

Chronology of Events in Afghanistan, March 2004*

March 1

Afghan Shias mark bloody ritual. (Reuters)

Hundreds of minority Afghan Shi'ites took to the streets of Kabul, whipping and beating themselves to mark a sombre anniversary of mourning. It was the first commemoration of the martyrdom of Hussein, a revered Shi'ite leader, since Afghanistan adopted a new constitution in January 2004 that promised religious tolerance in the overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim country of 28 million people.

Afghan soldier killed in a clash in Khost. (AIP and Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty Afghanistan Report)

One Afghan soldier was killed and two were injured in a clash that occurred at the customs house of the city of Khost. The clash took place between local residents and soldiers belonging to Khost Military Division No. 25. The cause of the fighting is not known, but an unspecified number of local residents have reportedly been arrested.

March 2

United Nations resumes aid to refugees months after the slaying of French staffer. (Associated Press / AP)

The U.N. Refugee Agency resumed helping Afghan refugees on their way home, months after the slaying of a French aid worker prompted a suspension in aid and the withdrawal of staff from provinces bordering Pakistan. The aid program -- which gives US\$8 per person and a travel allowance to help families return -- was suspended after two gunmen killed Bettina Goislard on November 16 in the city of Ghazni. The U.N. Refugee Agency began registering and screening families living as refugees in Pakistan. It plans to open reception centers in several Afghan cities beginning on March 4. Essential foreign staff have returned to its offices in Gardez, Jalalabad and Kandahar.

Afghan police official escapes attempt on his life. (Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press news agency / AIP)

The head of the reconnaissance department of the anti-drugs force of Helmand Province, Brig-Gen Mohammad Daud, escaped an attempt on his life but one of his companions was injured in the attack.

* *Disclaimer: Reports contained in this document are selected from publicly available resources and edited by country experts. The information provided here is not, and does not purport to be, either exhaustive with regard to conditions in the country of origin surveyed, or conclusive as to the merits of any particular claim. Further information may be obtained from BO Ankara*

Sunni and Shia army recruits clash. (Afghan Radio Radio Khelid)

Sunni and Shi'ite recruits for the Afghan National Army clashed in Kabul. The clash occurred as the Shi'ites were making preparations for the Shi'ite religious holiday of Ashura. An unidentified spokesman for the International Security Assistance Force said one person was killed in the clash. However, Afghan police sources said no one was killed, but 16 people were injured.

March 4

Afghan leader sacks Kabul mayor after land scandal. (Reuters)

The mayor of Afghanistan's capital has been sacked by Hamid Karzai amid complaints of rampant bribery and land grabbing by senior government members. Mohammad Anwar Jigdalak, an official of the Northern Alliance, has been replaced by Ghulam Sakhi Noorzad, an experienced technocrat and former mayor. Jigdalak was at the centre of a land scandal in the up market Sher Pur area in 2003. Top officials in Karzai's government, including Northern Alliance leader and Defense Minister Mohammad Qasim Fahim, secured plots after police demolished dozens of houses that had been used by locals for decades.

Suspected Taliban kill at least seven Afghan soldiers in raid on border post. (AP)

Suspected Taliban militants killed at least seven Afghan soldiers in a raid near the border with Pakistan, a senior military commander said. Guerillas attacked the border post in Maruf district in Kandahar province, said Khan Mohammed, the provincial military commander. Mohammed blamed Taliban militants for the attack, which left another soldier missing. Mullah Hakim Latifi, who claims to speak for the Taliban, said its members had carried out the attack.

March 5

Turkish engineer and Afghan soldier killed in suspected Taliban attack in Zabul. (AP)

Suspected Taliban gunmen killed a Turkish engineer and an Afghan soldier after stopping their car along a main road linking the capital with the turbulent south, a local army commander and a Turkish diplomat said. Another Turkish engineer and the car's driver were abducted, said Naimatullah Khan, army commander for Zabul province. The attack occurred in the early afternoon along the Kabul-Kandahar highway in Shahjoy district, about 280 kilometers southwest of Kabul. "The Taliban carried out this attack. Afghan soldiers are combing through the district looking for them," Khan said. The Afghan soldier was in the car to protect the engineers, he said. The shooting occurred in the same area of restive Zabul province as several other attacks on aid workers, engineers and Afghan security forces in recent months.

