

# Taliban still operating in Pakistan: U.S. report

B. Muralidhar Reddy

**ISLAMABAD:** The 9/11 Commission of the United States has said that Taliban forces still operate freely in the Pakistani tribal areas and terrorists from Pakistan carry out operations in Kashmir. It has urged the Bush Administration to pressure Islamabad to shut down Taliban linked religious institutions and shut down terrorist training camps.

In its latest report on the status of the 9/11 Commission recommendations (www.9-11pdp.org) the Commission has said the U.S. Assistance to Pakistan must move beyond security assistance and focus on reform of the failing basic education system.

## Original recommendation

The report recalled the original recommendation made by the Commission vis-à-vis Pakistan. It reads, "If Musharraf stands for enlightened moderation in a fight for his life and for the life of his country, the United States should be willing to make hard choices too, and make the difficult long-term commitment to the future of Pakistan. Sustaining the current scale of aid to Pakistan, the United States should support Pakistan's Government in its struggle against extremists with a comprehensive effort that extends from military aid to support for a better education, so long as Pakistan's leaders remain willing to



**ON THE TRAIL:** Pakistani soldiers patrol the border with Afghanistan at Teera, in search of Taliban operatives, in this file photo. - PHOTO: AP

make difficult choices of their own." While noting that there was "some progress" in implementation of the recommendation it said there is still little movement beyond security assistance. It has lamented that too much of U.S. assistance is in the form of a cash transfer and funding to improve education in Pakistan is still far from sufficient.

The report said the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 provided sense of Congress language supportive of the Commission's recommendations and maintained that increases in the 2006 budget and a five-year \$3 billion package of assistance are encouraging signs of a long-term commitment to Pakistan.

"Musharraf has made real efforts to take on the threat from

extremism, yet Pakistan remains a sanctuary and training ground for terrorists.

Gen. Musharraf does not appear to have lived up to his promises to regulate the madrasahs properly or close down all those that are known to have links to extremist groups. "Taliban forces still pass freely across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and operate in Pakistani tribal areas. Terrorists from Pakistan carry out operations in Kashmir. Finally, the results of promised democratisation efforts are yet to be seen", it noted.

The Commission has said rapid U.S. aid in response to the devastating October 8 earthquake has enhanced the U.S. standing in Pakistan and many elements of Pakistani society see such aid as a sign of strong U.S. commitment.

THE HINDU

# First elected Afghan parliament in three decades sworn in

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ASSOCIATED PRESS  
KABUL, DECEMBER 19

AFGHANISTAN'S first popularly elected parliament in more than three decades convened today, marking a major step toward democracy following the ouster of the hardline Taliban. US Vice-President Dick Cheney flew in to attend the opening session, which was held under intense security.

The session began with a reading from the Quran, the national anthem and a folk-song by schoolgirls



dressed in brightly colored robes. After the delegates were sworn in, President Hamid Karzai called the gathering a display of Afghan unity. "This gathering shows that all of the people of Afghanistan are unified," Karzai said. "This is an important step toward democracy." He said the ap-

proval of a constitution and the establishment of the national assembly "bring us all under one roof to discuss our problems". The 249-seat body is made up of an eclectic mix of tribal leaders, westernised former refugees, warlords, women and ethnic minorities, in itself a victory for a nation recovering from a ruinous civil war. Afghans voted for the Lower House in September, and also elected provincial councils that then chose two-thirds of the 102-seat upper chamber. Karzai appointed the remaining 34.

# Nation will rise like the Phoenix: Karzai

Emotional scenes in Parliament; warlords, Taliban defectors and women activists take oath

*Afghanistan 19-11 20/12*

**KABUL:** Warlords, former Communists, Taliban defectors and women activists were sworn in on Monday as members of the first Afghan Parliament in more than 30 years amid hopes of national reconciliation after decades of bloodshed.

The inauguration, which passed peacefully despite Taliban threats, was greeted with tears of emotion despite widespread disappointment at a Parliament filled with factional leaders blamed for serious human rights abuses.

President Hamid Karzai thanked God for giving Afghanistan the chance to take control of its destiny again after swearing in the 249 members of the Wolesi Jirga, or lower House, and 102 members of the upper House, or Meshrano Jirga.

"This meeting is a sign of us regaining our honour," he said.

"We have the right to tell those who are after the destruction of this water and soil that this homeland will exist for ever!" he declared, prompting tears from many delegates.

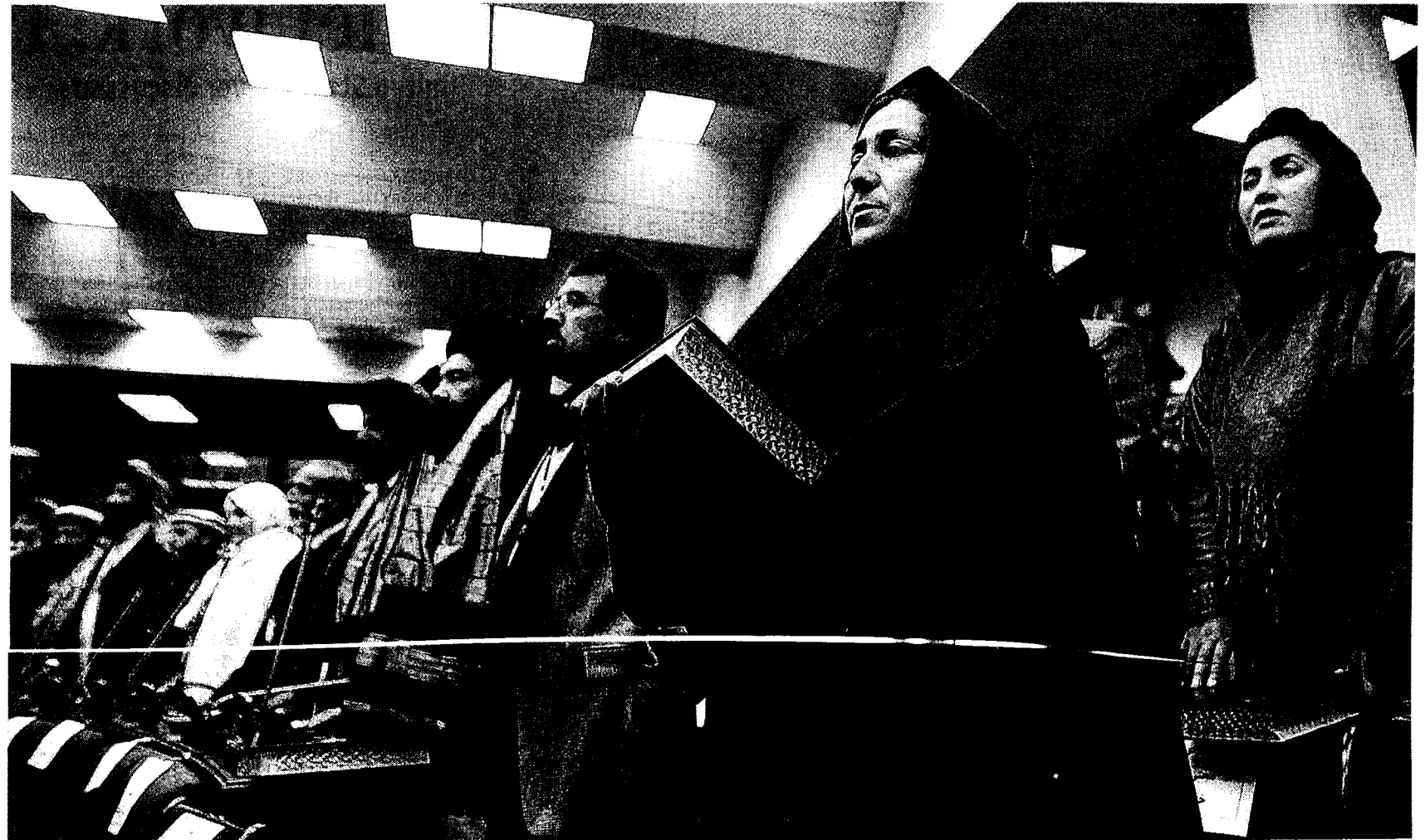
## Call for unity

"Without ethnic and regional discrimination we must work for the welfare and prosperity of Afghanistan. This is our right to get united and struggle collectively for the regaining of the honour of this Phoenix, Afghanistan", the President said.

Mr. Karzai urged national reconciliation and reiterated a call to the Taliban to abandon their militancy, which has intensified in the past year despite his efforts to encourage defections.

Mr. Karzai called upon the parliamentarians to serve the people honestly and take the nation towards prosperity.

"This is your responsibility to serve the people of Afghanistan without discrimination in line with the guidance of Islam the religion and the Constitution," Mr. Karzai told the Members of Parliament while administering their oath.



**HOPES OF RECONCILIATION:** Afghan Parliament members put their hands on copies of the Holy Koran as they are sworn in in Kabul on Monday. - PHOTO: AFP

Majority of the 351 members of the two-chamber House are former foes who fought against each other for power and had been involved in the past 25 years of civil strife in the country.

## Achievements hailed

As a precautionary measure, all the roads leading to the Parliament House as well as important government buildings were closed and vehicles entering the city were checked.

Afghan troops and police

backed by the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the U.S.-dominated coalition forces stationed themselves in sensitive areas in the city besides patrolling the streets.

Hailing the achievements made by his Government in the past four years, Mr. Karzai said: "Afghanistan is no more the isolated country as it was during Taliban regime.

"Today, we have Parliament, we have legitimate government, we have \$1.5 billion foreign ex-

change reserve and we have the international support in rebuilding our country."

## Foreign policy issue

Over 6.5 million Afghan girls and boys had begun going to school since the collapse of the Taliban four years ago while the strength of the Afghan National Army has reached over 34,000, he said.

"It is essential to have a strong army and air force to defend the country's geographical borders," he said.

On the Government's foreign policy, Mr. Karzai said: "Our foreign policy is based on non-interference in others' internal affairs and respect for international law."

Afghanistan wants friendly relations with the Islamic countries, strategic cooperation with the Western world and enhanced relations with the regional nations, he said.

"Our relations with the United States is based on mutual cooperation and strategic partnership as both countries are

fighting terrorism and supporting liberalisation of economy," he said.

U.S. Vice-President Dick Cheney, who arrived after a visit to Washington's more troubled front in Iraq to attend the inauguration, wrote in a commemoration book it was a "historic day for the people of Afghanistan".

While the inauguration passed peacefully, militants killed three policemen on Monday at a frontier post in Kunar province bordering Pakistan. — Xinhua, Reuters

# Taliban exploits drug trade to step up Afghan attacks

It appears that the Taliban, which had condemned opium as "un-Islamic," has turned to the billion-dollar drugs trade to earn money and undermine the authority of the Hamid Karzai Government.

Declan Walsh  
M1, 10-11  
RESURGENT TALIBAN forces have forged an alliance with drug smugglers in the lawless Afghan province of Helmand, underscoring a worrying slide in security. Community elders and police officials say the Taliban has flooded remote villages with "night letters" ordering farmers to grow poppy. "The notices are pinned to mosque doors or shop windows," said community leader Haji Nazaraullah.

"They say 'cultivate the poppy or we will come and kill you,'" he said in Khanishin, a remote village bordering a vast desert crisscrossed with smuggling tracks. "A lot of people are very scared."

The intimidation suggests the Taliban, which had condemned opium as "un-Islamic," has turned to the billion-dollar drugs trade to earn money and undermine the fragile authority of President Hamid Karzai's Kabul-based Government.

## More NATO troops likely

Last week Ministers of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) countries agreed to deploy an additional 6,000 soldiers to the south, allowing the United States to withdraw 4,000 troops. NATO's exact mandate remains unclear — until now the forces have been purely peacekeepers — and a rise in Taliban attacks has caused jitters among the United Kingdom's allies.

The Dutch have demanded guarantees of U.S. military back-up in the event of any serious attack before committing 1,000 troops to troubled Uruzgan province. In Helmand, a small British team has arrived in the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah, to prepare for expected deployment. Its members have already witnessed the insecurity.

