counting on his ethnic Pashtun votes. Mr. Karzai’s younger brother Ahmad Wali is a force to be reckoned with in southern politics and is willing to do all he can to ensure the support of the country’s largest Pashtun clan. — AP/Reuters

AFGHAN REALITIES

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1979

IN DISMISSING HERAT Governor Ismail Khan, Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai signalled his determination to press ahead with the campaign against warlords who wield real power in most parts of the country. Western supporters of the Karzai Government, especially the United States administration, have sought to portray Mr. Khan as an Islamic hardliner. However, this is an unconvincing attempt to justify the dismissal on ideological grounds. After all, well known fundamentalists such as Rab Rasool Sayyaf continue to enjoy Kabul's favour. Mr. Khan was targeted not because he enforced religious mores in Herat but because his military strength had declined after his son's death in battle a few months ago. The governorship of this western province is also a very coveted post since the incumbent controls the revenues that accrue from trade with Iran. Mr. Khan was offered a berth in the central cabinet but he preferred to cling on to what remains of his regional base. While Mr. Karzai lauded the deposed warlord's valiant role in the war against the Soviet Union, he will be relieved that this first attempt to extend his government's authority succeeded so well. However, the Afghan President should be well aware that the other former Mujahideen commanders cannot be tackled as easily.

Mr. Khan had been weakened by the unending strife between his fellow Tajiks and their Pakhtoon rivals. An attack launched by a Pakhtoon commander had provided the central government with the opportunity to insert contingents of the newly raised national army supported by American special forces into the western province. Mr. Khan was estranged from Defence Minister Mohammed Fahim and other Tajiks who hold key posts in Kabul. He apparently realised that the game was up once the regional military balance tilted in favour of the central government. The Afghan President's external

backers have made no secret of their interest in his proceeding now against the Defence Minister and other leaders of the Northern Alliance. Mr. Karzai signalled his intent to do so when he discarded Marshal Fahim as a running mate for the presidential election to be held in October. However, the Northern Alliance continues to be a formidable force. It has an astute political strategist in former Minister Younis Qanooni; it retains much of the weaponry captured from the Taliban; it has a strong base in the Panjshir Valley; and its loyalists are embedded in all ranks of the new national army. The Alliance also deprived Mr. Karzai's advisers of a justification for resorting to military action when it embraced the democratic process by nominating Mr. Qanooni as its candidate for President.

The restoration of stability in Afghanistan is undoubtedly a matter of urgent necessity. With Taliban and Al-Qaeda elements still active in the field, the central government must have the ability to enforce order all over the country. However, Mr. Karzai must understand that he should not opt for a needlessly confrontationalist approach. The former Mujahideen commanders claim that they are entitled to retain control over different regions and ethnic groups because they had defended their respective bases against the Soviets and the Taliban. While the autocratic manner in which the warlords administered their satrapies after the Taliban was driven out of power has weakened their case, the realities of the Afghan situation necessitate a wide distribution of power. Mr. Karzai must not overlook legitimate demands for regional autonomy since an overly centralised system of governance is ill suited to a country divided along ethnic, linguistic, and sectarian lines. The Afghan President also needs to convince his people that he operates independently of U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad and other external advisers.

THE HINDU

18 30 2004

Karzai escapes bid on life



Gardez (Afghanistan), Sept. 16 (Reuters): Afghan President Hamid Karzai escaped an assassination bid today when a rocket was fired at his US military helicopter as it was landing in the southeastern town of Gardez.

The President's campaign trip for the October 9 presidential elections, his first outside Kabul, was immediately aborted and he was flown back to Kabul, the US military and Afghan officials

Hamid Karzai in
Kabul. (AFP)

said. Witnesses said the rocket flew over Karzai's helicopter and a crowd of about 400 supporters gathered to meet him at a school as he was about to touch down.

"A rocket was fired at President Karzai as his helicopter was landing," said a US military spokesman.

Karzai escapes bid on life

Associated Press
Kabul, September 16

AN APPARENT attempt to assassinate Afghan President Hamid Karzai failed on Thursday when a rocket that was fired at his helicopter missed its target by 300 yards, the US military said.

The American military helicopter was preparing to land in Gardez, 60 miles south of Kabul, when the rocket was fired. The aircraft immediately turned around and returned to Kabul, US military spokesman Maj. Mark McCann said.

"The President was not in any imminent danger," McCann said.

It was at least the second apparent attempt on the US-backed interim leader's life since he took office in 2001, and the most ominous incident yet in the run-up to next month's landmark election.

Karzai's spokesman, Jawed Ludin, said the rocket came down much further away — in a village more

and spoken to the people." No one was hurt on the ground or in the air.

It was not clear who fired the rocket, but suspicion will fall on militants including the former ruling Taliban waging a stubborn insurgency against Karzai's US-backed administration.

Officials are bracing for a surge in violence in the run-up to next month's landmark presidential election, which Afghanistan's international sponsors hope will cement the shaky peace process begun after the United States drove out the Taliban in 2001 for harboring Osama bin Laden.

The school opening was not officially part of Karzai's election campaign. But the attack is still a setback as he tries to muster a majority in the October 9 ballot and avoid a second-round runoff.

Gardez is just 60 miles south of Kabul, but security concerns still meant Karzai needed the US military as his escort.

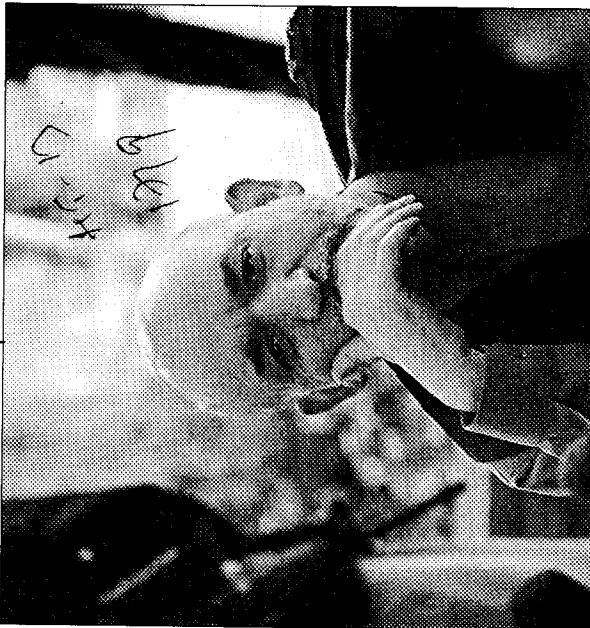
Karzai has said he is too busy leading the country to do a lot of the campaigning, and that his two deputies will tour the provinces in a bid to see off the electoral challenge from the 17 other candidates.

A dozen election workers have already been killed during a drive to register millions of Afghans for the country's first-ever direct presidential election.

In all, more than 900 people have died so far this year in political violence across the country.

The President has been shadowed by bodyguards from an American security firm since shortly after the unsolved killing of Vice-President Abdul Qadir on July 6, 2002.

Karzai's guards shot and killed an attacker who opened fire at Karzai in Kandahar on September 5 the same year. Karzai hails from Kandahar, the former stronghold of the ousted Taliban regime.



AP
Afghan President Hamid Karzai in Kabul on Tuesday.

than a mile from Gardez — and suggested Karzai didn't want to abandon his trip to the city, where he was to attend a school opening.