March 6

Tribal leaders agree to boost security in southeastern Afghanistan. (AFP)

Tribal chiefs and government officials met in Khost to iron out factional disputes and improve security in troubled southeastern Afghanistan. The meeting drew local notables, including tribal elders from Khost and the neighboring Paktia provinces, Khost governor Abdul Hakim Taniwal said. Delegates also agreed to provide security

along the 70-kilometer Gardez-Khost road which links Paktia and Khost, he said. He said that the tribes which live along the road will be responsible for the security of that portion where they live. The delegates also decided to fine tribes who breached agreements reached during the meeting up to 100,000 Afghanis (1,500 dollars). Representatives from the powerful Zadran tribe of anti-government rebel Padsha Khan promised at the gathering to prevent any violence in the provinces. Khan, who has led several attacks against government forces, was forgiven by President Hamid Karzai in February after he was handed over to Afghan police. His son, Abdul Wali Zadran, was appointed as a district chief in the hope of persuading his tribe, which is the largest in the region, to support the government.

Afghan aid worker killed by unidentified gunmen in Zabul. (AP)

Unidentified gunmen shot dead an Afghan aid worker in Zabul. Dr. Isha Khan, 33, director for the Red Crescent Society in southern Zabul province, came under fire as he traveled by vehicle from his office to his village home. The attack happened at around 5 p.m. on a road between the main town in Zabul, Qalat, and Khan's home village of Nokhaiz, which lies about 15 kilometers to the north.

March 7

Afghan Team reports findings on women's self-immolation. (Afghan newspaper *Hewad* and RFE/RL Afghanistan Report)

A team dispatched from Kabul to investigate reports of self-immolation by women in Herat Province discovered that most of those cases occurred among women in forced marriages. Soraya Parlika said the cases her investigative team probed "revealed that 70 percent of these women were forcibly married, 20 percent of them were living in extreme poverty, and the remaining 10 percent were engaged in immoral activities."

Two more girls' schools set alight in Afghanistan. (AFP)

A United Nations official said that two more girls' schools have been set alight in Afghanistan. One school was in Bala Bluk district in southwestern Farah province and the other was in the mountainous district of Kishem in northeastern Badakhshan province.

Three civilians, including a child, killed in clash with US forces in Uruzgan province. (AFP)

Three Afghan civilians, one a child, were shot in a clash with US-led forces in troubled central Afghanistan after a convoy carrying US troops hit a landmine, an official said. According to Afghan police, three people were killed when the coalition forces fired on, after their vehicle was hit by a land mine. Another seven people, three of them teenagers were wounded during the shooting which occurred some 500 meters from the district centre of Charchino in central Uruzgan province.

Afghan commandos arrest suspects in Zabul province. (Afghan radio *Radio Afghanistan*)

Commandos of Brigade No 3 of the Central Military Corps launched mopping-up operations in Shenkay District of Zabul Province. They arrested three people by the names of Rahmatollah, Ezatollah, and Sayfollah. The arrested people belong to a regional commander, Ahmadollah Mansur.

Afghan journalist held for links with Taliban in Khost province. (AFP)

An Afghan journalist was held for questioning by US-led troops after he was arrested by Afghan military forces for allegedly having links with the ousted Taliban militants in southeastern Afghanistan. Muhammad Qasim Jan was arrested by local militia forces in Khost and was detained by the 25th division of Khost, military commander Khyal Baz Khan said. He was later handed over to the US forces at the Khost airport for questioning. Khan said that the journalist is suspected to have "close relation with the Taliban" and had served as a commander of a Taliban checkpoint before the US-led military campaign in late 2001 which toppled the fundamentalist regime. A freelance cameraman, Qasim had been working as a stringer during Taliban's rule.