British Army Major Shawn Pendry was part of a U.S. convoy ambushed twice in an hour on November 30 in northern Helmand. The convoy returned safely. But like other British officers, Maj. Pendry was under orders not to discuss the mission in the increasingly unstable province.

One of the most critical decisions the U.K. commander will take is how to tackle the

burgeoning narcotics trade.

Last year, Helmand grew more opium than any other province. Its deserts are the hub of a smuggling network that stretches into Pakistan and Iran.

Smugglers and militants have a history of cooperation along the lawless border, said Lt. Col. Jim Hogberg, the U.S. commander in Helmand.

But the most powerful drug lords are widely believed to include top officials in the provincial government and senior police officers. American forces have so far avoided confrontation.

"We've adopted a devil-you-know approach," said one U.S. official. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

Indian slain, glare on Taliban backers

# Blood on road to bypass Pak

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, Nov. 23: For Maniappan Raman Kutty's family of five, his death means the loss of a son, husband, father and the sole breadwinner.

For the government in Delhi, though the Prime Minister described him as a "brave Indian, who was working in the cause of peace", the 36-year-old's murder could be fraught with political implications.

After news reached of Maniappan's decapitated body having been found dumped by the roadside by villagers in Afghanistan's southwestern Nimroze province, Delhi warned the Taliban and "its backers" that they should be prepared to face the consequences of this "barbaric" act.

"He has been slaughtered. His throat has been cut," a local Afghan official had said earlier.

Maniappan was kidnapped last Saturday, 10 days after the driver went to work in the Border Roads Organisation (BRO)'s project to build a 219-km road.

The road will help India bypass Pakistan in reaching its goods to various parts of Afghanistan after shipping them to a port in Iran.

"The Border Roads Organisation is engaged in building a road in Afghanistan that is vital for its development and the welfare of its people. It is inconceivable that anybody should be opposed to it and



Maniappan

threaten those working on it," the external affairs ministry said.

For strategic reasons, India is seeking a toehold in Afghanistan, which Pakistan does not want. The road project is among several Delhi is funding and building, for which Pakistan has not even given it transit rights to ferry material, let alone personnel.

The use of the words "the Taliban and its backers" has, therefore, triggered speculation if Delhi is pointing a finger across the border — not possibly at Pervez Musharraf but at other elements in Pakistan who have had close ties with the Taliban.

"We strongly condemn this inhuman and barbaric act against an innocent person. The Taliban and its backers bear the responsibility for the consequences of this outrageous act," said the statement by the ministry.

A note pinned to Maniappan's body written in English has also raised suspicions in

Delhi since most people in Afghanistan and, particularly, the Taliban do not know the language.

"We have the paper. It's in English so we cannot read it now," a provincial Afghan official was quoted as saying.

Purported Taliban spokesman Qari Mohammed Yousef had claimed yesterday that the rebels had shot Maniappan because the BRO had not agreed to the kidnappers' demand to pull out of Afghanistan. The Indian embassy said the Taliban never got in touch with it.

Maniappan's body is expected to be flown to Delhi tomorrow and later to his home at Chingoli in Kerala, where he leaves behind his elderly parents, wife and two young children. Maniappan was his parents' only son.

Some 300 other Maniappans are working in the road project, which India is not going to abandon. Security arrangements will be reassessed and work at isolated points on the highway will be halted until that is over.

"Our prayers are with the family (of Maniappan)," said Manmohan Singh, who received a call from Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Karzai expressed his condolences and assured Singh of steps to strengthen security for Indians working there.

The government announced Rs 10 lakh as compensation to Maniappan's family and free education up to the secondary level for his children.

■ See Page 8

# Indian taken hostage in Afghanistan

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## Man was working on major road project; Taliban hand suspected

Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI:** An Indian driver working on a major road project being executed by India's Border Roads Organisation (BRO) in southwestern Afghanistan has gone missing and is presumed to have been kidnapped by the Taliban.

The Reuters news agency in Kandahar received a telephone call from a man claiming to represent the Taliban. He said his group had seized the Indian along with an Afghan driver and two Afghan security guards. Xinhua, in a report from Kabul, quoted the Taliban's spokesman, Qari Yusuf Ahmadi, as saying that the outfit had given the BRO an ultimatum to leave the country in 48 hours.

"We don't yet have any confirmation [of the identity of the kidnapers]," Rakesh Sood, India's Ambassador to Afghanistan, told *The Hindu* on Sunday. "The Afghan authorities are looking after the investigation but at this stage they are not saying whether the kidnapers are really Taliban or local criminal elements." Nor was there any information about the kidnapers' demands, he added.

• **"We have him," Reuters quotes Taliban spokesman as saying**

• **Identity of abductors not clear nor are their demands known: Indian Ambassador**

The driver, M.R. Kutty, went missing on Saturday in the Khash Rod district of Nimroz province. "We have him," Reuters quoted Taliban spokesman Qari Mohammad Yousuf as saying in a satellite phone call placed from an undisclosed location.

Mr. Kutty is among an estimated 300 Indians working on the strategic 218-km road, which will link the main Kandahar-Herat highway in Afghanistan to the Iran border. The Rs. 377 crore project is being funded by India. It will provide the landlocked nation with a shorter route to the sea via the Iranian port of Chabahar than it now has through Pakistan.

Iran, India and Afghanistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding in January 2003 to

improve Afghanistan's access to the coast. Under this, Iran is building a new transit route to connect Milak in the southeast of the country to Zaranj in Afghanistan and has already completed a key bridge over the Helmand River. For its part, India is building a new road connecting Zaranj to Delaram, which is on the main Herat-Kandahar road. These projects will shorten the transit distance between Chabahar and Delaram by some 600-700 km.

According to Mr. Sood, the BRO started inducting people for the project last December and the work began in January. He said southwest Afghanistan was a region where a fair amount of criminal activity took place and it would be "premature" to see Saturday's kidnapping as part of any wider effort to scuttle the road project.

MEA officials said the Afghan authorities had been asked to increase security for the Indians working on the project. In December 2003, two Indians working on a U.S.-funded road project in Afghanistan were kidnapped but later released unharmed. Their kidnapers were not believed to be Taliban.

THE HINDU

# Former Afghan commanders, Taliban leaders win seats

Parliament expected to hold first session in December

**KABUL:** Final results of Afghanistan's legislative elections show several former commanders of military factions, three old Taliban officials, women activists and several ex-Communists won seats in the new Parliament.

The results of the September 18 vote for the 249-seat lower House, or *Wolesi Jirga*, and Councils in all 34 provinces were finally released on Saturday, after being delayed by a slow count and accusations of vote fraud.

"We have now completed certification of all final results for both the *Wolesi Jirga* and the provincial Council elections," said a statement by Bissmillah Bissmil, chairman of the U.N.-Afghan Joint Electoral Management Body.

Parliament is expected to sit for the first time next month in a renovated old Assembly building.

One of Parliament's key jobs will be to approve or veto the nomination of Cabinet members.

An election for a new upper House is expected to be completed by the end of this month.

## Polls a milestone

Mr. Bissmil described the polls, the first in decades in war-torn Afghanistan, as a milestone in the country's transition to democracy.

The U.N.-organised elections were held on a non-party basis, with all 5,800 candidates running as independents, raising fears that a fragmented Parliament will emerge, with members focused on parochial issues as they compete for government resources.

President Hamid Karzai has no political party and stayed out

of the fray, although several supporters, including two relatives, won parliamentary seats.

Yunus Qanuni, leader of an alliance of parties opposed to the U.S.-backed President, also won a seat.

The former Interior and Education Minister in Karzai's Government came a distant second to Mr. Karzai in the October 2004 presidential election.

## Based on ethnic lines

Mr. Qanuni's brother Haji Baryali said Mr. Qanuni and his allies had hoped to win up to half the seats in Parliament but it was unclear if they had achieved that goal.

Mr. Qanuni is an ethnic Tajik and a senior leader of an alliance that helped U.S.-led forces topple the Taliban in 2001, whereas Mr. Karzai is a Pashtun, the largest ethnic group and the one from which most Taliban were drawn.

The vote was mostly based on ethnic lines because of the dominance of the tribes in their respective regions. Turnout was 6.8 million of about 12 million registered voters.

Among others who won seats in the *Wolesi Jirga* were former president Burhanuddin Rabbani, a conservative ethnic-Tajik cleric from the north who is seen as a Mr. Karzai supporter and, according to associates, wants to become chairman of the Parliament.

## Warlords in

Several old armed faction commanders, labelled warlords and accused of war crimes by rights groups, also won seats.

Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq, from the Shia Muslim Hazara

ethnic minority, won most votes in Kabul province.

Mr. Mohaqiq's faction was involved in years of civil war in the 1990s.

He served as a deputy to Mr. Karzai and Planning Minister before losing office and is now part of Mr. Qanuni's Opposition bloc.

Another winner was old faction commander Abdul Rabb Rasul Sayyaf.

A religious conservative, Mr. Sayyaf is an ethnic Pashtun and a Karzai supporter.

Mr. Sayyaf denies accusations of war crimes going back to the civil war years, saying he would support an investigation.

Three prominent former Taliban won seats in Parliament — ex-commander Haji Mullah Abdul Salaam Rocketi, ex-provincial Governor Mawlawi Islamuddin Mohammadi and a senior former security official, Hanif Shah Al-Hussein.

## Women win seats

Women obtained all 68 seats reserved for them in the *Wolesi Jirga*, but five provincial council seats in the conservative south and east were left vacant because too few women candidates registered.

Among the victorious women was Malalai Joya, a young activist who rose to prominence during a 2003 constitutional conference when she stood up and denounced old faction commanders as criminals who should be put on trial.

Sayed Mohammad Gulabzoi, Interior Minister in a Soviet-backed Government during the 1980s, was among several ex-communist winners. — Reuters

19/11  
Afghanistan  
12/12



# In search of a settlement in Afghanistan

M.K. Bhadrakumar

**I**N THE past few weeks, Afghanistan has received a stream of important visitors from western capitals that are in a position to preside over its destiny — U.S. National Security Council Advisor Stephen J. Hadley, Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, British Secretary of State for Defence John Reid, and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai also paid a visit to Paris in a related mission to try to persuade French President Jacques Chirac that the 11,000-strong NATO contingent must augment its strength and merge under a single flag with the 18,000-strong American forces deployed in Afghanistan with NATO assuming full responsibility for the counter-insurgency operations. This is something Washington had been seeking but Paris was lukewarm to.

All this hectic diplomatic activity is aimed at finalising a "post-Bonn compact" for Afghanistan. With the holding of the Afghan parliamentary elections on September 16, the political process initiated at the Bonn Conference in December 2001 under the auspices of the United Nations is deemed to have reached a successful conclusion. Beyond lie uncharted waters.

The decision-makers in this cogitation are in actuality based in Washington but expediency demands that the process be seen as consensual. The itinerary of consultations is to be seen as including Kabul as the outcome after all concerns the life of the Afghan people. And, the process itself must ultimately be seen as bearing the imprimatur of the "international community." So long as Mr. Karzai acquiesces, arguably, the will of the Afghan people will have legitimised any such "compact." This may sound somewhat surreal but it conforms to the spirit of Afghan realities.

The focus of the "post-Bonn compact" is on formalising a regime that authorises open-ended stationing of foreign (western) troops on Afghan soil. Nothing illustrates as poignantly the tragedy of Afghanistan — the mismatch of the priorities of the so-called international community, and of the Afghan people at this point in their national history. Rather than focussing on

The central objective of the Bonn accord was to stabilise the security situation but this did not happen. What are the American intentions in Afghanistan?

NATO's future role in Afghanistan in the coming decades, the top priority should have been to draw up an economic road map for Afghanistan — a mutually reinforcing parallel track to the political process.

For the Afghan people, the Bonn process has proved to be a sad, disillusioning experience. As the prominent Opposition leader Yunus Qanoo summed up sardonically, "So, the Bonn accord has come to an end, but it has not brought major change to people's daily lives." The low turnout in the recent parliamentary and local body elections is indicative of the people's rapidly growing disenchantment with what passes for democracy.

The central objective of the Bonn accord was to stabilise the security situation but this did not happen. Insurgents are still being trained in Pakistan. In fact, with the booming drug trade, and the corruption and venality that accompanies it, the security situation has degenerated including in regions of Afghanistan that used to be relatively stable.