"He's disappointed and a little upset that the security sometimes in these situations over-reacts," Ludin said.

"He wished to have landed

HD-15 Afghan situation 15/9 still volatile

By Simon Tisdall

KABUL, SEPT. 14. Weekend violence in the western city of Herat is a reminder of how volatile the situation in Afghanistan remains, three years after the U.S. overthrew the Taliban and less than four weeks before presidential elections there.

The U.S. President, George W. Bush, described Afghanistan last June as "the first victory in the war on terror". A year ago, the Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, declared that major combat operations were over and an era of stabilisation and reconstruction had begun.

Taliban resurgent

But despite some progress in education, health and infrastructure, Afghanistan remains far more unstable than Western leaders care to admit. Afghanistan is a nation-building challenge to which even Iraq pales in comparison.

Attacks attributed to a resur-

gent Taliban and its Al-Qaeda allies have claimed more than 1,000 lives in the past 12 months. Low-level conflict in the south and east has become the norm. Foreign aid workers have been repeatedly targeted, as in Herat on Sunday. Much of the country beyond Kabul is considered insecure.

Major General Eric Olson, the operational commander of U.S. forces, has admitted that his troops were "not even close" to defeating the militants. The 14,000-strong Afghan national army is struggling to make an impact.

Western leaders are also counting on a victory for Hamid Karzai, Afghanistan's pro-Western leader. But Mr. Karzai must first see off 17 challengers, the foremost of whom is Yunus Qanuni, an ethnic Tajik who has become, in effect, the candidate of the Northern Alliance warlords who seized Kabul with U.S. backing in 2001. — © *Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004*

Carnage tests Karzai power

Herat, Sept. 12 (Reuters): Seven supporters of an ousted Afghan governor were killed and 20 were wounded today in clashes with police and US troops after crowds torched UN offices, medics and witnesses said.

The violence occurred as protests erupted for a second day after President Hamid Karzai, campaigning for a presidential poll on October 9, replaced Ismail Khan as governor of the western city of Herat yesterday as part of a plan to rein in warlords.

Bursts of small arms fire could still be heard round the city in the evening, as Afghan and US forces attempted to restore order after hundreds of Khan's supporters burned and looted the UN offices and set fire to the Pakistani consulate.

A Reuters reporter saw Khan backers shouting "Death to Karzai" and "Death to America" before setting fire to the offices of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Assistance Mission and the UN Development Programme.

Protesters threw stones at US soldiers in a Humvee.



Pakistani prisoners wait for their release at the Pul-i-Chakri prison on Sunday. (Reuters)

"I have so far received seven bodies of protesters," said a doctor at Herat's central hospital. A Reuters cameraman saw at least 20 people being treated for gunshot wounds at the hospital.

"I was protesting in front of the UN office when the Americans shot me in the leg," said Abdul Hamed.

Karzai told a news conference Afghans had the right to protest peacefully. "(But) anyone who resorts to violence against the UN or NGOs, these are rioters hurting the Afghan people and we will deal with them strongly," he said.

Hospital officials and witnesses said at least two people were killed in clashes with US

and Afghan forces yesterday. The US military disputed this, saying two people were hurt.

The violence occurred despite the presence of hundreds of Afghan and US troops in Herat and US military helicopters flying low overhead.

UN spokesperson Manoel de Almeida e Silva said UN staff had been evacuated to

the US military compound in the city and there were no reports that any had been hurt.

Karzai replaced the governors of Herat and the restive province of Ghor after launching his election manifesto with a pledge to rein in warlords.

Afghanistan's ambassador to Ukraine, Sayed Mohammad Khairkhwa, arrived in Herat today to replace Khan.

US ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, a close Karzai confidant, said he was not aware of any deaths and praised security forces for restraint, even though some had been hurt by stone throwers.

He said he had spoken to Khan, who would appear on television to urge cooperation with the new governor. "I think it's sent a clear message of where Afghanistan is headed and how you can be a part of the future of Afghanistan," Khalilzad said of Khan's replacement and other changes.

Karzai had offered Khan, long a thorn in his side, the job of minister of mines. But Khan rejected the post, saying he would remain in Herat as a "private citizen".

Pak Taliban fighters freed

Pul-i-Chakri, Afghanistan, Sept. 12 (Reuters): Hundreds of Pakistanis who fought alongside the Taliban against US-led forces after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the US were released from an Afghan jail today after nearly three years as prisoners of war.

The 368 prisoners, the last of more than 2,500 Pakistanis captured during the overthrow of the Taliban, were being driven by bus 250 km to the Pakistani town of Peshawar for screening by Pakistani authorities.

"We are glad that their ordeal is finally over," said Pakistani embassy third secretary Zafar Ali Khan. "We have been trying to get access to them for a long time. We believe there has been no need to have kept them for so long in Afghan jails."

The prisoners, ranging in age from 22 to 60, were captured as the Taliban disintegrated in the face of the US-led invasion that drove the Islamic fundamentalists from power

in November 2001. Many had been drawn to Afghanistan from madrasas in Pakistan, attracted by the puritanical brand of Islam that the Taliban espoused.

"The mullahs in my area said that as Muslims we should go to Afghanistan to fight a jihad," 22-year-old Amir Khan, from Peshawar, said. "I cannot deny this was my intention. I arrived in Afghanistan in October. I spent three days in Kabul and then went to Mazar-i-Sharif. I was captured the day after I arrived there."

Like many of his comrades, Khan said he had received no military training and insisted he was a religious student who had been "misled" by the mullahs.

"They sold us," he said. "We learnt later that for every 10 mujahideen (holy warriors) that they sent, they would receive Rs 5,000 (\$100)."

Mohammed Afriqi, a 30-year-old from Pakistan's rugged North West Frontier Province, said he was among a

group of 50 that surrendered to forces of Abdul Rashid Dostum in November 2001. "They treated us very badly," he said. "Of those I was with, there are only about 20 left."

He was initially held at the notorious Shiberghan prison, where Dostum's forces are accused of killing hundreds of prisoners or allowing them to die because of overcrowding.

In September 2002, Dostum issued a formal statement acknowledging that "approximately 200 prisoners died, but mostly of wounds suffered in the fighting, disease, suffocation, suicide and general weakness". Afriqi showed Reuters scars on his chest he said came from wounds caused by being whipped with electric cable.

The prisoners said the past 18 months of their captivity had been much better than the initial stage, and today they all looked clean, fit and healthy.

Qaida militants

Up to 10 people were killed in fierce fighting between Pak-

istani security forces and al Qaida-linked fighters today, taking the death toll to over 70 in one of the deadliest actions against the militants.

Military spokesperson Major-General Shaukat Sultan said "six to eight" people were killed in clashes with the security forces in the rugged South Waziristan tribal region near Afghan border where more than 60 militants died last week.

He said the security forces also suffered a "few" casualties but declined to provide details. A government official said two soldiers were killed and two others were wounded in the latest fighting.

Witnesses said security forces backed by helicopter gunships and artillery attacked suspected hideouts of the militants in the mountains surrounding Laddha and nearby areas in South Waziristan.

Laddha lies 50 km north of South Waziristan's main town of Wana, which itself is 400 km northwest of Islamabad.