March 9

Afghan government seeks tribes' support to ensure security in Paktia province. (Iranian radio Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

Leaders of Afridi border tribes of Paktia met the Border and Tribal Affairs Minister Mohammad Aref Nurzai, and expressed their readiness for ensuring order and security in border areas and preventing unidentified armed people from entering Afghan soil. At the meeting, the tribal leaders announced that people who would try to violate order and cooperate with the Taleban and members of Al-Qa'idah in hatching a plot against the Afghan central government would be fined equivalent to 6,000 dollars.

Afghan minister says he was fired for presidency bid. (Reuters)

A day after the government announced his resignation, Afghanistan's former Planning Minister accused President Hamid Karzai of firing him because of plans to run against Karzai in presidential elections. According to government officials, Karzai replaced Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq as planning minister after he resigned during a cabinet meeting on March 7. Mohaqiq said he had walked out of the meeting in protest against Karzai's decision to transfer some of his ministry's powers to Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, but he denied that he had quit. "My removal is certainly linked to my announcement that I will be a presidential candidate," he said. Mohaqiq was a Northern Alliance commander whose ethnic Hazara troops were accused of committing atrocities against factional rivals during civil warfare in the 1990s and of massacring Taliban fighters in the north in 1997. He was replaced in the key planning post by Ramazan Bashardoost, a veteran Western-educated technocrat.

March 10

Situation reportedly calm in Argo district of Badakhshan Province. (AIP)

A deputy governor of Badakhshan Province said that both of the commanders who fought in Argo were in Kabul, and an acting head has been appointed in the district. The deputy governor of Badakhshansaid that, according to an order by the central government, the former head and security commander of Argo District, Dr Abdol Jabbar Mossadeq, and Qari Ziaoddin, went to Kabul. Mowlawi Mohammad Yosuf was appointed as acting head of the district and is carrying out the duties of the security commander of the district too. Several weeks ago there were violent clashes on the collection of Ushr [agricultural tax] from the opium harvest between the

supporters of Dr Abdol Jabbar Mossadeq, the head of Argo District, and the district's security commander, Qari Ziaoddin. Many people were killed in those clashes.

Two new political parties registered. (Afghanistan Television and RFE/ RL Afghanistan Report)

The Afghan Justice Ministry has officially registered two new political parties. The new groups are the Islamic Independence Party of Afghanistan (*Hizb-e Esteqlal-e Islami-ye Afghanistan*) and National Solidarity Youth Party of Afghanistan (*Hizb-e Hambastagi-ye Melli-ye Jawanan-e Afghanistan*).

Six new provincial governors appointed. (Afghan Bakhtar News Agency and RFE/RL Afghanistan Report)

Six new provincial governors were appointed at the initiative of the Interior Ministry and with the approval of Afghan Transitional Administration Chairman Karzai. They are, in the north and northeast: Sayyed Mohammad Akram in Badakhshan; Faqir Mohammad Mamozai in Baghlan; Mohammad Omar in Konduz; Amer Latif in Samangan; and Abdul Kabir Marzban in Takhtar. Mohammad Aman Hamimi was appointed to head a provincial government in Logar, south of Kabul.

March 12

Afghan forces free two Turkish engineers. (AP)

Afghan forces freed two kidnapped Turkish engineers and an Afghan translator in a shootout with their captors, the Interior Minister said. Two suspects were killed and two Afghan soldiers injured in the operation. Ali Ahmad Jalali said the two Turks, who were abducted in December 2003, were freed after a rescue operation in a village in the Mohammed Agha district of Logar province. Officials said in that the Turks, who were digging wells, had been abducted by a former militia commander called Afzal Khan over a land dispute.