What is most disconcerting, however, is that there is a huge question today whether a functional political system can evolve at all under American supervision. The political factions opposed to Mr. Karzai remain adamant that the Americans manipulated the presidential election last October. They are concerned that the parliamentary election results too may be manipulated. There is resentment that Mr. Karzai's "English-speaking" Cabinet is unrepresentative, and that in a bid to placate Pakistan, Americans resorted to systematic sidelining of erstwhile Northern Alliance groups and began co-opting "good Taliban."

Without doubt, it is a mockery of recent Afghan history that notorious figures such as Maulawi Qalamuddin, the head of the Department

for the Prevention of Vice and the Promotion of Virtue in the Taliban regime, and Haji Abdul Samat Khaksar, the redoubtable Deputy Interior Minister, are being called "good Taliban."

The calculation behind co-opting the Taliban (and Mujahideen and even the Khalqi faction of Afghan communists), thereby pandering to Pashtun chauvinism, was that it would create a Pashtun power base for Mr. Karzai. But things have not worked out that way either.

The parliamentary elections provided a window of opportunity for genuine participatory politics to develop. But, disregarding the opinion given by the United Nations' advisors and most diplomats, Mr. Karzai opted for an electoral system that undermined political parties — most likely on American insistence. The result, anyhow, is that Mr. Karzai may not have to contend with an assertive Opposition in Parliament (especially over contentious issues such as foreign troop presence or the excesses of the "war on terror") and that levers of power may overwhelmingly remain in his hands. But how could such a contrived over-centralised political arrangement be made to work, let alone win the trust and confidence of the people that made effective governance possible?

No attempt has been made yet to flesh out the details of the legislative powers vested with the new Parliament or the local bodies. Conceivably, Kabul is marking time and waiting to see the composition of the new Parliament before determining whether it can be trusted with legislative power. "Show me the legislator, and we will decide what he may legislate" — this seems to be the cynical approach. In a country of such diversity as Afghanistan, a genuinely representative legislative forum with independent opinion making that remained impervious to foreign manipulation could have provided the underpin-

ning for enduring political stability.

But, on the contrary, as during the presidential election last year, the orchestrated talk has revived as regards the "menace of warlordism" — a rubric under which politically disagreeable elements could be threatened, blackmailed, bludgeoned into submission or dispatched into oblivion. Are the Afghan "warlords" any more obnoxious than the robber barons who strode long corridors of time in the early (and middle) history of American democracy?

The prevailing political vacuum and the lack of national leadership are working to the advantage of the Taliban. After retreating into Pakistani territory in 2001 under watchful American and Pakistani eyes, the Taliban is staging a comeback. No questions are being asked about the hibernation. Apparently, jihadis from Chechnya, Uzbekistan, and Arab countries have also reappeared in the Afghan operations! Entire crops of superstitions have sprouted up again regarding the Taliban's obscure sources of support. SAM missiles of Russian and Chinese make are apparently reaching them from Iraq via Iranian territory!

## Recipe for civil war

Taken together, the growing insurgency, the illicit drug trade, general lawlessness, ineffective governance, political corruption, ethnic factionalism, and the overall destitution and poverty are a recipe for civil war.

Certainly, the security situation presents itself as an ingenious argument for the U.S. to claim that its continued military presence in Central Asia serves the interests of the "international community." This in turn countervails the groundswell of opinion among Central Asian countries in favour of evicting American troops from their soil at the earliest. Uzbek Foreign Minister Elyor Ganiyev gently drew attention to this paradigm in his speech at the U.N. General Assembly on September 16 when he explained that the agenda of stabilising the situation in Afghanistan is being "unjustifiably delayed."

Indeed, the testimonies at the on-going trial of the extremist elements involved in the uprising in May in Uzbekistan's Andizhan province have revealed shocking details that militant elements based in Afghanistan, whom the "war on terror" was supposed to be tackling, had masterminded the uprising. Some witnesses at the trial plainly alleged that the Americans financed the militant Islamists behind the Andizhan uprising.

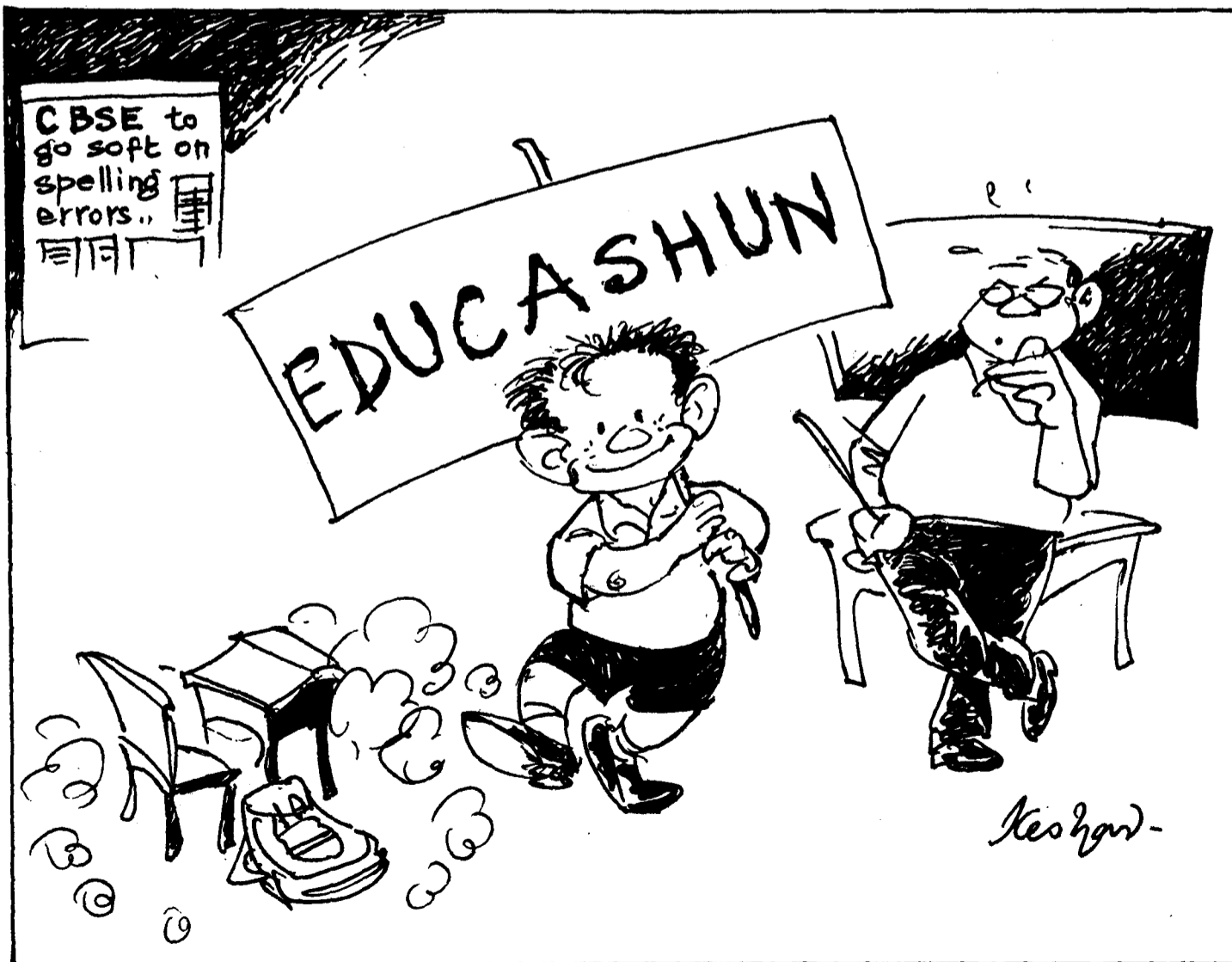
From the well-planned assassination of a prominent Hazara politician recently in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, it appears that deep-rooted plans are afoot to sow the seeds of Tajik-Hazara disunity in the sensitive northern Amu Darya region bordering Uzbekistan. Mazar-i-Sharif has always been a problematic city where Uzbek, Hazara, and Tajik communities uneasily co-exist. Of course, volatility there could be useful for the U.S. to pressure Uzbekistan. (Tajik-Hazara unity has also been a major plank of Iranian influence within Afghanistan.) Afghanistan's border region with Tajikistan is already unstable.

The U.S. has remained inexplicably cool to the Russian suggestion (made in June 2004 originally) for coordination between the NATO forces in Afghanistan and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation forces operating in Central Asia. Washington seems to estimate that any tacit "recognition" of CSTO's *locus standi* (and Moscow's leadership role in it) might foreclose NATO's eventual advance into the strategic Central Asian region bordering China.

Viewed against the above trends, what are the American intentions in Afghanistan? Are the current hectic diplomatic parleys intrinsic to Afghanistan's priority needs?

The chancelleries in the region would have taken note of an important speech made by American Ambassador to NATO Victoria Nuland in Brussels on September 22 spelling out the key elements in the U.S. plans for the alliance's future. The Ambassador said the U.S. saw a greater understanding among European allies since "the post-Cold War honeymoon is now over." Afghanistan would remain NATO's "most important mission" for the foreseeable future. "If the divisive debate over Iraq taught us one thing, it is that NATO must be the place where we talk about all issues affecting our future — the Middle East, Iraq, North Korea, China, Iran, to name just a few."

## CARTOONSCAPE





# Afghan Interior Minister resigns

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**KABUL:** Afghanistan's respected Interior Minister Ali Ahmad Jalali submitted his resignation to President Hamid Karzai on Tuesday following reports of rifts between the pair.

Mr. Jalali, who is in his mid-60s, said the main reason he wanted to quit after more than two years in the key post was because he wanted to resume his academic career.

Afghan officials and media, however, have reported disagreements between Mr. Jalali, who is seen as a reformist, and

Mr. Karzai over the President's appointment of former warlords to Government positions. "I will not remain in the Interior Minister post any more," Mr. Jalali told *Tolo* television. "Maybe, there are reasons for this and maybe not, but one of the main reasons is that I want to resume my academic research. I was involved in academia in the past, throughout my life, and I feel more comfortable in that field," he said. Mr. Jalali said he was "fully committed" to the President. — AP, AFP

# Afghans vote first time in 30 years for Parliament

Nine killed in violence; suicide attack on polling station foiled

**KABUL:** Millions of Afghans voted Sunday for their first Parliament in more than 30 years, streaming to polling stations in mosques and schools and defying last-ditch attempts by Taliban rebels to derail the vote.

Violence marred the start of polling, with nine persons killed including a French soldier, while rockets were fired on a U.N. warehouse in Kabul and two would-be suicide bombers were wounded as they tried to attack a voting centre.

But as the polls closed officials said a high proportion of the nearly 12.5 million eligible voters had cast their ballots, signalling another step on a difficult path to democracy launched after the Taliban regime fell in 2001.

"The voting started relatively slowly but after the morning it has seriously picked up all over Afghanistan," Peter Erben of the U.N.-Afghan Joint Electoral Management Board told reporters.

"I believe a high number of Afghans have turned out to vote."

On the ballot papers voters found a cross-section of Afghanistan's strife-torn society, including warlords, drug kingpins, former Taliban and — marking a step forward for the conservative country — women.

"The last time we had an election in Afghanistan I was not even born," said schoolteacher Fahima Sabir (31), as she voted in Kabul. "It is what we have dreamed of for decades."

## Making history: Karzai

The vote for the lower House of Parliament and 34 Provincial Assemblies comes less than a year after Afghanistan's first presidential poll, won by U.S.-backed leader Hamid Karzai.

"We are making history," Mr. Karzai told reporters while casting his ballot in the capital. "After 30 years of war, intervention and misery, today Afghanistan is moving forward."



**HISTORIC MOMENT:** Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai casts his ballot in Kabul as the polls opened in the war-torn country on Sunday morning. — PHOTO: REUTERS

The 26,000 polling stations, scattered from the parched southern deserts to the northern slopes of the Hindu Kush mountains, started closing at 1130 GMT.

Full results are not expected until late October.

One of the chief concerns had been violence by Taliban militants, who warned that voters could be hurt if they went to the voting stations.