TALIBAN THREAT

Peace And Stability Elude Afghanistan

By SANKAR SEN

It is true there are about 20,000 coalition troops, mostly Americans, in Afghanistan but they are mainly to hunt down Osama bin Laden and other remnants of Al-Qaida. American forces during their operations are resorting to search and destroy missions and revenge killings. This has further alienated the civilian population. Violence

has been killed. In Mazar-e-Sharif warlords like Rashid Dostam and Attah Mohammad are fighting their battles. Elections have already been put back from the target date and the delay in holding the election will fulfil the plans of the Taliban. So far only around 3.5 million of Afghanistan's estimated 10 million eligible voters, mostly in and



of human rights by the Americans troops in their operations in Afghanistan has been documented and indicted by the Human Rights Watch in its report.

The task of providing basic internal security has been given to International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) comprising troops provided by Nato powers. But their number is totally inadequate. They have a total strength of 6,500 men and they are mainly based in Kabul. In consequence, the Afghan capital is safe but not the rest of the country. This indeed marks a serious failure of Nato. The organisation has been asked to run ISAF and extend its remit outside the capital. But so far its success has been limited. Warlords and drug barons rule most of the country and anyone who opposes them is threatened with death.

Workers killed

Nato's European peace-keepers promised to restore peace in the country ahead of the election but have so far singularly failed to do so. Terrorist violence sweeps the land. A number of workers of different aid agencies as well as election workers have

of more troops. Germany and Canada have provided the bulk of the forces; other countries are unwilling to contribute men and money for a land which they fear may slip back to chaos and become a failed State. Many Nato countries also feel they are not bound to fulfil Nato's peace-keeping duties as the Cold War is over. ISAF commanders are also hamstrung by the restrictions imposed by their governments. For example, German soldiers that are keeping peace in Kunduz are constitutionally barred from performing riot control duties.

Small measures

According to the existing arrangements, Germany will contribute a garrison to remote Faizabad and a British-run coalition PRT in Mazare-Sharif will come under ISAF's command. The Netherlands will open a new PRT in northern Baghlan province and Turkey will provide a force for another PRT. These small measures are unlikely to bring peace to an increasingly dangerous land. The over all effect is going to be slim. Afghanistan has provided Nato an opportunity to show its usefulness in the post-cold-war world. It should redeem itself and not allow this opportunity to slip by.

US forces in Afghanistan have now begun a military operation called "Operation Lighting Resort" aimed at providing security for the October presidential election. The purpose of the operation according to Pentagon, is to ensure the security of the electoral process. These operations are being launched jointly with the Afghan national army and the police. A large number of US troops are participating in it.

The Taliban has vowed to disrupt the election process and will leave no stone unturned to achieve their goals. Any delay in holding presidential and parliamentary elections would mark a victory for them. However, for the success of the election and subsequent formation of a representative government, peace and security are essential. Otherwise, the new constitution would suffer the same fate as the country's previous ones which were largely undermined by facts on the grounds. There is also popular apprehension that the Americans might at some time cut their losses and seek an exit strategy. The Taliban estimates that time is in their favour.

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After the end of the war bringing down the brutal Taliban regime in Afghanistan, Tony Blair had said in November 2000 that in rebuilding their country, the people of Afghanistan would receive the full support of the coalition. "We must give you all help and support that you need", he said, "and that support will be forthcoming". But Afghanistan remains a trouble-torn country even three years after liberation. Peace and stability have eluded its people. More than 800 people have been killed in the past year in a wave of violence unleashed mostly by the remnants of the Taliban who are opposed to "Karzai's US-backed government".

Grand Council

The Afghans have done their bit in setting up an interim government and holding a *Loya Jirga* or Grand Council to set up a legitimate administration. They have drafted a constitution and are preparing to hold a democratic presidential and parliamentary election. Western powers, however, have not fulfilled their commitment. Disorder and violence stalk the land, particularly in southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan. The Taliban is down but not out. They have vowed to disrupt the October elections and have carried out a string of attacks killing civilians, government employees and election workers. Recently there was an explosion in the city of Herat killing five people and wounding 34. The Governor of Herat Ismail Khan is a warlord with his own militiamen.

Efforts of the central government to disarm rogue private militias have not been so far successful. Disarming of thousands of irregular fighters under the command of regional warlords is the key to Afghanistan's stability. President Hamid Karzai told the *New York Times* that Afghanistan's private militia was a greater threat than the Islamic militants of Taliban. According to him, only 10,000 of estimated 50,000 militias could be demobilised and that is why the parliamentary elections had to be postponed till April. More forceful measures are necessary to deal with militias who have often defied Kabul's orders and added to Afghanistan's instability.

The writer is former director-general, National Human Rights Commission and director, National Police Academy, Hyderabad

The Afghan endgame

By M.K. Bhadrakumar

THE SURPRISE decision by Afghan President Hamid Karzai to drop Defence Minister Mohammed Fahim as his running mate in the October 9 presidential election signifies a defining moment in the peace process. Its downstream impact will be profound both for the stabilisation of the Afghan situation and for regional security.

Mr. Karzai's decision may lend itself to the naked eye as the sidelining of yet another Afghan "warlord." Without doubt, Mr. Fahim is the most powerful military commander in Afghanistan today. He commands the Tajik forces of the *Shura-e-Nazar* previously led by Ahmad Shah Masood. Other warlords of the erstwhile Northern Alliance (N.A.), which led the anti-Taliban resistance during 1996-2001, too have been systematically sidelined in recent weeks. They include Afghan Uzbeki leader Rashid Dostum, Hazara Shiite militia commander Mohammed Mohaqiq, and Tajik leaders Ismail Khan, Yunus Qanuni and Mohammed Atta. They are arrayed against Mr. Karzai, setting aside their mutual antipathies.

Thus the N.A., which had powerful regional support at one time — from Russia, Uzbekistan, Iran, India — now finds itself in political opposition to Mr. Karzai. The United States too had use for N.A. forces as foot soldiers for its intervention in 2001 and until recently leaned on them to assist in the operations against Taliban. N.A. leaders feel particularly let down that as recently as June they had been given an impression that they would remain as the backbone of any future government.

Mr. Karzai has opted for two non-Pashtun figures as his running mates — Hazara chief Akbar Khalili and Masood's brother, Ahmad Zia Masood. This is a shrewd move aimed at dividing the N.A. camp. Though their elec-

toral appeal in the northern and western provinces remains debatable, Mr. Karzai sees an advantage in projecting a pan-Afghan candidacy. Also, Mr. Khalili spent many years in Iran and Mr. Masood lived much of his adult life in Western capitals and lately in Russia. Thus, notionally they were associated with the Afghan *jihad*, yet they are anything but *jihadis* in outlook or in political temperament. They have no independent power base, unlike Mr. Fahim, to challenge Kabul's supremacy.

The N.A. would have only itself to blame for being marginalised. N.A. groups fell apart once the Taliban was ousted. Regional powers that previ-

American and British intelligence have worked closely with Pakistan in recent months to finesse the Taliban movement and Mr. Hekmatyar's followers among the Ghilzai. Several senior Taliban leaders have been "encouraged" to cross over to Mr. Karzai.