Interior Minister opens first police station on Afghan-Iran border. (Afghan Herat TV)

Afghanistan and Iran opened the first in a series of police stations on the Afghan border. Iran made a start by erecting 10 frontier police stations. The ministers said ten out of 25 frontier police stations are under construction. The construction work on the 10 police station has been completed and the rest of these police stations will be ready for opening in 20 days. The Islamic Republic of Iran is going to construct three more police stations in the border areas of Farah and seven other frontier police stations in the border areas of Nimroz Province. After construction of the police stations is completed, they will be handed over to Afghan officials.

March 13

Missile attack leaves one dead in Laghman Province. (AIP)

Two missiles have landed near the residence of the governor of Laghman Province, and killed a man. The Governor of Laghman, Mohammad Ebrahim Babakarkhel, said that the victim was not a government employee but a civilian.

Kidnappers release vaccinators in Herat Province. (Afghan news agency Herat News Centre)

Four vaccinators involved in the polio vaccination campaign were kidnapped and beaten up by armed people on March 10 after they were dispatched to provide vaccinations in the Chah Hakim Gawader area, located 60 km from Ghowrian District in Herat Province. They were later released after mediation by some elders and are now at Ghowrian hospital. According to the vaccinators, these gunmen were members of a group who kidnapped 11 people from a mosque in Chonjan area of Ghowrian District and then killed them in 2003.

March 14

Alleged Taliban attack leaves 4 dead near Kandahar. (AP)

Armed persons, supposedly Taleban, with rockets and heavy machine guns attacked a government office near the Afghan-Pakistan border, sparking a firefight that killed one Afghan soldier and three Taliban. The attack occurred at night in the Shorovak district of Kandahar province. About 60 Taliban fighters attacked the office of the Shorovak district chief.

UN says forty-five children as young as seven in jail in Kabul. (AFP)

Forty-five children aged between 7 and 18 are in jail in Kabul, a UN official said. "In Afghanistan anyone seven years and up can be charged for a criminal offence," United Nations spokesman Manoel e Almeida de Silva told a press conference. "Currently there are some 45 juveniles aged from 7 to 18 who have been arrested and detained with adults. Seventy percent await trial and the rest have been convicted." A new national strategy had recently been launched to protect children at risk and to prevent delinquency, he said. "The strategy aims to ensure child imprisonment is a last resort. That convicted child felons benefit from appropriate rehabilitation programmes and that juveniles are treated as children." The strategy aims at strengthening administrative procedures for juveniles and bringing them into line with international standards.

Afghan-Pakistani tribes clash in border region. (Afghan Hindukosh News Agency and RFE/RL *Afghanistan Report*)

Armed clashes broke out between Afghan and Pakistani tribes across the disputed border between those two countries. The fighting reportedly pits the Tani tribe, on the Afghan side of the so-called Durand Line, with the Madakhayl, Wazir, Zeli Shakh, and Badarkhayl tribes residing in the northern Waziristan region of Pakistan. Both sides have laid claim to the Sutarki region. The current border between Afghanistan and Pakistan -- known as the "Durand Line" after Sir Henry Mortimer Durand, the British signatory of the 1893 agreement that demarcated the border between Afghanistan and British India -- has never been officially recognized by Afghanistan, and has been at the core of disagreements between Afghanistan and Pakistan since the creation of Pakistan in 1947.

March 15

Police kill man in Khost province. (AIP)

Police killed one person in Khost, the capital of southeastern Khost Province. The victim was a person who had returned to his home from the United Arab Emirates a few days ago. Five persons in police uniform left the scene quietly after killing the person. No officials were available for comments on the incident.

Afghan soldier shot dead at checkpoint near Kandahar. (AP)

An Afghan soldier was shot dead at a checkpoint in Kandahar province, a senior Afghan official said, in an attack he blamed on Taliban militants. A second soldier was wounded when four people opened fire from a vehicle on the checkpoint near the town of Maywand, some 70 kilometers west of Kandahar.