Mr. Erben said only a handful of poll centres had been closed because of security worries and some of them could open after extra troops and voting staff were flown in.

A rise in Taliban-linked violence has left more than 1,000 people dead this year, including seven election candidates.

The French soldier killed in a bomb blast in Kandahar prov-

ince, the former heartland of the Taliban, was the first soldier from his country to die in Afghanistan.

## Security post attacked

Militants, meanwhile attacked a security post in the eastern province of Khost, killing two policemen and wounding a U.S. soldier and two Afghan soldiers, officials said.

Three suspected Taliban fighters were also killed. Another died when rebels attacked a polling station in the southern province of Helmand late on Saturday, provincial officials said.

One Afghan soldier was killed and seven were injured in Nuristan province in eastern Afghanistan, a local official said.

An Afghan civilian was killed overnight when U.S.-led forces

were attacked in Khost and called in air support to bomb the area, police said. The U.S. military said it was checking the report.

The attempted suicide attack by militants with explosives strapped to their bodies was in the village of Ghaziabad, near Khost city, Interior Ministry spokesman Lutfullah Mashal said. No one else was hurt.

Around 100,000 Afghan troops and police were deployed for the vote, supported by 20,000 U.S.-led coalition troops and 10,500 NATO-led peacekeepers.

Up for grabs in the elections were 249 seats in the lower House of the National Assembly, including 68 for women, and 420 seats on Provincial Assemblies. — AFP

# UN urges Afghans to defy rebels

ASSOCIATED Press  
Kandahar, September 17

THE UNITED Nations on Saturday urged Afghans to defy rebel violence and turn out in large numbers to vote in landmark legislative elections. Fierce battles near the capital and elsewhere killed nine militants and three policemen.

Security forces said they thwarted four rebel bombings, including an attempt to blow up a big dam, underscoring fears for Sunday's vote that many hope will marginalise insurgents and bolster a fragile democracy.

Top UN envoy Jean Arnault said extremists had failed to disrupt preparations for the polls despite fighting that has killed more than 1,200 people in the past six months, including seven candidates and four election workers.

"We are very confident that those extremists will also fail to disrupt and derail voting day," Arnault told reporters.

Chief election organiser Bismillah Bismil appealed to voters to participate and not be "intimidated or frightened" by the threats of more bloodshed. A US military spokesman, Col. James Yonts, predicted "a massive number" of voters would turn out, adding that "this election will send a powerful message to the Taliban that their influence is waning."

Their comments came a day after the Taliban called for a boycott of the polls. They said they would not attack civilians going to vote but would target areas where US-led coalition forces were deployed — and advised people to avoid such places. The elections for a new parliament and 34 provincial councils are the last formal step for Afghanistan on the path to democracy laid out with international support after US-led forces ousted the Taliban from power four years ago. Many hope the vote will help the country claw its way out of a spiral of violence that started with the Soviet occupation in the 1980s.

"We are seeing today an unmistakable confirmation that there is in the country the emergence of a new political culture," Arnault said. "A sense that the legacy of the rule of the gun can be resisted is now taking root."

About 100,000 Afghan police and soldiers and 30,000 foreign troops are on alert across the country to safeguard the election. In Kabul, road checkpoints have sprung up, with police pulling over vehicles ranging from hay carts to ribbon-decked wedding cars.

## THE ROAD TO DEMOCRACY

The United Nations envoy to Afghanistan said that extremists had failed to disrupt preparations for the Afghan elections on Sunday and he hoped the people of the war-torn country would defy the Taliban's call to boycott the polls and turn out to vote in large numbers. The hardy people of this country hope to finally win peace after the polls.



An Afghan girl watches a convoy arriving with election materials at Sare Dare Shasht village, in Bamiyan province, central Afghanistan.

Brave new face  
of politics—  
young & female

DECLAN Walsh  
Kabul, September 17

AMONG THE stony-faced mugshots on posters plastered across election-crazed Kabul, one stands out. At first glance it looks like an ad for a Bollywood blockbuster: a close-up of a pretty young woman with an alluring smile against a canary yellow background.

But this is the face of Sabrina Sagheb, the youngest candidate in Sunday's landmark parliamentary elections, who has created a stir across Kabul with her splashy campaign and outspoken views. "If elected I will face up to the old men with guns that destroyed our country," said the 25-year-old development worker on the final day of campaigning. "Now it is our turn to fight with them."

It is a tough battle. Sunday's vote is beset with perils. On Friday, gunmen dragged candidate Abdul Hadi from his house in Helmand province and killed him, the sixth candidate to die. The Taliban have warned voters to boycott the poll to avoid getting caught in fresh attacks.

Meanwhile Hawa Alam Nuristani, a television presenter turned candidate, was being treated in an American military hospital after gunmen in Nuristan province dragged her from her car and shot her three times in the legs.

But the poll has also fired the imagination of young Afghans, who see politics as a way to wrench power away from the big men of violence. "The politicians we supported before have betrayed us. They start wars, put our money in their pockets and do nothing for the young," said Reza Hashimi, a 20-year-old carpet weaver.

Sagheb, with her lipstick, fluent English, matching Nike trainers and headscarf, represents a new optimism and sophistication. She has injected a new ingredient into Afghan politics: sex appeal.

The Guardian

THE HIRUSTAN TIMES

# Afghanistan set for landmark elections though beset with perils

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Poll fires the imagination of youth who want to wrench power from men of violence

Declan Walsh

**KABUL:** Among the stony-faced mugshots on posters plastered across election-crazed Kabul, one stands out. At first glance it looks like an advertisement for a Bollywood blockbuster: a close-up of a pretty young woman with an alluring smile against a canary yellow background.

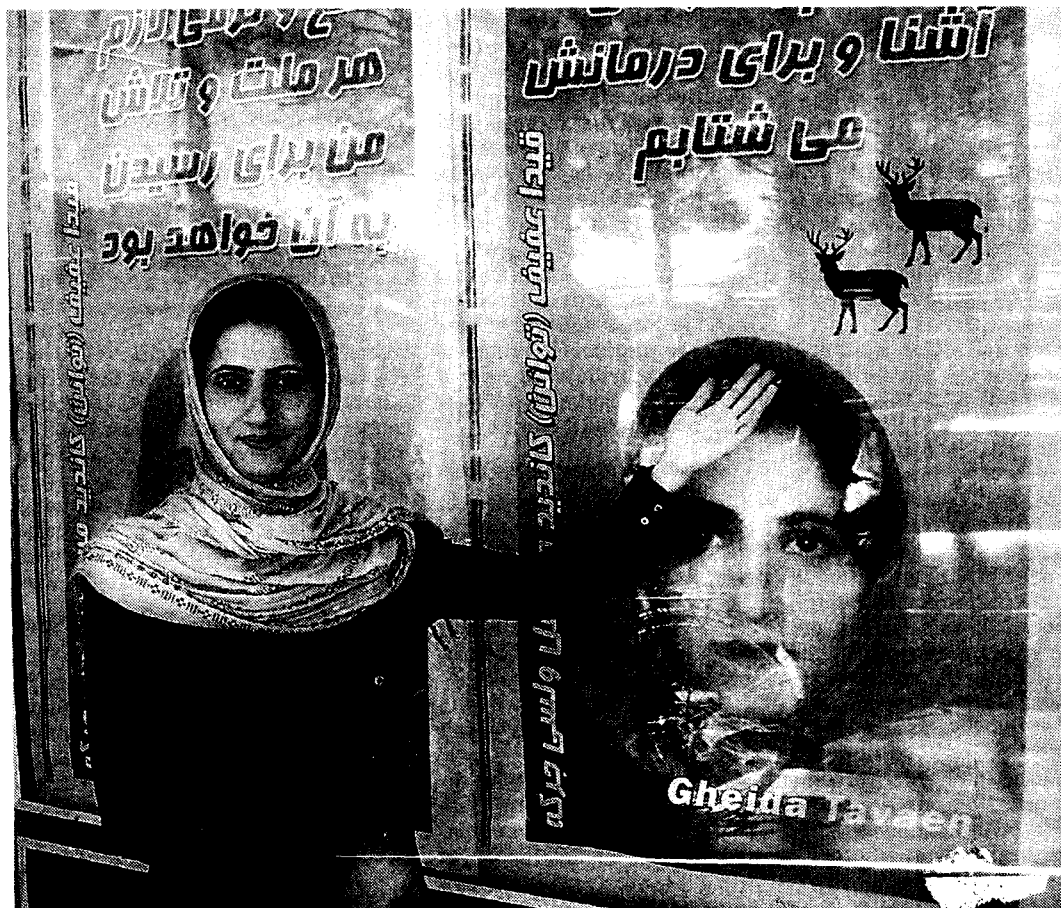
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## Attack on candidates

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**BRAVING ODDS:** Gheida Tavaen Afif, 26-year-old candidate for the Wolesi Jirga (Lower House), at her office in Herat. - PHOTO: AFP

20-year-old carpet weaver.

## Youth's hope

Ms. Sagheb, with her lipstick, fluent English and matching Nike trainers and headscarf, represents a new optimism and sophistication. She has injected a new ingredient into Afghan politics: sex appeal. Her glamorous poster has

become an object of desire in Kabul, rivalling only that of Bollywood siren Aishwarya Rai on shops, taxi windows and bedroom walls. Of the 10,000 copies her supporters have distributed few remain on the city's walls. Most have been torn down to be put up again in private homes or traded in the city bazaar.

"If I put a poster on a wall today, tomorrow it is gone," she sighed as she juggled phone calls, media interviews and visitors at her city centre office. Across the room, Muhammad Naseen (20), sat alongside a dozen other young men waiting on plastic chairs for a chance to chat with the candidate and, ever so politely, beg a copy of

the coveted poster. "Sabrina is young and so are we," he explained with a coy smile. "We have already voted in a lot of men. Now it is time for change." Ms. Sagheb admits not all admirers may vote for her but she is confident she can win one of Kabul's nine reserved seats.

More than 500 women are competing for 68 places in the 249-seat Wolesi Jirga, or lower House of Parliament. She needs courage as well as votes.

Men traditionally discourage women from seeking attention — four years after the Taliban, burkas are common in Kabul — and the conservative press has targeted Ms. Sagheb.

"Her posters are driving our youth towards sin," thundered the Dari language *Cheragh* newspaper. "It is a political weapon against true Islamic voters." Other candidates have been more viciously attacked.

## Threatening letters

The final weeks of campaigning saw a string of attacks on women, according to human rights groups. Candidates in Ghazni, south of Kabul, say they have received threatening "night letters" from the

The intimidation is part of a wider problem of warlordism in Sunday's election: although 210 candidates have private armies at their disposal, just 32 were disqualified.

But despite the vote's flaws, enthusiasm for democracy remains high. Ms. Sagheb is undeterred by threats. She once received a call from a man demanding she follow "Islamic rules" said her mother, Nadia. "Sabrina told him that if he wasn't happy, he didn't have to vote for her." — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

# Taliban calls for poll boycott

Associated Press

KABUL, Sept. 16. — Attacks by militants killed a legislative candidate and four others and wounded two American troops, while a purported Taliban spokesman today threatened more violence and urged Afghans not to take part in weekend polls for a new legislature.

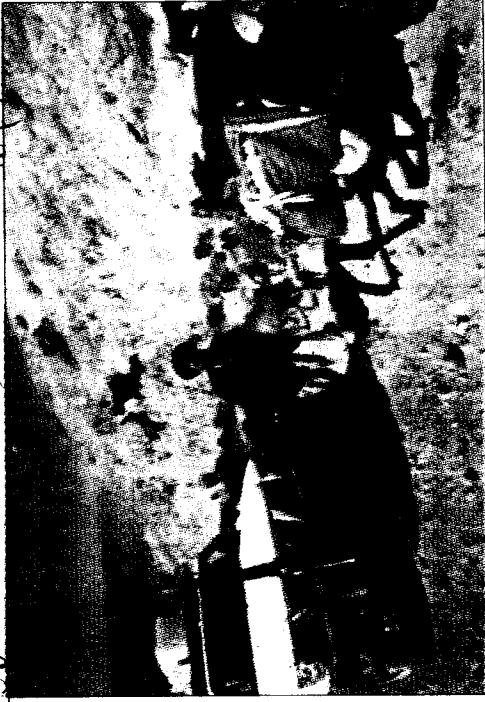
There are hopes that the vote will sideline the insurgents by demonstrating the Afghan people's commitment to democracy, but they show no signs yet of letting up in their attacks.