Appreciating the U.S. policy of co-opting the "good" Taliban, the leader of Pakistan's Jamiat Ulema I-Ulema I-Islam, Maulana Fazlur Rahman (who has traditionally close links with the Taliban) noted recently with satisfaction: "The situation is not like previously when Western powers were not prepared to listen to the name 'Taliban'. Now they are certain-

ly prepared for many compromises... There is a visible change in their behaviour. Mr. Jack Straw came to Pakistan this year and I spoke to him about the same thing, saying 'Please do not abandon the Taliban as they are the real binding force in Afghanistan', and Mr. Straw agreed with me that the dialogue process should not exclude any Afghan party." Equally so, a solid Pashtun vote bank for Mr. Karzai is sought to be finessed with Pakistan's helping hand. The U.S. has acted as midwife to forge an agreement whereby Afghan nationals living in Pakistan for 20 years and more can vote in the October 9 election. It is the crowning irony of the Afghan war that Pakistan finds itself exclusively sharing the "driving seat" with the U.S. in fashioning the contours of the future power structure of Afghanistan. Hardly three years have

passed since the ouster of the Taliban whose rise had been stage-managed under direct Pakistani supervision. Pakistan's demands in the post-Taliban Afghan situation have been that first, the N.A.'s key role in the Kabul power structure will be unacceptable. Secondly, Mr. Fahim must be removed from power. In Pakistan's view, the N.A. and Mr. Fahim pose a threat as they act under Iranian and Indian influence. Again, Pakistan wanted the postponement of elections in Afghanistan beyond June (as stipulated by the Bonn Agreement) until such a time as "participation" by Pashtuns was assured; Pashtuns must be given their due role in Afghanistan's governance. Finally, the Taliban should not be bracketed with Osama bin Laden or Al-Qaeda. Clearly, the U.S. has accommodated Pakistan on all these elements. Mr. Fahim's fall is the latest link in the chain.

Peace-loving Afghans and regional powers should keep their fingers crossed and hope that Pakistan will now "deliver" on Afghanistan's stabilisation. Will the U.S. be successful in nudging Pakistan to show "more muscle" in reining in the Afghan militants? The prognosis is mixed, though. Pakistani commentators, apprehensive about their country's long term stability, have been warning that an entire "infrastructure" that can take Afghanistan back into the abyss of violence at short notice still exists intact within Pakistan in the sub-soil, which puts Islamabad in a spoiler's role unless it gets precisely what its Afghan policy, originally chiselled by General Zia-ul-Haq, has consistently sought. Indeed a middle-level Afghan intelligence official in Kandahar reportedly reached Mullah Omar recently by simply calling him on his satellite telephone located somewhere near Quetta.

(The writer is a former Indian Foreign Service officer who has served extensively in Central Asia.)

Clearly, the U.S. has accommodated Pakistan's concerns. Will Islamabad now "deliver" on Afghanistan's stabilisation?

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KARZAI'S GAMBIT

AFGHANISTAN'S PRESIDENT HAMID Karzai ran a political risk when he refused to take Vice-President and Defence Minister Mohammed Qasim Fahim as his running mate for elections to be held on October 9. Mr. Karzai's decision was widely perceived as a signal of his readiness to take on warlords who wield enormous power and treat different parts of the country as their personal fiefdoms. As the commander of the Northern Alliance, Marshal Fahim is arguably the most powerful of the former Mujahideen commanders and his position in the Cabinet enabled him to get a grip on the fledgling national army. While Mr. Karzai had to break the power of warlords in order to enforce the writ of the central government, he was expected to treat his Defence Minister as a partner in this enterprise. Instead, he has preferred to disassociate himself from a political and military formation that helped put him in office. With other warlords, such as Herat Governor Ismail Khan and Uzbek General Abdurashid Dostam, not on the best of terms with the Kabul regime, Mr. Karzai is likely to become even more dependant on the military support provided by the 20,000 strong contingent from the United States and the smaller International Security Assistance Force. He might also become more susceptible to the influence of the neo-conservative American Ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad.

Foreign troops were deployed for action in Kabul on July 26, the day Mr. Karzai announced his new electoral team. This deployment appears to have been undertaken not so much out of fear that the Northern Alliance would rebel as to create the impression that it would. However, Education Minister and Alliance ideologue Younis Qanooni defused the situation with a display of political sagacity. By declaring his

own candidature for the Presidency, Mr. Qanooni indicated that he and his associates would protect their interests exclusively through democratic means. The Alliance is composed largely of Tajiks from the Panjsher valley and its presidential candidate is not likely to draw support from other ethnic groups or people in other regions of Afghanistan. However, the rupture within the coalition that has ruled Kabul for the past two years is likely to undermine Mr. Karzai's electoral prospects. With as many as 20 candidates in the fray there is no guarantee that the incumbent President will clinch the contest in the first round of polling. The two leading contestants will have to face off in a second round if no candidate secures a majority of the votes polled. In such a scenario, it is possible that other ethnic groups and candidates will gang up against Mr. Karzai and his Pakhtoons who make up a little over half the Afghan population but are not a monolithic bloc.

Mr. Karzai is in desperate need of a popular mandate: he was appointed President in 2002 by an unelected assembly that had been arm-twisted by the United States. For this reason he decided to press ahead with the presidential election even though the non-completion of voter registration had led to the postponement of parliamentary elections. The Afghan President might have won wide acceptance abroad. However, it does not appear that the people of the country have a favourable opinion of a person who lived comfortably in exile while his compatriots had to suffer either the ravages of war or the squalor of refugee camps in neighbouring countries. Unlike some of his rivals, Mr. Karzai did not fight against the Soviets or the Taliban and the other candidates will insist that he is not qualified for leadership.

THE HINDU

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Afghan electoral delays

By Duncan Campbell

EARLIER THIS month (July), it was announced that the elections in Afghanistan were to be delayed for a second time, with the country now supposedly choosing a president in October and a new parliament next spring. The announcement made a few waves. Afghanistan is the day before yesterday's story. Nearly three years after Operation Enduring Freedom was launched to remove the Taliban regime and bring liberty and prosperity to one of the world's most impoverished countries, not much of the operation endures and many basic freedoms — from insecurity, from fear, from poverty — remain elusive.

The timing of the election, one month before George W. Bush goes to the polls himself, has as much to do with American as Afghan politics. With Iraq in turmoil, a newly elected Afghan president will be offered as proof that at least some of the administration's foreign policy objectives have been met.

Many Afghans, particularly in Kabul, clearly welcomed the removal of the Taliban. But the one thing that the Taliban did provide was security, so that people could travel in the countryside without fear of ambush and so that the plunder, rape and corruption of the warlord era that preceded them became largely contained.

Last week, President Hamid Karzai told *The New York Times* that the

threat from the Taliban was "exaggerated" and that the real danger to the future of Afghanistan lay with the warlords and their militias. Part of the reconstruction process after the war was meant to be a disarmament of the militias, but so far only around 10,000 out of 60,000 have responded to the incentive of new jobs and handed in their weapons.

Not a few Afghans surveying the chaotic aftermath of war have ruefully, if not seriously, suggested that

where the international community has intervened militarily, Afghanistan has been badly let down.

NATO has just decided to increase its forces there from 6,500 to 8,700, which the report claims will be inadequate. "Shamefully, Afghanistan has the lowest international troop to population ratio of any recent intervention," asserts Col Philip Wilkinson, who co-authored the paper with Michael Bhatia and Kevin Langan. The report says that Afghamis-

Sweden and Switzerland, reckons that as the situation stands it is still not possible to hold fair and safe elections.