Four Afghan civilians killed in fighting between Hezb-i-Wahdat factions in Uruzgan. (Reuters)

At least four Afghan civilians were reportedly killed in clashes between rival pro-government commanders in central Afghanistan. The clashes between forces of two commanders of the Shi'ite Muslim Hezb-i-Wahdat faction broke out in the Dai Kundi district of Uruzgan province on March 13-14.

March 17

Taliban commander made chief of south. (Reuters)

Afghanistan's Taliban appointed a commander to lead their military operations. A Taliban official said Mullah Dadullah has been appointed as a commander in the Taliban's former southern stronghold, which has been the scene of stepped up clashes with U.S.-led and Afghan forces in recent months. Dadullah succeeds Hafiz Abdur Rahim, who was killed in a U.S.-led raid in southern Afghanistan, near the border with Pakistan, in September 2003. Dadullah was a commander during Taliban rule from 1996 until late 2001. Members of the minority ethnic Hazara community accuse him of ordering the massacre of dozens of Shi'ite Muslim Hazaras during the Taliban's rule.

Radio Afghanistan starts airing programmes for Shi'i ethnic group. (Afghanistan Television)

A Hazaragi programme for ethnic Hazaras, belonging to Shi'i school of thought has been added to Radio Afghanistan broadcasts. The chairman of Afghanistan's radio and television, Gholam Hasan Hazarati, said they decided to add a new programme called the Hazaragi programme to the "Voice of compatriots" broadcasts. This programme will be broadcast from 21 March 2004.

US bombing kills six civilians in Uruzgan province. (Reuters)

At least six Afghan civilians were killed and seven others injured in a U.S. air strike in Afghanistan's central province of Uruzgan, local officials said. Many of the casualties in the night raid on a village in Charcheno district were women and children, said a local government official. U.S. military spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Bryan Hilferty said he was unaware of any civilian casualties. He said U.S. planes had pounded suspected Taliban positions in the area in retaliation for the killing of two U.S. soldiers.

March 21

Some 100 killed in clashes following Minister's assassination in Herat. (Qatari Al-Jazeera satellite TV)

More than 100 people were killed in violent clashes in Herat following the assassination of the Afghan Minister of Aviation and Tourism [Mirwais Sadeq] in Herat province. The Minister was riding in a car with his father Esmael Khan, Governor of Herat, when fire was opened on them from the house of the commander of the 17th Division in the Afghan Army [Abdolzaher Nayebzadeh]. The Minister died and his father survived the attack. Following the incident, fierce clashes broke out between forces loyal to Ismael Khan and Afghan Army forces.

Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran report on the same news: Herat security forces have laid siege to the house of the commander of the Herat Division No 17. The spokesman for the governor-general of Herat, Esmail Khan said that forces loyal to Abdolzaher Nayebzada, who is a senior army commander in Herat, were responsible for the assassination.

Agence France Presse report on the same news: Fighting erupted in Herat shortly after Khan's minister son Mirwais Sadiq was killed as he went to investigate an earlier assassination attempt on Khan himself in the same day. Three men had shot at Ismael Khan's convoy with AK-47s in the afternoon in what is believed to be a well-planned attack, according to a Herat intelligence officer. The man who escaped from the spot was chased into the home of local army commander Abdul Zahir's house. Sadiq approached Zahir's house with other top city officials to demand answers, and was shot dead as he entered. His death led to all-out fighting between Khan's forces and Abdul Zahir's forces. More than 200 people had been arrested after the clashes.

Afghan radio Kelid report on the same news on March 22: Commander Nayebzada has denied the reports that he had attacked and killed the minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation. Quoting Commander Nayebzada, the reports add that Sadeq was killed when he entered his residence. The government has ordered the National Army's soldiers to go to the fighting place and try to put an end to the ongoing deadly clashes in Herat.