Purported Taliban spokesman Mullah Latif Hakimi urged Afghans to boycott the election but said Taliban insurgents would not

in the past has sometimes proven exaggerated or untrue, and his exact tie to the Taliban leadership cannot be verified independently.

In the latest attack blamed on the Taliban, a roadside bomb hit a public bus in central Ghzani province today, killing three civilians and wounding seven others, including children, said Abdul Rahman Sarjang, the local police chief.

The elections for a new Parliament and 34 provincial councils are the last formal step for Afghanistan on the path to democracy laid out with international support after the US-led forces ousted the Taliban from power four years ago in their war against terror.



ROUGH JOURNEY AHEAD? A landcruiser passes through a road in Badakshan in north Afghanistan, with poll materials, on Friday. — AFP

attack civilians going to vote at polling stations.

He said they would launch attacks only on areas where US-led coalition forces were deployed, and advised civilians to avoid such places. Information from Hakimi

# NATO now eyes Afghan frontlines

MARK JOHN

BRUSSELS, SEPTEMBER 9

WHEN the United States shunned NATO for its 2001 invasion to oust Afghanistan's Taliban rulers, it looked like another nail in the coffin of an alliance whose purpose had crumbled with the Berlin Wall.

But if Afghanistan's September 18 elections pass off smoothly, NATO could be right at the front-line. Some in the alliance—notably the US—want it to take on all international peacekeeping there, in as little as 12 months.

They see the impoverished country as the crucible in which the alliance can forge itself a new identity in a guise unrecognisable from the titan which once faced the Soviet

Union across the Iron Curtain.

Currently focused around capital Kabul, and in the north and west, NATO's 10,000 strong force has thousands of candidates to protect amid fears of election-related attacks. For the time being, the NATO-led ISAF force plays second fiddle to the US-led coalition that bears the brunt of a stubborn insurgency.

While a full merger of the two troops under NATO command seems unfeasible, a plan is on the table under which the US-dominated counter-insurgency operation would report to NATO, but remain separate from the ISAF's peacekeeping and reconstruction task. If that works, Afghanistan could emerge as NATO's largest



A Kabul procession on Friday, marking the fourth anniversary of the assassination of guerrilla leader Ahmad Shah Masood

mission and be a major step in shifting NATO's focus towards the broader Middle East, where some in the alliance see its future.

Yet many others (particularly those committed to de-

veloping the European Union as a credible military player) have reservations about such aspirations. France in particular stresses that NATO is not the "gendarme of the world". —Reuters

# Desperate Kabul looks to Delhi

## Mannohan to meet Pervez in NY on Sept 14

**YASHWANT RAJ**  
Kabul, August 29

KABUL IS desperate. Every day brings a fresh round of violence. And it's increasing as the date for the parliamentary elections draws closer. Afghanistan goes to the polls on September 18.

Behind every incident are the Taliban speaking back from Pakistan. This was top of the agenda for discussions between Prime Minister Mannohan Singh and Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai. An Indian official said, "This was discussed at length by the two leaders." Prime Minister Singh would say no more than this: "We discussed the security situation in this region and the world". But he refused to be drawn out over the details.

"India understands Afghanistan's concerns," the official said, adding, "But we can't do any more than offer them the help they need; it's for them to ask what they want". Addressing a Press conference before leaving for New Delhi, the

Prime Minister said, "We're not in the business of thrusting anything on anyone". But Afghanistan can look to India, he added, for any help it wants.

The Prime Minister, however, admitted that Pakistan did, in a way, influence Indo-Afghan ties. "We have to induce Pakistan to fall in line — for increased cooperation between India and Afghanistan".

This — and other issues — may be discussed when Singh meets Pervez Musharraf on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting in New York on September 14.

On transit facility through Pakistan for goods from India to Afghanistan and Central Asia, Singh said, "It would help if Pakistan cooperated".

On Taliban infiltration, Kabul is in a peculiar situation. The world knows who is behind the violence that has become routine since the start of the election process.

But Karzai is being brave about it saying Afghans will go

ahead regardless, as they had done during the presidential elections. But, according to India, "The Afghan government is the sole determinant of what needs to be done" to check resurgent Taliban from creating trouble.

That election would, in a way, complete Afghanistan's transition from a monarchy to anarchy to democracy.

The first general elections were held in 2004, when the country voted to elect Hamid Karzai as President.

It's now preparing to elect representatives to Parliament, a new building for which is going to be constructed with Indian help. He said, "We believe democratic institutions need to be encouraged... we're committed to helping Afghanistan". A team from the Central Public Works Department made a presentation on the design of the Parliament building.

Over all, the Prime Minister said he was satisfied with the talks: "I've discussed all issues with a bearing on bilateral rela-



Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and former King of Afghanistan Zahir Shah (left) at the foundation stone-laying ceremony of the new Parliament building in Kabul on Monday.

tions (and those that impact)... Singh termed his two-day visit a "voyage of rediscovery". He said he had always been ex-sensus on most of them".

tremely fascinated by Afghanistan, with which his family had had business ties.

AP

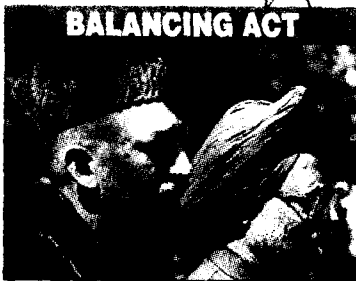


# PM, Karzai pledge to fight terror

By Rajat Pandit/TNN

**Kabul:** To consolidate India's political influence in Afghanistan, and in the process counter Pakistani moves in this strategically-located Central Asian nation, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Sunday promised all possible help to President Hamid Karzai in the reconstruction of his war-ravaged country. In the backdrop of resurgent Taliban remnants indulging in hit-and-run operations in south and south-east Afghanistan from their hideouts in Pakistan in the run-up to the parliamentary elections in this landlocked nation, the two leaders also condemned terrorism as a serious "threat to democracy and civilized existence".

They resolved to work together to ensure Afghanistan



2018  
Manmohan Singh  
"never again becomes a safe haven" for terrorism and extremism. "There is a convergence of views that terrorism anywhere and everywhere poses a serious threat and we have to deal with it jointly," said the PM. The first Indian premier to visit Kabul in three decades, after Indira Gandhi's visit in 1976, Singh asserted that a stable, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan was essential for peace and stability in the region.

Afghanistan, on its part, wants to strike a delicate balance between India and Pakistan, with whom it shares a long and porous border, apart from ethnic similarities in tribal areas. Stating that Pakistan was conducting operations against insurgents operating from its territory, Karzai said all three countries needed to join hands to work for the safety and security of people of the region.

29 AUG 2008 THE TIMES OF INDIA

# Three years on, security eludes Afghanistan

## The U.N. Secretary-General's Special Representative has painted a worrying picture of the situation in the country.

Amit Baruah

**T**HE ALARM bell has been sounded on Afghanistan. Looking beyond the specific actions of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces in Afghanistan, the Special Representative of the United Nations' Secretary-General, Jean Arnault, has placed a stark assessment of the situation in Afghanistan before the Security Council.

Briefing the U.N. Security Council on June 24, Mr. Arnault said, "The violence had caused unspeakable suffering and jeopardised the chances for rebuilding in the most seriously affected regions ...

"United Nations agencies, like other international bodies, had been obliged to have a low profile, which impacted on the quality and quantity of projects. The worsening security situation had a negative impact for upcoming elections [in September]," he maintained.

Using diplomatic, but pointed language, the Special Representative didn't hesitate in pointing the finger towards Pakistan. A U.N. press release issued on Mr. Arnault's briefing said that another special effort, a greater effort than last year, was needed to address the worsening security situation.

"He [the Special Representative] also emphasised the consequences of the violence

on the political transition ... the international response to thwart the destabilisation strategy could not be limited to combat operations on the ground.

"It was necessary to resolutely attack the financing, the safe havens where they trained and the networks that supported them. He welcomed the high-level contacts between Afghanistan and Pakistan in that connection. Also, the [Security] Council had a duty to follow the situation closely and support greater cooperation against terrorism, something that Afghanistan needed today," the press statement continued.

"What was needed most was to re-establish minimum security conditions. After three years of trying, the spoilers were still stonewalling in some regions. There were urgent lessons to be learned without delay," it added. While all these were "open remarks", Mr. Arnault is believed to have told the Security Council behind closed doors that the political process in Afghanistan could be destroyed if the international community didn't remain vigilant.

The Special Representative took the view that the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda were stronger today than at any time after the war was said to have officially ended. Comparing the present scenario to that of 1992-94 when the Taliban took advantage of the total inse-

curity and chaos that prevailed in most parts of Afghanistan, Mr. Arnault said that the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda were better equipped than before.

According to him, there were links between the money being funnelled to militant elements and organised crime, drug trafficking and foreign financial backing. He claimed that the growing number of attacks indicated a higher rate of border infiltration.

Many countries, including India, have reason to be concerned with the latest assessment of the situation in Afghanistan provided by Mr. Arnault. Though no firm figures are available, it is estimated that over 1,000 Indian nationals are living and working in Afghanistan.

### Karzai's problems

While international security forces may have sanitised Kabul, it's evident that the U.S.-propped Hamid Karzai Government has been unable to line up people behind the reconstruction efforts. It's even feared that any withdrawal of the current levels of international security assistance could well lead to the collapse of the Karzai Government.

Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan haven't been great, principally because of what the Karzai-led Government

believes Pakistan is doing again in Afghanistan. It is a fact that none of Afghanistan's other immediate neighbours has any interest in the further destabilisation of that country.

The Al-Qaeda has been the target of operations by Pakistani security forces in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), indicating that the terrorist outfit is far from finished in this area. It is, possibly, these very areas that continue to provide recruits to the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Three years after the "war" commenced in Afghanistan, it's evident that the country remains a mess, with Mr. Arnault admitting that international agencies had to maintain a low profile on account of the prevalent security situation.

The inability to create an Afghan security architecture — a truly national Afghan Army and a functioning police force — lies at the heart of the security failure in Afghanistan. Continued reliance on foreign troops — whether from the International Security Assistance force or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) — comes with its own costs. For many, having a non-Taliban government in place in Afghanistan is success in itself. The time for excuses is over. Three years on, the Karzai Government must deliver both security and governance.

# Suicide attack on U.S. convoy in Afghanistan

Four soldiers wounded in ambush on highway near Kandahar

**KANDAHAR:** A suspected suicide bomber detonated explosives in his car near a U.S. military vehicle in southern Afghanistan on Monday, wounding four American troops, a spokesman for the American military said, in the latest in a series of bloody assaults on coalition forces.

The attack occurred on a highway near the main southern city of Kandahar.

"Initial indications indicate it was an explosion in a vehicle and might have been a suicide bomber," U.S. military spokesman Lt. Col. Jerry O'Hara said without elaborating.