Aid agencies have also expressed their concerns. "Afghanistan continues to be sidelined as international attention and resources remain focussed on Iraq," says Barbara Stapleton, spokeswoman for the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief in Kabul. She says that many NGOs have called for an increase in security to help the country stabilise itself. Many others in the aid community have expressed concern that the election is being hurried through without enough attention paid to the safety of voters and registration teams.

In his novel about the Taliban period, *The Swallows of Kabul*, Mohammed Moulessehoul, under his nom de plume of Yasmina Khadra, writes: "The Afghan countryside is nothing but battlefields, expanses of sand and cemeteries ... everything appears charred, fossilised, blasted by some unspeakable spell."

For a moment, in the wake of the war, it looked as if the spell might be broken and the country would be associated with something other than battlefields and cemeteries. Then the caravan moved on to Iraq and the warlords returned to their old pursuits. Afghanistan deserves the world's full attention — and its help — once more. — © *Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004*

The timing of the elections has as much to do with American as Afghan politics.

tan now has one member of the military to 1,115 members of the population, compared to one per 50 at an equivalent period in Kosovo, one per 111 in East Timor, one per 161 in Iraq and one per 375 in Haiti.

"NATO's continued inability to provide significant forces will only further embolden President Karzai's opponents — whether warlords, poppy-growers or terrorists," the report concludes, arguing that "the Taliban are far from defeated, poppy production has soared, and regional warlords are still brazen in their abuse of citizens and in their dealings with the central government." Andrew Wilder, director of AREU which is based in Kabul and receives funding from the E.U., the U.N.,

the Taliban should be invited back in a limited capacity to run security. Every day come reports of fresh attacks on anyone associated with the election process or the west, along with a steady drizzle of ambushes, assassinations, rocket attacks and explosions. On Tuesday, there was a fatal clash between U.S. forces and the Taliban in Zabul.

As it happens, the announcement of the election date comes as an independent research body has published a report on what it sees as the failure of the security policy in Afghanistan, accusing the international community of serious neglect. The report, by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), points out that, compared with countries

Taliban guerrillas gun down 16 for possessing voter cards

Kabul, June 27 (Reuters): Taliban guerrillas kidnapped and then killed 16 people in an Afghan province after finding them with voter registration cards for the country's September elections, officials said today.

The killings on Friday night in the province of Zabul were the most serious attack yet on the elections, which the Taliban and allied Islamic militants have vowed to disrupt.

News of the violence came a day after a bomb killed two women working for the UN-Afghan electoral body and wounded nine women poll workers and two children in the eastern city of Jalalabad. Haji Obaidullah, chief of Khas Uruzgan district in the central province of Uruzgan, said the guerrillas stopped a bus carrying 17 civilians through the district on Friday.

They took the passengers to

Dai Chopan district of the neighboring province of Zabul and killed all but one when they found they were carrying voter registration cards, he quoted the lone survivor as saying.

"They were apparently killed because they were carrying the registration cards," he said.

A spokesperson for the UN, which is overseeing voter registration, said he had no information about the incident.

Uruzgan police chief Koozi Khan said several hundred US and Afghan soldiers backed by air support were searching for the villagers' bodies and the attackers.

"We have been told that the group involved in this incident has hidden in Deh Rawud district of Uruzgan," he said.

A Taliban spokesperson claimed responsibility for killing the women in Jalalabad

yesterday by bombing their bus. He said the guerrillas had warned Afghans not to become involved in elections that would only strengthen the US-backed government.

Taliban spokesperson Abdul Latif Hakimi said the Taliban had killed 19 people kidnapped in Uruzgan on Friday but none of them were civilians. "Six of them belonged to the elections commission and 13 were govern-

ment soldiers," he said when contacted by satellite telephone.

An upsurge in militant violence in the run-up to the polls has raised doubts as to whether they can be held on time.

About 4.5 million of nearly 10 million voters eligible have registered, but the process has been slowed in the south and east by militant threats and violence. Female registration has lagged, partly because of problems recr-

uiting female election workers.

The latest attacks are further setbacks for President Hamid Karzai's efforts to bring peace to Afghanistan, a country President George W. Bush has described as a role model for Iraq.

Karzai appealed to Nato on Friday to make good its pledge to send more troops to protect the presidential and parliamentary polls to ensure they can be held as scheduled.

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THE NEW YORK TIMES

28 JUN 2004

Taliban suspect in Chinese massacre

By Carlotta Gall

Afghanistan 11-13-12 6

Kandahar: The massacre of 11 Chinese road construction workers and an Afghan guard as they slept in their tents early Thursday was the deadliest against foreigners since the fall of the Taliban, and dealt a setback to US efforts to stabilise the country ahead of elections scheduled for September.

The men were among more than 100 Chinese engineers and construction workers who had recently arrived in Afghanistan to work on a World Bank project to rebuild a road from Kabul to the Tajikistan border. Some of those killed had been in the country for only a few days, the Chinese news agency reported.

The attack occurred at 1:30 am about 20 miles south of Kunduz, in the normally peaceful northern part of the county, Afghan officials said. A group of nearly 20 gunmen in cars attacked the sleeping men, the spokesman for the interior ministry, Lutfullah Mashal, said. The Afghan guard and nine Chinese men were killed immediately in the attack. Two more Chinese men died in the hospital later. Four other Chinese workers were wounded and being treated in a Kunduz hospital.

Coming after the murder of five aid workers last week in northwestern Afghanistan, the assault, which Afghan officials attributed to the Taliban, may indicate that the gunmen are shifting their attacks to northern Afghanistan, which has been relatively free of violence. President Hamid Karzai and Gen David Barno, the commander of the US-led forces in the

country had warned of increased attacks on aid workers, government officials and foreign military forces ahead of the elections. US troop deployments have been increased to 20,000 to help with security ahead of the voting.

A senior Afghan military commander Hajji Mir Wali, said Mullah Dadullah, one of the top Taliban commanders, recently issued orders to his fighters to strike at road builders. "His orders were: 'First, you have to kill engineers to stop the building of the roads. Second, you have to burn schools and spread out leaflets. Third, you have to put mines and attack government officials; and fourth, if you can, you have to attack American forces,'" Wali said.

General Mutalibeg said the people responsible were probably "remnants of the Taliban and Al Qaida, and Hesb-e-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar", referring to a renegade mujahideen commander who is on the US list of wanted terrorists and has declared a war against foreign forces in Afghanistan.

Gen Muhammad Daoud said the attack appeared timed to coincide with the opening of the first two miles of the road on Thursday. "This is an action to destroy the reconstruction process of Afghanistan," he said.

The Taliban did not immediately claim responsibility for the attack, as it has with previous incidents. A spokesman for the Chinese foreign ministry, Liu Jianchao condemned the attack as a "brutal terrorist act", and said "China will not give in to any terrorism." NYT News Service

10-19
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Killings raise new security concerns in Afghanistan

KABUL, JUNE 10. Eleven Chinese construction workers on a World Bank project were shot dead in an attack yesterday in Afghanistan — the largest number of foreigners to be killed since the end of the war with the Taliban in 2001. The killings raised new concerns about security for the upcoming national elections, still officially scheduled for late September.

A group of about eight armed men entered the compound 32 km from the city of Kunduz, where the workers were sleeping in tents, and opened fire indiscriminately. After 10 minutes of shooting, 11 Chinese men lay dead and five wounded.

The men, who worked for the China Railway Shisju group, were helping to build the Kunduz-Baghlan road, a \$22m project sponsored by the World Bank. The attack caused widespread shock as the area had previously been regarded as one of the safest, and not normally associated with the Taliban.