Agence France Presse report on the same news on March 23: Nayebzade denied the allegation and said he knew nothing about an attempt on Khan's life. He said Sadiq had tried to storm his home, killed two guards at the entrance, and was himself killed in the subsequent exchange of fire. "Ismael Khan's forces surrounded the 17th military division and his son, along with the director of intelligence and police security director with 100 troops, surrounded my house at the same time," Nayebzade said. "Mirwais Sadiq forced the entrance of my residence killing two of my guards, he died in the exchange of fire which followed." Nayebzade said 35 of his soldiers were killed in the fighting and 40 were injured. He accused Khan of later killing the wounded soldiers, saying their bodies had disappeared. Naibzada fled Herat after Khan's forces took control of the city on the night of March 21.

Associated Press report on the same news on March 25: Three men arrested in the killing of Aviation Minister allegedly confessed to the attack, saying they fired upon him with rocket-launched grenades and assault rifles, security officials said. Herat authorities arrested 21 of Nayebzade's men immediately after the clash, Herat Deputy Intelligence Director Abdul Wahid Tawakuli said. Three of them confessed to direct involvement in the Sadiq's murder, Tawakuli said. One said he opened fire on the

minister with a grenade launcher while the other two said they fired on him with assault rifles. Tawakuli didn't identify the men, other than to say they were loyalists of Nayebzade. Local officials said the fighting that followed killed 50-100 people. However, President Hamid Karzai said in a statement that an initial investigation showed the death toll at 16.

March 23

Shalman camp closed. (UNHCR)

UNHCR closed Shalman camp for Afghan refugees in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province after the camp's last inhabitants left for home with assistance from the refugee agency. The last group of 148 Afghans were repatriated on March 21, joining some 4,000 others who had headed homewards before them in recent weeks. A separate group of 4,800 who did not wish to go back to Afghanistan had earlier been relocated to Kotkai camp in Pakistan. Shalman's closure is part of a plan to consolidate camps along the Pakistan-Afghan border that were set up to accommodate Afghans fleeing the fighting in their country in late 2001.

March 25

30 private jails closed in Afghanistan. (Afghan newspaper *Arman-e Melli*)

The Independent Human Rights Commission has closed down more than 30 jails established by local commanders and armed persons in various provinces. The commission has also closed down some 11 jails which were established by the government's military forces, inside divisions and battalions of the Defense Ministry. In total some 1,500 people, who had committed no crimes and had been imprisoned without reason were released with the help of the Commission. It was reported that there were presently about 16 unofficial jails currently existing in various provinces, and the Independent Human Rights Commission started to investigate them.

Displaced Afghans visit home-town in northern Jowzjan Province. (UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan / UNAMA)

A group of 13 displaced Afghans visited Jowzjan Province for a five-day go-and-see visit in their villages of origin. The visiting delegation represents some 10,000 displaced persons who fled Jowzjan in late 2001 and early 2002 due to insecurity and outright intimidation, and who currently reside in Kandahar Province and Baluchistan in Pakistan. The group, back in Kabul, will be having a series of meetings with the Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, Enayatollah Nazeri, as well as Filippo Grandi, Chief of Mission for UNHCR.

March 28

Daikondi Province established. (AFP and RFE/RL *Afghanistan Report*)

Interior Minister Ali Ahmad Jalali said that Daikondi Province has been established as the country's 33rd province. The heavily populated Daikondi District, which is in Oruzgan Province, will have its own governor and security commanders and is expected to receive increased funds and services from Kabul as a result of the change.

Suicide bomber killed in Khost. (Reuters)

A suicide bomber trying to attack an Afghan military base in Khost town was killed when his bomb exploded early. In a separate attack, six civilians, one a child, were wounded in a rocket attack on a restaurant near the town's airport, where U.S. forces are based, Sherzai said. In a third attack in the town night, three hand grenades were thrown at homes of Afghan soldiers, some of whom work with U.S. forces. No one was hurt in that attack.