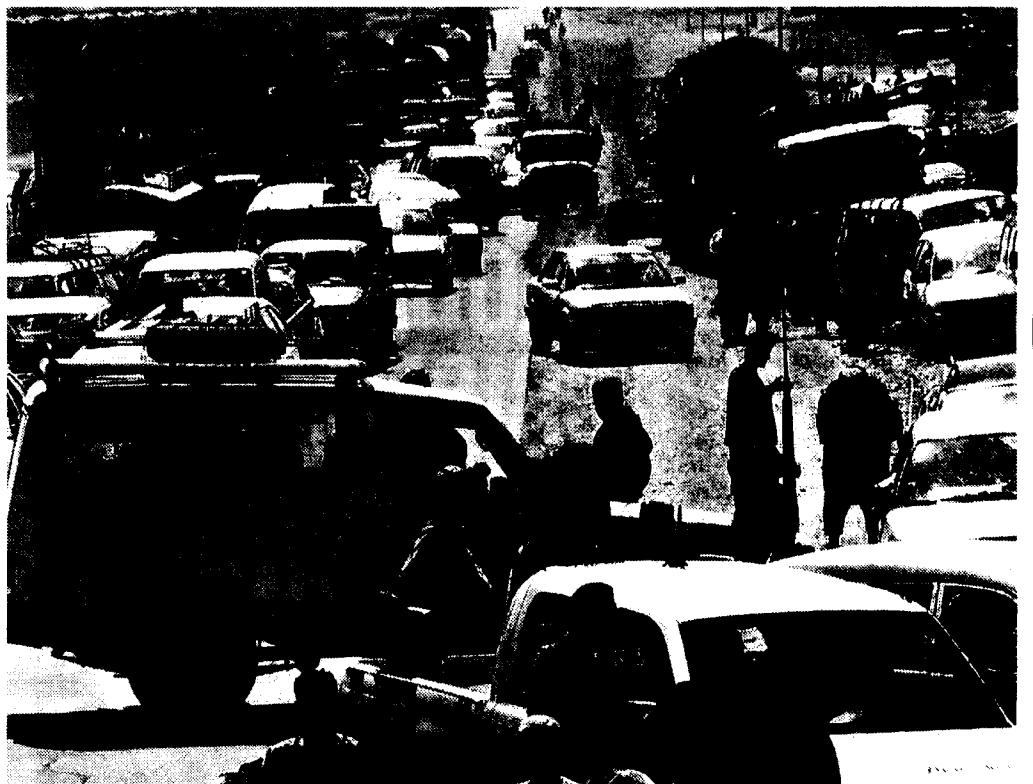
Gen. Salim Khan, the deputy police chief for Kandahar city, said a suicide bomber rammed a car full of explosives into the U.S. vehicle. The head of the attacker was found near the site of the blast and it appeared to be that of an Arab, he said.

## Injured evacuated

"The U.S. vehicle was blown up in the suicide attack," Gen. Khan said.

Lt. Col. O'Hara said the four wounded, one in serious condition, were evacuated by air to a U.S. base in Kandahar for medical treatment.

An Associated Press reporter at the scene saw three American soldiers being carried on stretchers into a military helicopter. Two other U.S. helicopters hovered overhead, while dozens of Afghan and U.S. troops took up positions around the site. Troops blocked the high-



**HIGHWAY ATTACK:** The main highway of Kandahar city in Afghanistan is blocked after an explosion on Monday. — PHOTO: AP

way where the attack happened. The road links Kandahar and the western city of Herat. Hundreds of Afghans who had been driving along the road looked on.

Three other bombs were found hidden on roadsides around Kandahar on Monday morning, a Government official in the city said on condition of

anonymity. All were defused, he said.

A bomb attack Sunday on an Afghan family's pickup truck just north of Kandahar killed a woman and wounded four others, including two children, said Gen. Khan, the deputy police chief.

He said the attackers may

have thought the four-wheel-drive vehicle belonged to the Afghan army as it was similar to ones the army uses.

A Taliban spokesman, Mullah Latif Hakimi, said in a telephone call that the group was responsible for Monday's bombing and that the suicide attacker was an Afghan. — AP

100-15  
19/6  
Kandahar

# Afghan mosque blast kills 20

Associated Press

KANDAHAR, June 1. — A suicide bomb tore through a mosque in southern Afghanistan today during the funeral of a moderate cleric, killing at least 20 people including the Kabul police chief. The local Governor said an Al-Qaida militant was responsible. At least 42 people were wounded.

The attack — which came on the heels of a major upsurge in rebel violence in recent months including assassinations, almost daily clashes with rebels and the kidnapping of an Italian aid worker — further raised fears that militants here are copying the tactics of insurgents in Iraq.

The rebels themselves have suffered a heavy price — losing about 200 men according to American and Afghan officials — but the drumbeat of attacks has belied US claims that it is stabilising the country, nearly four years after driving the Taliban

from power.

Kandahar Governor Mr Gul Agha Sherzai said the suicide bomber's body had been found, and that he was part of Osama bin Laden's terror network. "The attacker was a member of the Al-Qaida. We have found documents on his body that show he was an Arab," Mr Sherzai told reporters.

A purported Taliban spokesman, Mullah Latif Hakimi, said in a telephone call earlier that the rebels were not responsible for the bombing. Hakimi often calls news organizations, usually to claim responsibility for attacks on behalf of the Taliban. His information has sometimes proven untrue or exaggerated, and his exact tie to the rebel leadership is not clear.

Hundreds of mourners were crowded inside the Mullah Abdul Fayaz Mosque in the southern city of Kandahar when the bomb went off around 9 a.m., leaving blood and body parts littered over a wide area.



Policemen search for clues at the blast site in Kandahar on Wednesday. — AFP

02 JUN 2005

THE STATESMAN

# Bush refuses to yield on U.S. military authority in Afghanistan

## Hamid Karzai rebuffed on prisoner abuse issue also

Ken Herman

**WASHINGTON:** Afghan President Hamid Karzai met U.S. President George Bush but came away without the increased authority he had sought over U.S. military action in his country.

Mr. Karzai also failed to get more control over Afghan prisoners held by the American forces.

The two Presidents signed a "strategic partnership" declaration delineating the nations' roles on a variety of issues, including a section saying, "U.S. and coalition forces are to continue to have the freedom of action required to conduct appropriate military operations based on consultations and pre-agreed procedures."

The statement stopped short of the standard Mr. Karzai called for during a Sunday interview on CNN's "Late Edition when he said, "The Afghan people now feel that they own that country. Operations that involve going to people's homes, that involve knocking on people's doors, must stop, must not be done without the permission of the Afghan government," he said on Sunday.

The two leaders had high praise for each other at a joint news conference in the White House East Room. But Mr. Bush made it clear Mr. Karzai would be leaving town without getting any change in how the 20,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan operate.

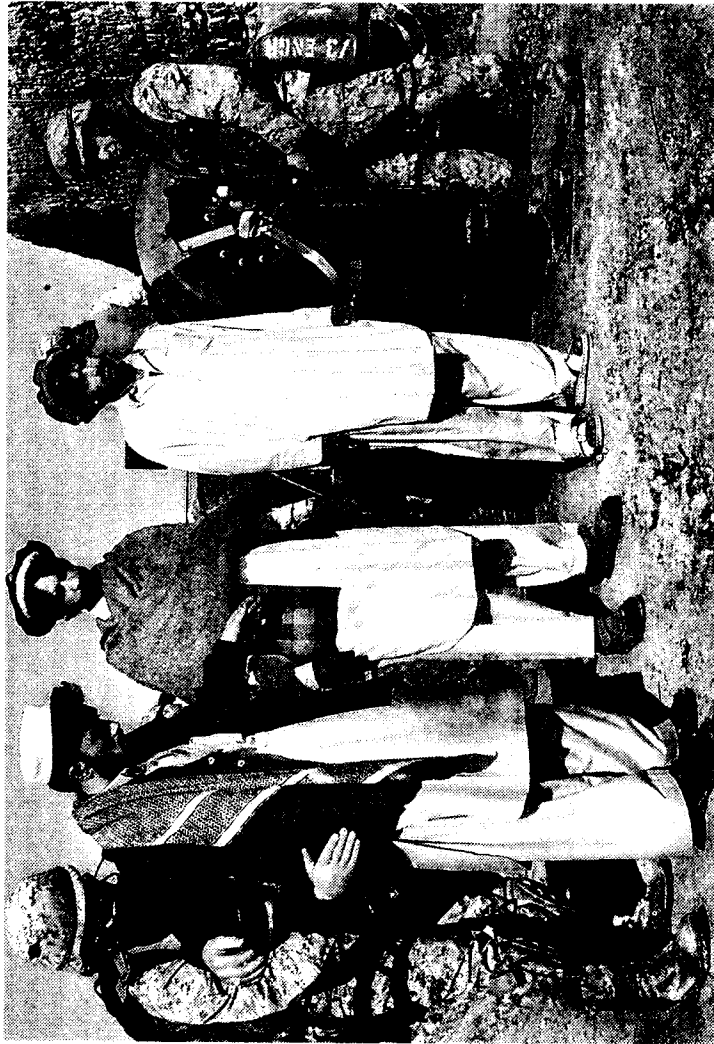
"Our relationship is one of cooperate and consult," Mr. Bush said. "Of course our troops will respond to U.S. commanders, but our U.S. commanders and our diplomatic relationship there is in a consultative relationship with the Government."

Mr. Bush also rebuffed Mr. Karzai's initiative to gain control over Afghan citizens in U.S. custody at Guantanamo Bay and at Bagram Air Base in Kabul.

Mr. Bush said U.S. policy would continue to be "to work our way through those who are being held" and return them to their nations. "And we will do so over time with the Afghan government," he said, adding that one issue was to make sure there was a place where the prisoners can be held.

### Mistreatment of citizens

Mr. Karzai reiterated his concern about mistreatment of Af-



**UNCHECKED AUTHORITY:** U.S. troops bodysearch Afghans in the southwestern province of Khost, Afghanistan, in this January file photo. — PHOTO: REUTERS

ghan citizens held by U.S. forces. Mr. Karzai said he was satisfied that those who abused prisoners are being punished.

The two leaders said they also discussed the need for international help in developing the Afghan economy and moving it away from dependence on poppy

production. Mr. Karzai disputed reports that a recent *Newsweek* item, subsequently retracted, was more against the progress in Afghanistan." He said Muslims were very unhappy "with *Newsweek* bringing a matter so serious in the gossip column." — *New York Times News Service*

*Newsweek* story," Karzai said. vice

# Abuse report irks Karzai

Kabul, May 21 (Reuters): Afghan President Hamid Karzai said today he was shocked by a US army report on abuse of detainees in Afghanistan, saying his government wanted custody of all Afghan prisoners and control over US military operations.

The abuse described in the report, including details of the deaths of two inmates at an Afghan detention centre, happened in 2002 and emerged from a nearly 2,000-page file of US army investigators, the *New York Times* reported yesterday.

"It has shocked me thoroughly and we condemn it," Karzai said. "We want the US government to take very, very strong action, to take away people like that."

Karzai, a staunch ally in the US-led war against terrorism, is due to leave on a US trip

## Government wants custody of all Afghan prisoners

later. He will meet President George W. Bush for talks next week.

Karzai wants to forge a broad long-term partnership with his most important ally but he said he would also reiterate a request for the return of Afghan prisoners and control over US military operations.

The US commands a foreign force in Afghanistan of about 18,300, most of them American, fighting Taliban insurgents and hunting militant leaders, including Osama bin Laden.

Many Afghans have criticised US troops for what are seen as heavy-handed tactics, such as breaking into people's homes in the middle of the night in their search for militants.

Growing resentment of US forces was partly behind violent anti-American protests last week, analysts said.

The protests were sparked by a report that said US army interrogators had desecrated the Quran.

Sixteen people were killed and many wounded in violence in several Afghan cities.

That report by *Newsweek* was later retracted, but the International Committee of the Red Cross subsequently said it had told the Pentagon of allegations US personnel had mishandled the Quran.

Karzai said searches should be carried out in cooperation with Afghan forces. "No operations inside Afghanistan should take place without the consultation of the Afghan government," he said.

"They should not go to our people's homes any more without the knowledge of the Afghan government ... If they want any person suspected in a house, they should let us know and the Afghan government would arrange that."

Karzai said he would also ask for "the return of prisoners to Afghanistan, all of them".



Karzai

22 MAY 2005 THE TELEGRAPH

# America and the roots of Afghan rage

M.K. Bhadrakumar

**T**HE FIERCELY independent Hazara tribes inhabiting the tangled Hindu Kush mountain tops, believed to be the descendants of Genghis Khan, have a saying: "Shisha ke maida shod, tiztar misha." ("Broken glass becomes sharper.") It is doubtful whether the Americans ever came across such disarmingly simple Afghan homilies. Surely, the Americans have broken a lot of glass during their three-and-a-half-year military occupation of Afghanistan.