Jean Arnault, the U.N. special representative for Afghanistan, condemned "in the strongest possible terms this cold-blooded attack."

The Chinese president, Hu Jintao, also condemned the at-

tacks, which he described as "inhumane and brutal." Most of the men had arrived at the site the previous day.

The electoral registration sites in the state were immediately closed. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which has recently opened a base in the area and which consists of NATO and other forces, moved troops to the compound yesterday.

Also yesterday, a UN anti-narcotics vehicle was hit in a bomb attack, although no one was hurt. The attack took place at Taloqan in Takhar province.

No one has yet claimed responsibility for the murders of the Chinese workers. One early suspect is the Hezb-i-Islami group, which has linked up with the Taliban against President Hamid Karzai and the election process.

Last week, five members of Medicines sans Frontiers were killed in the Baghdis Province, again not an area seen as a major risk. More than 60 people, including Taliban fighters, U.S. soldiers and foreign aid workers, have been killed in clashes or attacks in the past 10 days.

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US review of Afghan jail abuse

Associated Press
Kabul, May 22

THE US military on Saturday named a long-serving brigadier-general to carry out a review of its secretive Afghan prisons, while officials in Washington revealed the deaths of two more people in custody here.

Brig Gen Charles H. Jacoby, deputy operational commander at the US military's main base at Bagram, north of Kabul, will carry out the

"top to bottom" review and deliver a report by mid-June, spokesman Lt-Col. Tucker Mansager said.

The overall commander of the 20,000 US-led forces pursuing Taliban and al-Qaida militants in Afghanistan, Lt-Gen. David Barno, ordered the review this month in response to the growing scandal about prisoner abuse in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Jacoby is to visit each of the American detention centres, including the main jail

at Bagram and others at smaller bases "to ensure internationally accepted standards of handling detainees are being met", Mansager said.

"He'll ensure facilities are adequate, procedures are in accordance with the spirit of the Geneva Conventions and are being followed correctly and fully, and that staffing and capabilities are adequate to the task", he said. "Portions" of the report would be made public, the spokesman said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES 29 MAY 2001

US Gen reviews Afghan prisons

25/5
Hr- 15
Afghan
Associated Press
Kabul, May 24

AN AMERICAN General has begun his review of secretive US jails in Afghanistan where at least three prisoners died and former detainees say they were abused, the military said on Monday.

The military announced the sweeping review of its jails last week. Brig.-Gen. Charles Jacoby, deputy operational commander at its main base at Bagram, was appointed to carry out the work by mid-June.

"Gen. Jacoby is now into about the third day of the top-to-bottom review of all the coalition's detainee facilities and procedures", Lt-Col. Tucker

Mansager said. He added that the General had visited two jails at military bases but declined to say which ones.

Overall commander of the 20,000 US-led forces pursuing Taliban and al-Qaida militants in Afghanistan Lt-Gen. David Bar-no ordered the review earlier this month in response to the growing scandal about prisoner abuse in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Incursions into Pak

The US military on Monday denied that its troops in Afghanistan had made incursions into Pakistan, which a senior Pakistani official has condemned as "totally unacceptable".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 MAY 2004

Dostum forces seize north city

9/4 *AKS*
Kabul, April 8 (Reuters): Forces of a renegade adviser to President Hamid Karzai overran the capital of a northern province today, creating a fresh security headache for Afghanistan's western-backed government.

General Abdul Rashid Dostum's largely ethnic Uzbek militia invaded Faryab from neighbouring provinces yesterday, prompting the central government to send national troops there today in an attempt to maintain control.

"Dostum loyalists have entered Maimana city," interior minister Ali Ahmad Jalali said. "This is an unconstitutional act of interference by General Dostum."

He said the commander of the Maimana's military forces General Mohammad Hashim Habibi had left the city with his men, while the governor, Anayatullah Anayat, was at the airport.

Jalali said the first batch of a force of 750 national army troops had already arrived in Maimana. "With the deployment of the national army, the situation will improve," he said.

Presidential spokesman Jawed Ludin said an emergency National Security Council meeting chaired by Karzai had heard the city fell "to irresponsible armed individuals from neighbouring provinces and areas around Maimana".

"They should withdraw from the area immediately," he said.

UN spokesman Manoel de Almeida e Silva said United Nations staff in Maimana had reported fighting there but he had no details.

According to a spokeswoman for the British military, Flight Lieutenant Emma Matthews, members of a British civilian-military Provincial Reconstruction Team were in Maimana and would assist the Afghan authorities in stabilising the situation. "There have been no injuries among coalition forces and we are not aware of any civilian injuries," she said. A soldier from Habibi's provincial militia said the general was currently in Belcheragh, about 40 km east of Maimana. The government has defended Anayat as its legitimate representative in Faryab. "General Dostum is an adviser to the President," Ludin said. "However, that does not give him the right to deploy forces or get involved in any military operational issues."

THE TELEGRAPH

' 9 APR ' 2008

US serves ultimatum to Pak on Taliban

Washington: Asserting that terrorists continue to operate from Pakistan, the US has asked Islamabad to root out Taliban sanctuaries or else it will have to step in. Extremists are still able to "base, train and operate from that country's (Pakistan's) territory," US ambassador to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad said on Monday, warning "we cannot allow this problem to fester indefinitely".

"Unless Pakistan roots out Taliban sanctuaries, it will be difficult to fully eliminate security problems in the south and east of Afghanistan," he told Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a major think tank here.

"We have told the Pakistani leadership that either they solve this problem or we will have to do it ourselves. We prefer that Pakistan takes the responsibility, and the Pakistan government agrees," he said. Pakistan reacted to the statements angrily, saying they were uncalled for and unwanted. "The remarks are uncalled for and unwanted," foreign office acting spokesman Abbas Jilani said. Jilani said ambassador Khalilzad was not aware of Washington's stand on Pakistan's role against terror. In his remarks, Khalilzad said the US-led coalition was prepared to help President Pervez Musharraf, adding, "one way or

the other, this problem will have to be dealt with".

Jilani said the US had always appreciated Pakistan's efforts in eliminating terrorist infrastructure and Taliban elements, adding that statements like the one by the US envoy may lead to political problems for Pakistan. Pakistan information minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed also rejected the US envoy's warning say-

ing Pakistani forces are fully capable of confronting terrorists. "The United States must realise ground realities," the state-run PTV quoted Rashid as saying. "We will deal with terrorists on our homeland," Rashid said adding, "Pakistan does not need foreign forces to act on our soil and Pakistan will not allow anybody for such action".

Khalilzad, who had angered Pakistan by charging that the Taliban and Al Qaida fugitives were launching attacks into Afghanistan from Pakistani soil, acknowledged Islamabad's recent army deployment into tribal areas to destroy Taliban sanctuaries along the Afghan border as "positive and hopeful".

Khalilzad said that the Taliban were continuing to destabilise Afghanistan but they were not succeeding. "They have not been able to establish a popularly-supported insurgency," he said. Agencies



Afghan polls will be held in Sept: Karzai

By Sayed Salahuddin

Kabul: Afghanistan's presidential and parliamentary elections, originally planned for June, will be in September, President Hamid Karzai said on Sunday, as fresh attacks underlined the security worries behind the delay.