Two Afghans killed, 10 missing, in Taliban raid in Uruzgan province. (Reuters)

Taliban fighters reportedly raided an Afghan army post in Uruzgan province, killing at least two soldiers. Ten soldiers were missing. A spokesman for the ousted Taliban said 11 government soldiers were killed in the pre-dawn attack in Deh Rawud district of central Uruzgan province. But a provincial official, who declined to be identified, said two men had been killed, three wounded and 10 were missing.

Demonstration held in west Afghan city one week after minister killed. (AFP)

About 400 people gathered in the city of Herat to protest against recent violence, one week after the killing of Aviation Minister Mirwais Sadiq there. Outside the UN's Herat office, a statement was read condemning all acts of terrorism but also criticising the central government for failing to take major steps to arrest those responsible for Sadiq's death.

Pakistani prisoners buy release in north Afghanistan. (Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

Nine Pakistani prisoners have been released in exchange for money from a jail in northern Afghanistan. The prisoners who were released from [leader of the Jonbesh-e Melli Eslami Afghanistan] Gen Abdorrashid Dostum's jail were residents of Karachi, Peshawar and Lahore, who paid 7m Pakistani rupees [about 150,000 US dollars] for their release.

March 29

Two Afghan coalition lorry drivers injured along Khost-Gardez highway. (AIP)

Eyewitnesses from the Zadran area along the Khost-Gardez highway said that unidentified people attacked a lorry heading from Khost town for Gardez town near the Saydkhel bazaar, about 30 km away from Khost. As a result the driver of the lorry and his assistants were injured. It was reported that large lorries have been delivering goods to coalition troops deployed in Khost. The Taleban had repeatedly demanded that the drivers avoid any delivery of goods to the coalition forces.

Four injured in rocket attack on hotel in Afghan eastern province. (Afghan independent radio Kelid)

Four people have been injured in a rocket attack on a hotel in the city of Khost. The hotel building has also been damaged. All of the injured, including a girl, were guests.

Thirteen troops killed in suicide attack in Jalalabad. (Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

It was reported that three US and six Afghan troops were killed in a suicide bomb attack, carried out by an unidentified man, in Jalalabad [the capital of eastern Nangarhar Province]. Following the attack, the US troops who were based in this area

thought that fighting had broken out between US and Afghan troops. It was reported that US troops attacked Afghan forces and killed four Afghan soldiers.

March 30

First public appearance by women at Khost radio opening. (Non-governmental media organisation Internews)

The opening of a new independent radio station in the southern Afghan city of Khost has heralded the first known participation by women in a public event in the city since 1992. Ten women from the local office of the Ministry of Women's Affairs attended the opening of Radio Sulh-e Paygham (The Message of Peace), one of 13 independent stations launched in Afghanistan under an Internews project funded by the United State Agency for International Development (USAID). Radio Sulh-e Paygham, which began broadcasting February 25 on 88.2 MHz, will reach at least 59,000 residents of Khost and the surrounding districts. The station is broadcasting both in-house programming and material from the Tanin Network five hours a day.

March 31

Two Afghan soldiers killed by suspected Taliban near Kandahar. (AFP)

Two Afghan soldiers were killed by suspected Taliban militants near the city of Kandahar, an official said. The two were ambushed in Parliz village north of Kandahar and close to Shah Wali Kot, a military commander said.

Bomb blast hits Herat. (AFP)

A strong explosion hit western Herat city, shattering windows but causing no injuries, days after fierce factional fighting erupted in the city following the death of a cabinet minister. The blast took place near the Qamar Hotel, close to the residence of Herat governor Ismael Khan.

Presidential candidate reportedly barred from entering university compound. (Afghan newspaper *Arman-e Melli*)

Presidential candidate Masuda Jalal, in a gathering of students in Mazar-e Sharif, has criticized the recent decision to postpone the elections. Masuda Jalal complained about activities of a number of government organizations to hinder her election campaign. It was reported that officials closed the Balkh University gate on the presidential candidate, Masuda Jalal, and prevented her from entering the university compound.

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Revised September 2004*