With the profound sensitivity to human suffering that comes naturally to a creative writer, Pankaj Mishra recently narrated an incident in an article titled "The Real Afghanistan" in *The New Yorker* magazine: "I was at the governor's mansion in Jalalabad, formerly a summer palace of the King of Afghanistan, when a delegation of tribal elders arrived. They had walked for much of the day from a remote district; mud covered their slippers and scaly feet ... They sat on a terrace in two long rows, and the scene — long bearded, turbaned men before their solicitous portend against a backdrop of gardens and pavilions — could have come out of a Mughal miniature painting.

"The men had come to complain to the governor about heavy-handed American soldiers in their villages. After their leader spoke briefly and sombrely, the governor attempted a joke — probably in order to hide his own inability to influence his American patrons. Afghanistan, he said, had become a petri dish in which foreigners could throw in whatever they liked. Some of the men laughed, revealing toothless mouths.

"But when their laughter subsided one of the elders began to speak. From where I sat, I couldn't see his face. I only heard his deep, urgent voice. He spoke about the dishonour caused to their families by American soldiers barging

**The Afghan rage is not simply over the American war crimes. The U.S. needs to let the political process float and find its own native equilibrium.**

into women's quarters, about the frustration and rage felt by him and others, and he spoke for a long time, his voice growing in passion until it broke ..."

Thus, the recent eruption of mass demonstrations in large swathes of Afghanistan must be seen in context. The reported desecration of the *Koran* in faraway Guantanamo military base (which too, ironically, the U.S. holds on to despite Cuba's protestations over the violation of its sovereignty) was the proverbial last straw that breached the dykes holding back the Afghan rage. The rage is indeed deep-rooted.

The U.S. military operations in Afghanistan have been extremely high-handed. Tens of thousands of innocent Afghans have been killed unnoticed in the past three years of the "war on terror." Recently, a senior United Nations official posted in Afghanistan publicly alleged that his audacity to protest about the American war crimes in Afghanistan cost him his job. American military's interrogation methods have made a fine art of torture of detainees. The U.S. military itself has acknowledged the "unnatural" death of Afghan detainees in American custody in the Bagram air base north of Kabul.

But the Afghan rage is not simply over the American war crimes. The fact of the matter is that in the Afghan bazaar, "toothless" people talk about what has been going on in Kabul. And they are intuitive — like in any ancient land.

In another quarter century, perhaps, if some chancelleries in world capitals open up their archives and "declassify" their records of diplo-

macy, the first question would be whether the American military intervention in Afghanistan in October 2001 was necessary at all.

The Northern Alliance (NA) did not want an American intervention. As for the former King, Zahir Shah, he had just formed an alliance with the NA on September 30, 2001 and was about to announce a broad-based government-in-exile under his leadership.

The U.S. simply ignored the Afghan initiatives and instead proceeded to hand out \$ 70 million in 100-dollar bills to handpicked NA militia commanders to coax them into becoming the foot soldiers for the handpicked 110 CIA officers and 316 Special Forces personnel who were being assigned to Afghanistan.

Once the NA militia won the "war" on the ground, the U.S. military began moving in and commenced a rapid build-up in force level (presently 18,000 troops). In fact, the NA leadership in Kabul was taken by surprise and initially objected to the arrival of the U.S. forces at the Bagram airbase.

## Playing one against another

After establishing its military presence, the U.S. turned on the NA leadership. Playing the NA commanders against one another, creating dissensions within the NA, forcing the NA commanders to compromise by means of bribery, threats, and outright blackmail, the U.S. manipulated to create a power arrangement in Kabul that was entirely beholden to Washington. Afghanistan thus came to be touted in Washington

as a "success" story. But a fundamental requisite for long-term stability in Afghanistan is missing — the legitimacy of state power. None of the problems facing Afghanistan — poverty and destitution, drug culture, lawlessness, "warlordism" — would lend itself to a durable solution unless the fundamental issue — that Afghanistan's post-Taliban political transition is deeply flawed — is addressed.

The Afghan people do not trust the legitimacy of the transition. Without such trust, there can be no respect for authority; without such respect, there is alienation; and state authority suffers. The country remains ungovernable.

Imagine if a handful of Non-Resident Indians settled in Detroit or Alabama or Colorado for the past quarter century were to be persuaded to assume power in Delhi on the strength of an invading American army. Can their writ run beyond the sequestered vistas of central Delhi? More to the point, what if such a power calculus were to impose a unitary system of government on a country that is extremely complex in its diversity of culture, society, religious beliefs, language and ethnicity? This is the Afghan paradigm — shorn of the Bush administration's propaganda.

In the Afghan bazaar, the common "toothless" people (whom Pankaj Mishra refers to) talk about their "English-speaking government" and what a decadent, corrupt den of vices their precious jewel, Kabul city, has become in the hands of foreign infidels.

By the yardstick of colonialism, the U.S. is attempting something quite extraordinary. Of course, it is not meeting any opposition from the regional powers in doing what it pleases with Afghanistan. Afghan resistance remains sporadic. Local leaders are too overawed by the profile of the "lone superpower" to voice dissent.

Yet Afghanistan is far from "pacified." Afghanistan has simply lapsed into silence — deeply troubled and sullen. It is seething with frustration over the humiliation it is being subjected to. The pent-up rage erupts every now and then. In early May, it erupted in the western city of Herat over an innocuous incident.

The popular fury soon took the form of a demand for the reinstatement of Ismail Khan to his old position as Governor — the post from where the legendary Afghan commander was ignominiously removed by the U.S. viceroys last September because of his likely friendship with neighbouring Iran.

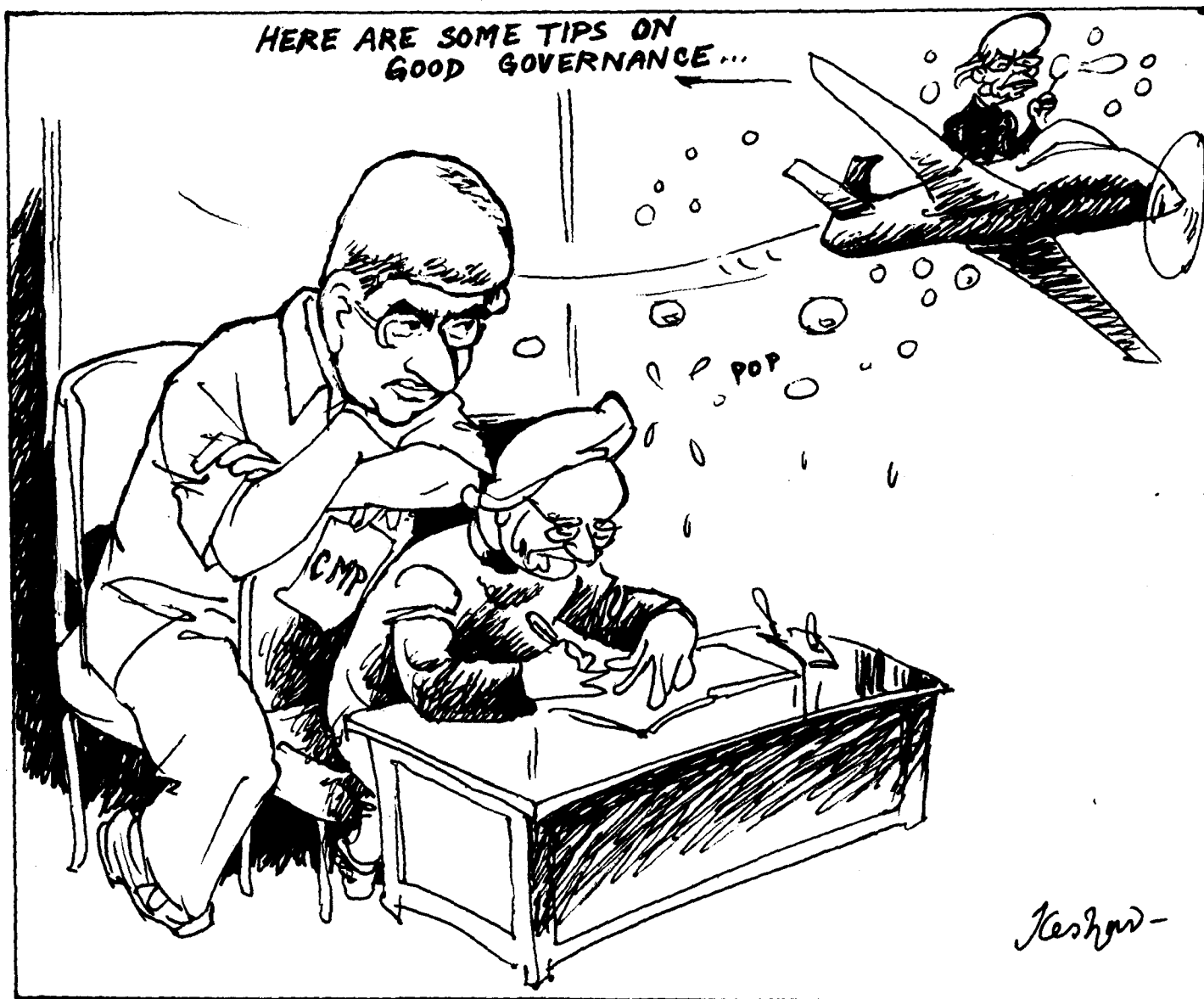
In mid-May, the rage erupted in south-eastern Jalalabad over the alleged desecration of the *Koran*. Within no time, it spread to remote Badkhashan in the foothills of the Pamir. The crowds began chanting: "Death to America," "Death to Bush," "American military go back," etc. And all the entreaties by high officials in Washington did not seem to work. The rage must now die down on its own accord, exhausted — till the next outburst.

It is not easy for the Americans to make a course correction in Afghanistan. The U.S. policy has waded so far out into the river of blood that it may seem there is no turning back. But a window of opportunity might just about open on September 18 when the parliamentary and local body elections are due. Make the occasion a level-playing field for political participation by all elements that wish to be included in mainstream national life.

Do not browbeat, blackmail or manipulate the Afghan protagonists willing to participate. Trust "people's power" as George W. Bush incessantly avows to. Let the political process float and find its own native equilibrium. In the event, democratic process might have a fighting chance to vitalise itself with the lifeblood of political legitimacy.

Clearly, no power on earth is going to try to force Washington into a course correction. It is up to Washington to take a perspective beyond the hollow rhetoric of freedom, beyond the occasional photo opportunities for American dignitaries, and, further afield, beyond the pale view of Afghanistan being pivotal real estate in the geopolitics of the region. Or else the Afghan rage will only get sharper — like broken glass.

## CARTOONSCAPE





# Four dead, scores hurt in Afghan riot

America denounced amid reports of alleged desecration of holy book

KABUL: Afghan troops were deployed on the streets of an eastern city on Wednesday after four persons died and scores were injured in riots sparked by reports that U.S. soldiers had desecrated the Koran at Guantanamo Bay.

Police in Jalalabad opened fire to break up an enraged mob of several thousand people that torched the Governor's house, the Pakistani consulate and several foreign aid agencies, police and witnesses told AFP.

As black smoke rose over the city, the crowd went on the rampage, chanting slogans including "Death to America" as well as burning the Stars and Stripes and effigies of U.S. President George W. Bush, witnesses said.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai said the riots showed the "inability" of the war-shattered country's institutions to deal with such situations, but added that the demonstrations at least meant that democracy was



**INFLAMED PASSIONS:** Students of the Nangarhar University burn household articles during a protest in Jalalabad on Wednesday. —PHOTO: AFP

flourishing. "Afghanistan's institutions, the police, the army, are not ready to handle protest and demos," Mr. Karzai said at NATO headquarters during an

official visit to Brussels. The US State Department said late Tuesday the Pentagon was investigating a report in Newsweek magazine that interrogators in Guantanamo, Cuba, had desecrated the holy book. The U.S. military, which leads a coalition of around 18,000 troops hunting Taliban mili-

tants three years after it helped topple the Islamic regime, said it was not involved.