Announcing the agreement on September elections on the eve of a trip to Berlin for an aid donors' conference, Karzai said election security would be one of the main issues he would raise at the meeting.

As he spoke, news was reaching Kabul from a remote central province of a Taliban raid on an army post that killed at least two soldiers, while a series of blasts in a southeastern town killed a suicide bomber and wounded six people.

The decision on September polls came after the United Nations said both the presidential and parliamentary elections could not be held in June, as outlined in an international agreement that brought Karzai to power in late 2001. Instead, the UN and Afghan election authorities had recommended both elections be held in September. "They said that they can hold the presidential and parliamentary elections simultaneously, which was the wish of all of us," Karzai told reporters, referring to the UN and the Afghan election committee.

"Therefore, they have proposed the dates of late Mizan (early September) and Sunbola (mid September) and we have agreed with them and said that it is OK," he said. The timing and conduct of the

Afghan election is important as analysts believe US President George W. Bush is looking to the polls for a foreign policy success story ahead of his own re-election bid in November. Under the 2001 Bonn agreement that led to the establishment of Karzai's government, elections were seen in June, but that date was no longer considered viable given slow registration of voters and security worries.

The UN says only 1.46 million voters were registered by March 15, far short of the target of 10.5 million people. Poor security is a main reason for the slow registration. The UN had suggested a July election

might not provide enough time to organise security to ensure a safe vote, a presidential spokesman said last week.

"The UN says that the later the election is held, the safer it is likely to be," said the spokesman, Jawed Ludin. Security worries were heightened

by recent fighting between pro-government factions in the western city of Herat, until then considered one of the most peaceful parts of the country. The Taliban, driven from power by US-led forces in 2001, have already threatened to disrupt the polls and more than 600 people have been killed in militant-related violence in the south and east of the country since last August.

A Taliban spokesman said in a statement issued late on Saturday, a delay in the elections was an embarrassment for the United States and the Karzai government, and the election was aimed at distracting Afghans from jihad, or Muslim holy war. Reuters

Prolonged Agony



- President worries about election security
- The timing and conduct of polls important for Bush
- Taliban threatens to disrupt the election

Affhamber

HD-10
9/11/2

A NEW BEGINNING

THE PEOPLE OF Afghanistan embarked on a course they have never before charted in their history when their representatives adopted a new Constitution at a *Loya Jirga*. The endorsement of the Constitution was in itself an achievement since ethnic divisions and attitudinal differences among the delegates had brought the deliberations to the verge of collapse on at least a couple of occasions. These differences have not been completely resolved. However, the delegates made the commendable decision to approve the document with the hope and confidence that the residual disputes will be resolved over time. As the delegates got to their feet to adopt the Constitution by acclamation, they signified that the Afghans were preparing themselves to live by a democratic order for the first time ever. The new dispensation in Afghanistan is under pressure from within and from outside. The warlords who wield power in different parts of the country will have to continue to make compromises if the new order is to survive the threat from the remnants of the Taliban and other forces that cannot countenance the emergence of a democratic era.

That pragmatism and a willingness to accommodate the concerns of all groups are not at a premium is evident from the decisions taken at the *Loya Jirga* and other attendant developments. Those warlords, such as the Uzbek General Abdul Rashid Dostum, who had once driven ethnic minorities away from the areas under their control have now agreed to allow these internal refugees to return. The Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group in the country, gave up their effort to impose their language on other groups. They agreed that Dari would have the same national language status as Pashto and also that the mother tongues of the linguistic minorities would be official languages in the ar-

reas where these groups are concentrated. President Hamid Karzai, who had earlier insisted that his office should be all-powerful so as to ensure the unity of the country, softened his stance during the course of the *Jirga*. He accepted parliamentary supervision over senior appointments and over some spheres of policy. An accommodative spirit was displayed by the *Jirga* overall when the members of a traditionally male-dominated society endorsed provisions that are beneficial to women. They approved articles of the draft constitution that grant equal citizenship to women and reserve for them a quarter of the seats in the lower of the two chambers of parliament.

It augurs well for the future of Afghanistan that the various groups were able to reconcile their differences in a relatively short period of three weeks. However, the Constitution has several in-built frailties that will have to be addressed over time. The most significant of these fault lines lie in the provisions that seek to balance the conflicting demands of democracy and religion. While the Constitution does not enshrine the *Shariah* as the source of the law, it does prohibit legislation that is repugnant to Islam. The longevity of the democratic order might well depend on the character and calibre of the senior judges who will be appointed to the Supreme Court to be formed. Afghanistan's future can only become more secure when institutions such as an independent judiciary and a national army are established. However, the establishment of the mechanism of governance will not be sufficient to enthuse the Afghans to work the constitutional scheme. They will embrace the new democratic order only when they are certain that they can run their affairs free from foreign intervention. Afghanistan's history contains ample proof that the powers that deny freedom to the people of this country do so at their peril.

THE HINDU . . . 19 JAN 2004

9 JAN 2004

Birth of a nation ✓

5/16 The many colours of Afghanistan 8/1/04

A giant step was taken towards stability and hope in Afghanistan when the *loya jirga*, or grand tribal assembly meeting in Kabul, agreed on a new constitution for the country. Elections for a new president as well as a two-chamber national assembly will be held within six months, a revolutionary step for a society that has seen monarchy followed by Communist and theocratic dictatorship. Even more revolutionary, perhaps, is that in a macho society like Afghanistan women have not only been granted equal rights but 25 per cent of all seats in the lower assembly. Although Afghanistan has been declared an Islamic republic, civil law has been held to be applicable. Elections should strengthen the government by making it widely representative and inclusive of the Pashtuns, who are the majority in the country and used to being its political elite, but who have been excluded from the present set-up. The marginalization of the Pashtuns has led to many of them supporting Taliban attempts to make a comeback; hopefully disaffected Pashtuns can now be re-channelized into democratic politics which ought to cool their ardour for a Taliban return. Afghanistan

Now that a constitution has been agreed upon it is crucial, however, that it be implemented. It confers considerable powers on the president, but the reality is that the government's writ does not run much beyond Kabul, and local warlords hold sway elsewhere. These warlords have to be persuaded to give up power to the president — easier said than done. The only hope for rebuilding Afghanistan, however, lies in demilitarizing the country — international donors are not going to open their purse-strings if they are convinced that their largesse will become some warlord's booty. One positive sign is that many of the warlords were present at the *loya jirga* deliberations and agreed to the final shape of the constitution, which acknowledges minority rights and regional interests by giving minority tribes the right to teach their own languages within their own regions. Given the regressive changes that have been made recently in Pakistan, whereby parliament now sits at Musharraf's will, Pakistan now has a thing or two to learn from Afghanistan about a democratic constitution that balances rights.

Loya jirga hammers out charter of cohesion

Agencies

KABUL, Jan. 4. — Afghanistan's constitutional convention agreed upon a historic new charter on Sunday to hammer out a compromise meant to bind together the war-ravaged nation's mosaic of ethnic groups.

Just a day after warning that the meeting was heading towards a humiliating failure, chairman of the council or loya jirga Sibghatullah Mujaddedi told the 502 delegates in the Afghan capital that the last-ditch diplomacy had secured a deal. "We are very happy that all the members have reached a very successful agreement," Mujaddedi said.

A new draft circulated among the members showed that northern minority languages had been granted official status in their strongholds, an issue which had brought the meeting close to collapse. The new document enshrines a presidential system, with two vice-presidential posts, and declares

Afghanistan an "Islamic republic".

UN Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi and US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad hailed the accord. "It's a huge success for the people of Afghanistan," Brahimi said, though he added that there was work to do to repair the "bruises" from the ethnic debate. "It's a good framework," Khalilzad said. President Hamid Karzai and ex-king Mohammed Zaher Shah were to join the gathering later on Sunday to oversee the official ratification of the charter — apparently without a final vote. Mujaddedi ruled out further floor debate. "The changes have been discussed already. If you find any mistake in writing or dictation of the articles you can discuss and correct it with council officials."

Sidiq Chakari, a Tajik delegate and spokesman for faction leader and former President Burhanuddin Rabbani, who had taken part in a boycott on Thursday, said the deal was a milestone on the way to peace.

AFGHANISTAN / DIPLOMACY WINS DEAL

FD-19

5/1 Charter approved by consensus

KABUL, JAN. 4. Afghanistan's *loya jirga*, or grand assembly, approved a new Constitution by consensus on Sunday, paving the way for the country's first full democratic elections later this year.

After weeks of wrangling over the powers of the President, the assembly Chairman, Sibghatullah Mujaddedi, asked delegates to stand to show their endorsement of the Constitution. An overwhelming majority did so, signifying its adoption.

"We wanted consensus on the Constitution, not voting," the Afghanistan Vice-President, Nematullah Shahrani, the head of Constitution Drafting Committee, told the assembly.

The new charter is the latest step in a drive to bring stability and build a new state after a United States-led invasion drove the Taliban from power at the end of 2001. Since the war, an American-backed Afghan Government has been created, and national elections are supposed to take place this year under the new Constitution.

However, the country's progress has been slowed by powerful regional warlords, a fresh wave of violence by Taliban and Al-Qaeda insurgents, and drug trafficking.

The agreement, which seeks to hammer out a compromise

to bind together the war-ravaged nation's mosaic of ethnic groups, came after weeks of division and mistrust.

Just a day after warning that the *loya jirga* was heading toward a humiliating failure, Mr. Mujaddedi told the 502 delegates gathered under a giant tent in the Afghan capital that last-ditch diplomacy had secured the comprehensive deal.

"We are very happy that all the members of the *loya jirga* have reached a very successful agreement," Mr. Mujaddedi said. He gave no details of how an impasse over whether to grant official status to minority languages, an issue which brought the meeting close to collapse, had been solved. But he said a new draft of the document would be distributed to the delegates shortly and that the President, Hamid Karzai, would join the gathering to oversee the charter's official ratification.

The accord is expected to give the U.S.-backed Mr. Karzai the strong presidential system he had insisted on. Mr. Karzai has argued strongly for a dominant chief executive to hold the country together as it rebuilds and reconciles after more than two decades of war, and said he wouldn't run again if he didn't get his way. — AP

THE HINDU

JAN. 2002

Afghanistan stands up for free elections



Women delegates to Afghanistan's constitutional Loya Jirga read newspapers at the venue tent prior to the start of the day's session in Kabul on Sunday. (Reuters)

Kabul, Jan. 4 (Reuters): Afghanistan's Loya Jirga, or Grand Assembly, passed a new constitution by consensus today, paving the way for the country's first full democratic elections later this year.

After weeks of wrangling over the powers of the President, assembly chairman Sibghatullah Mojaddidi asked delegates to stand to show their endorsement of the constitution. An overwhelming majority did so, signifying its adoption.

"We wanted consensus on the constitution, not voting," Afghan Vice-President Nematullah Shahrani, the head of constitutional drafting committee, told the assembly.

"We came close to a major problem, but it was resolved by the people of Afghanistan," Mojaddidi told the 502 delegates

meeting under a giant white tent on a college campus in Kabul.

"We are hoping to be able to unite together as one nation and to be able to overcome challenges of the future."

He did not give details on how the deadlock was resolved but said the full assembly would approve the charter later in the day, ending three weeks of debate on the role of Islam, rights of women and the political system in post-Taliban Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's last constitution was drawn up in 1964. Since then, the country has lived through Soviet occupation, catastrophic civil war and five years of hardline Taliban rule, leaving it in desperate need of stability.

The assembly has run for 22 days instead of the 10 envisaged by President Hamid Karzai, with UN and US officials working be-

hind the scenes to broker a deal. The threat of violence against a woman delegate and accusations of meddling by ministers marred the proceedings. A low point came on Thursday, when nearly half the 502 delegates boycotted the first and only ballot, complaining the pro-Karzai bloc had dropped their proposed amendments.

Karzai, a Pashtun, who like his backers in Washington argued for sweeping powers to rebuild his war-weary country, will get his wish of a strong presidency, but one that will answer to parliament on certain issues.

Opposition to Karzai at the Loya Jirga was orchestrated by members of the mainly Tajik North Alliance that helped the US military topple the Taliban in late 2001 and which remains the backbone of his government.

Afghan constitution council deadlocked

47-15
21/1/04
THE CONSTITUTIONAL grand council, or loya-jirga, adjourned in disarray on Thursday, leaving the entire process of drawing up a new constitution badly damaged.

The crisis has revealed a bitter struggle between the leaders of the country, with President Hamid Karzai and his Pashtun kinsmen on one side, and on the other the Islamist leaders and ethnic minorities of the north, who are seeking to preserve some of their wartime power.

Officials in the US-backed

government tried to break the deadlock by putting five amendments to the vote.

But the tactic backfired when a great number of the 502 delegates, mostly from the ethnic minorities of northern Afghanistan, refused to vote. In the end only 264 people cast votes, enough for a quorum.

They are determined that the national anthem be in the two languages, Dari and Pashto, rather than Pashto alone, and that the Uzbeks be given language rights.

NYT, Kabul

CHENNAI

AFGHANISTAN / MEET ADJOURNED

Consensus eludes Loya Jirga

HD-19
M

KABUL, JAN. 1. Afghanistan's marathon constitutional convention was adjourned until Saturday in a desperate bid to reach a consensus amid a boycott by opponents of the U.S.-backed President, Hamid Karzai.

The decision, taken on Thursday after scores of delegates refused to take part in a vote on several amendments to the draft charter, was the latest setback for the historic gathering, which has already been marred by acrimony and a dangerous ethnic rift.

Opponents are particularly angry over Mr. Karzai's insistence on the creation of a strong presidency, which they say could shut minorities out of the halls of power.

Officials said more than half of the 502 members of the *Loya Jirga* cast their ballots in voting on Thursday — enough to make the results binding. But after hours of behind-the-scenes wrangling, the meeting was called off until Saturday to allow

more time to seek a compromise.

Mr. Karzai insisted a simple majority of those voting was enough to pass the charter, but most observers recognise that a constitution that doesn't win wide-ranging support will hamstring the country as it seeks to put two decades of devastating conflict behind it.

Meanwhile, U.S. troops and helicopters killed as many as 14 insurgents in clashes in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan, the military said today. Three U.S. soldiers were wounded in the battle yesterday some 20 km northeast of Shkin, a town in Paktika province near the Pakistan border.

The first three militants were killed in a gunbattle after a small group of insurgents fired on a U.S. patrol, a spokesman said.

The same patrol later found the insurgents, and AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters flying in support inflicted several more casualties, he said. — AP

THE HINDU

02 JAN 2004