Protests also spread to the southeastern city of Khost, where about 1,600 university students took to the streets, but the demonstrations there ended peacefully, witnesses said. — AFP

## Pakistan outraged

Reuters reports from Islamabad:

Pakistan, a key Muslim ally in the U.S.-led war on terror, has voiced deep concern to Washington over the report. The Foreign Ministry said in a statement that Pakistan conveyed its deep concern to Washington over the reports. There has been growing public outrage in Pakistan over the report. The National Assembly, Parliament's Lower house, on Tuesday passed a resolution denouncing the reported desecration and Imran Khan

# Karzai, Aziz look to leave past behind

■ Call for fresh efforts to take forward south Asia's economy

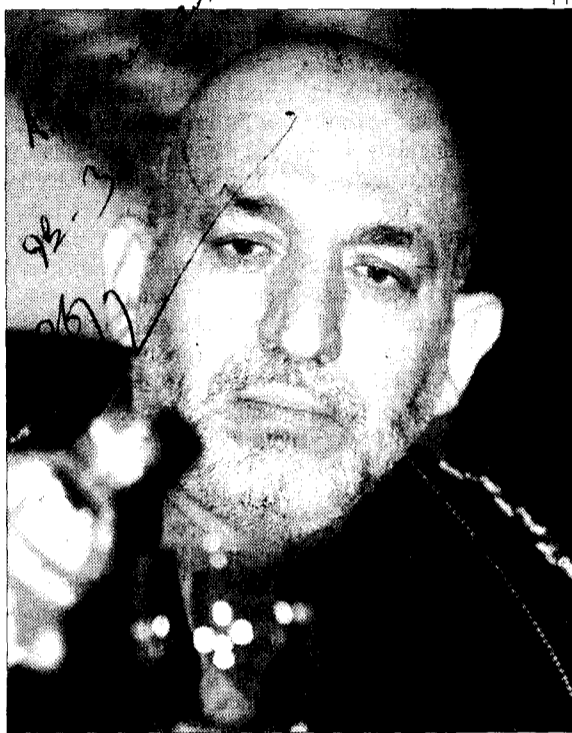
EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI FEBRUARY 25

**F**OR two countries that have been under the spotlight in the war against terror, the last three years have clearly forced a rethink in shaping their national agendas. Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai and Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz were together today in seeking to redouble efforts for a better economic future for south Asia.

Addressing the *India Today* conclave, Karzai said that Afghanistan would be only too happy to become part of SAARC, leaving Aziz to throw Pakistan's weight behind the idea. The Pakistan PM, who addressed the conclave through satellite, also felt India and Pakistan had the capability to lead south Asia to a "new horizon" of a "bright economic future".

He said neither country should allow the future to be held hostage to past problems and said Islamabad had shown its willingness to "think out of the box" and called for both countries to develop "fresh approaches" while addressing issues of the past. But he couldn't entirely shake off the past as he spent considerable time emphasising the centrality of the "Kashmir dispute" in the ongoing Indo-Pak peace process.

"Kashmir is not about territory or ideologies...it is a human problem. Kashmiris



## Aziz to look into row over kiss on screen

■ NEW DELHI: With Pakistani actor Meera caught in a controversy at home over a kissing scene in Indo-Pak venture *Nazar*, Pakistan PM Shaukat Aziz said he was looking into "details" of it and will then take a decision. "There has been reaction in the public in Pakistan because of some scenes which are not culturally acceptable," he said. — PTI

have been denied their right to self-determination," he said, adding that to bracket the Kashmir problem as a "subset" of global terrorism is "disingenuous" and "dangerous".

Aziz came in for aggressive questioning from poet-lyricist Javed Akhtar, who said dividing Kashmir meant legitimising the two-nation

theory, so would Pakistan be prepared to accept the millions of Indian Muslims? Aziz, instead, assured Akhtar that Pakistan was keeping a watch on how Muslims were treated in India and hoped they enjoyed basic rights. On a more positive note, Aziz pushed for an early breakthrough in the talks for a gas pipeline from Iran to India through Pakistan. As for increasing trade between both countries, Aziz felt India ought to give some "comfort" to Pakistan's private sector by removing certain tariff and non-tariff barriers.

Earlier in the day, it was Karzai who went a step further when he called for removal of "political barriers" to make trade and transit more accessible in the region. "There should be a new vision for the region and efforts made to remove political barriers and, instead of building walls, we must build bridges."

What has been happening since the new president came in?

# The Afghan story

## WRITING ON THE WALL

ASHOK V. DESAI

There was a time, not too long ago, when Afghanistan made front pages. Taliban, Bamian, Herat, and Mazar-e-Sharief had become almost household words in India. Then a graduate of Himachal University became Afghanistan's president; and Afghanistan vanished from our newspapers. What has been happening in this little friend of Hindostan?

Zahir Shah became Padshah of Afghanistan in 1933 when he was a kid; his uncles ran the country. While he was enjoying himself in Europe in 1973, Daoud Khan led the Afghan communist party in a coup, abolished monarchy and made himself president. The party was divided into Khalq (people) and Parcham (banner) factions. In 1978, Nur Mohammad Taraki and Babrak Karmal killed Daoud Khan and seized power. Soon the Khalqis began to purge the Parchamis. Karmal was sent off to Czechoslovakia, and Hafizullah Khan Amin of Khalq took over. Taraki's followers tried to kill Amin; but Taraki was killed first. Land ceilings were imposed, and women were liberated. Such reforms were found intolerable, and thousands migrated to Iran and Pakistan. Finding that communists had got a bad name, Amin began to say that his was an Islamic regime. There were several attempts to assassinate him. Keen to restore communist rule, the Soviet army marched into Kabul on Christmas Day in 1979. They brought in Babrak Karmal as president.

A guerrilla movement soon started against the regime. The Afghan army dwindled with desertions from 105,000 in 1978 to 30,000 in 1987. The Soviets prevented its rout only by the use of tanks and helicopter gun ships. Pakistan and the US combined in 1986 to launch an operation in which the Pakistan army trained and led Afghan recruits as well as Arab volunteers, with arms and money coming from the US. It bled the Soviet Union until it withdrew in 1989. The ensuing civil war ended in 1994 when the Taliban, a subsidiary of Pakistani ISI, took over Afghanistan. The border with Pakistan became more or less open.

In 1998 the 25 million people of Afghanistan owned 40 million animals or 1.6 animals a head — 25 million sheep, 9 million goats, 4½ million cattle, 1 million donkeys and half a million camels (we Indians own about a third of an animal per head). They also had 11 million chickens. The 2.7 million hectares of cultivated land produced 3.9 million tons of foodgrains — 2.7 million

tons of wheat, 400,000 tons of rice, 300,000 tons of maize and 250,000 tons of barley. Of the 2.7 million hectares, 1.2 million was irrigated, and produced 2 million tons of wheat.

The country imported almost all its industrial goods — petroleum products from Iran, and the rest from Pakistan. Taliban had an Afghan Transit Trade agreement with Pakistan under which it imported goods duty-free through Karachi. As India has often done with Nepal, Pakistan used to badger

quarrelled with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. So in the last days it was reduced to importing small quantities of petroleum products from Turkmenistan; their cost was raised considerably by transport.

Taliban's control over the country also melted soon. It lived entirely on US, and then Pakistani aid; its state revenue in 1996-97 was only 2.6 per cent of its expenditure. By then, collection of economic statistics had virtually ceased. Later observers looked back on Taliban rule



Of carrots and sticks

Afghanistan about goods that were imported across Pakistan and then smuggled back into Pakistan. Of the \$2.5 billion of goods imported under the ATT in 1996, \$2 billion was smuggled into Pakistan. In 1995 Pakistan removed 17 items from the ATT, including synthetic fibres and clothing; in 1999 it asked the Afghan government to levy the same customs duties as Pakistan. Indian tyres were particularly cheap, so their import was taken out of the ATT in 1994. But still in 1999 Pakistan, to its horror, found Modi tyres being smuggled in.

Taliban, a devoutly Sunni outfit, had theological differences with Shia Iran, which affected trade. It became difficult to import goods through Bandar Abbas and Islam Qala; and there were obstacles in the import of the crucial petroleum products from Iran. Taliban also

with nostalgia because of the law and order it imposed. But its writ did not run far beyond Kabul.

Taliban lost the goodwill it had in Washington by continuing to provide a safe haven to Osama bin Laden, whose al Qaida was associated with a series of terrorist acts starting with the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II in Manila in 1994. But it had good friends in Pakistan. So it was left alone till the attacks of September 9, 2001 in the US. The US used the attacks to remove Taliban and install Hamid Karzai as president.

In 2003, Afghanistan had a population of 21 million. It produced 3.6 million tons of foodgrains from 2.2 million hectares — 2.7 million tons of wheat (2.1 million tons of it irrigated), 350,000 tons of barley, 300,000 tons of wheat, and 260,000 tons of rice. But in addition, 74,000 hectares

of land produced 3,422 tons of opium, which brought export revenue of \$2.5 billion — two-fifths of the gross national product. It gave 78,987 person-years of employment; at harvest time it employed 822,722 people, according to a report Manabu Fujimura did for the ADB.

Re-exports — also known as smuggling into Pakistan — brought \$2.7 billion, and opium exports brought \$2.3 billion. Foreign aid brought another \$1.8 billion. Thus this country, which exported \$150 million's worth of its own produce — dry fruit, sheepskin and carpets — could afford imports of \$4.7 billion.

It collected \$132 million in government revenue — 2 per cent of GNP. Half of it came from import duties — less than 1½ per cent of imports. A third was collected by the provinces but little of it was remitted to the Central government. It spent \$349 million; it received \$184 million in grants, \$25 million in loans, and \$39 million in other financing. Amongst the last were fees from overflights over Afghanistan that International Air Transport Association had collected for years but not remitted since it did not know to which government to send them to. The government employed 456,000, including an army of 100,000. But not more than 330,000 were actually being paid.

All government employees got 1,200 afghanis a month in food allowance, Af440 in a second food allowance, Af130 in transport allowance and Af8 in professional allowance (the official exchange rate of the afghani was about the same as that of the rupee). The salary itself was Af210 at the top and Af40 at the bottom; gross pay including the allowances varied from Af4,077 to Af1,818.

These are new afghanis. Many variants of afghanis were in circulation including counterfeit ones. In 2003, the government got 500 tons of new notes printed in Germany and Sweden, and flew them in. Then they were flown to seven provinces — roads were considered too hazardous — and then transported to 47 exchange points. When anyone came to exchange his money, 10 per cent of it was examined; the proportion of counterfeits in it was then applied to the entire amount he wanted to exchange, and he was reimbursed for the rest. The old and phony afghanis were burnt on the spot. So Afghanistan finally has a single currency — except for the dollars, which the government receives in millions and periodically auctions.

25 JAN 2005

THE TELEGRAPH

# Torture echo in Afghan jails

**Kabul, Jan. 16** (Reuters): US forces in Afghanistan freed 81 suspected Taliban fighters from military jails across the country today and some of the released men said they had been mistreated and tortured in custody.

Aged between 19 and 64,



**A released detainee in Kabul shows his prison number stamped on his hand.** (AFP)

looking pale and exhausted, the bearded men smiled and waved as they left the Afghan Supreme Court to begin their journeys home.

"They have been released

from Bagram," Chief Justice Fazl Hadi Shinwari said, referring to the main American base in Afghanistan, north of the capital Kabul.

"We will give them clothes and then send them home."

At a brief hearing before their release, Shinwari warned the men not to talk about their imprisonment, saying it could harm the prospects of those still held, but some still spoke out.

"I was picked up on the basis of wrong information," Shah Alim, a 19-year-old from the eastern province of Kunar, said. "They poured water on me, deprived me of sleep and beat me during detention as part of their torture."

Accusations of mistreatment of prisoners have dogged US military jails from Iraq, to Afghanistan and its base in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

"I have very bad memories of the interrogation because they were torturing us," said Abdul Manan, 35, also from Kunar. "But after the interrogation period was over, everything was all right," he said outside the Supreme Court.

US forces captured hundreds of prisoners when they toppled Afghanistan's radical Islamist Taliban government in late 2001 for failing to surrender al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, architect of the September 11 attacks on US cities.

Prisoners deemed to be the greatest security risk were taken bound and shackled to Guantanamo Bay, while others were kept at US bases across Afghanistan.

The US said last week it would release the last four Britons and an Australian held at Guantanamo Bay for three years without charge after Britain and Australia had given Washington a number of unspecified "security assurances".