

Chronology of Events in Afghanistan, April 2004*

April 1

Afghans who fled northern homes after Taliban's defeat consider return. (Associated Press / AP)

Civilians who fled northern Afghanistan after the Taliban's defeat have revisited their home province, the United Nations said, as part of an effort to heal the wounds of more than two decades of fighting. Thirteen Afghans spent five days in Jawzjan province last week on behalf of some 10,000 people who fled the area in late 2001 and early 2002, the U.N. Refugee Agency said. This year, Pashtun families have already begun to return from the south to western Herat province. Many more have returned to Parwan province, north of the capital, Kabul. U.N. officials have also visited Balkh and Faryab provinces to discuss the possible return of former residents.

New Afghan media law allows for more freedom. (Reuters)

Afghanistan's Transitional Administration issued a new media law to protect journalists and broadcasters from unfair prosecution. Under the law, police, courts and security agencies cannot detain journalists for any violation without the approval of an independent commission made up of members of human rights group and media experts. Under the new law, recently enacted by Karzai, the media commission will recommend prosecution of journalists judged to have violated clauses such as insulting Islam or other religions, or revealing military secrets.

One killed in attack on troops in Afghanistan. (Pakistan-based news agency Afghan Islamic Press / AIP)

Allied troops killed an attacker and arrested another near the Tani area of Khost Province. It was reported that students of a religious school attacked the allied troops near Khowst town with hand grenades but one of them was fatally shot and another was arrested.

April 3

Government delegation releases prisoners in Herat Province. (Radio Afghanistan)

Some 26 prisoners were reportedly released from prison in Herat Province. It was reported that a delegation sent by the government to Herat Province under the leadership of Taj Mohammad Wardak, Minister Adviser, released 26 people suspected of involvement in a recent incident [killing of Mirwais Sadeq, the Minister of Civil Aviation and Tourism] from prison. It is worth mentioning that the delegation

* *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*

released 110 people from prison a week ago, who were also arrested in the recent incident in Herat.

April 5

Afghan soldier shot dead by unknown attackers. (Agence France-Presse / AFP)

An Afghan soldier was shot dead and another wounded when their military compound was attacked by armed men in the country's far west. The incident happened at night in the relatively quiet Farah province. "In a sudden attack by an armed group of people, a colonel who was in charge of communications was killed and a soldier was wounded," an official said. The attackers made off right away.

April 6

Afghan governor acknowledges problem of Taleban camps. (Iranian Radio Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

Taleban training camps have existed in the southeastern areas of Afghanistan, a southeastern Afghan official admitted. Golaboddin Mangal [the governor of Paktika Province] also explained that Janat Gol [a suspected Taleban fighter] said during interrogation that he had been taken blindfolded by Taleban forces to an unknown place and during a phase of training was transferred to another place blindfolded.

April 7

Ex-Communist official to run in Afghan presidential elections. (Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

The former Deputy Minister of Justice of Afghanistan is to run for the presidential elections. Abdol Hadi Khalilzai, who was a Deputy Minister of Justice in the Communist regime and served under the mojahedin rule, has introduced himself as an independent candidate for the Afghan presidential elections. Khalilzai is an ethnic Pashtun from Nangarhar Province; he has been residing in Peshawar [Pakistan] for the last few years.

Seven arrested over suspected links to insurgents in Kabul. (AFP)

Afghan security forces and international peacekeepers have arrested seven suspected militants in Kabul, an official said. The seven are thought to have links to Taliban, al-Qaeda or the outlawed, fundamentalist Hezb-i-Islami faction, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) spokesman Commander Chris Henderson said. The detainees were suspected of having links to at least one of the three groups.

General Dostum raids Faryab province. (AFP)

Factional fighting between a warlord and a government commander broke out in northern Afghanistan, prompting the central administration to order some 750 soldiers to the area, officials said. Skirmishes between warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum and government-appointed military commander General Hashim Habibi erupted in Faryab province at night, local governor Anayatullah Anayat said. The fighting was prompted by Uzbek commander Habibi's decision to switch his allegiance from Dostum to the central government of President Hamid Karzai, he said. Dostum had

then moved his soldiers into the province, the governor said. Defense Ministry spokesman General Mohammad Zahir Azimi confirmed that the fighting was between Dostum and Habibi's soldiers and was continuing on the outskirts of Faryab provincial capital Meymanah. "Dostum's forces have captured Shirin Tagab, Jama Bazaar and Bilchiragh districts and heavy fighting is still going on in the outskirts of all these districts," Habibi said.

AFP report on the same incident on April 8: Fighting raged for a third day in northern Afghanistan between forces loyal to the central government and those supporting a powerful regional warlord, the provincial governor said. The fighting was taking place near the provincial capital Meymanah, in Shirin Tagab and Bilchiragh districts, Faryab governor Anayatullah Anayat said. The government said it had regained control of Jama Bazaar district which had been in the hands of Dostum's militia forces, Interior Minister Ali Ahmad Jalali said.

Reuters report on the same incident on April 8: Forces of General Dostum overrun the capital of Faryab province, a Defence Ministry official said. "Both the governor and the commander have fled. Dostum's forces have overrun Maimana," said the ministry official.

Associated Press (AP) report on the same incident on April 8: Dostum's aide in Kabul said he had discussed the situation in Faryab with elders of the province, but had ordered no moves against Enayat or Hashim Khan, the commander of the 200th Afghan army division, who Jalali said had also fled Maymana. The aide, Akbar Boy, said government troops were welcome in the region, but cautioned that there would be a violent backlash if they sided with the embattled officials whom he accused of receiving government funds to buy votes ahead of the elections.

Reuters report on the same incident on April 9: The Afghan government tried to persuade General Dostum to withdraw forces that overran Faryab province in a fresh challenge to the government. But even as a delegation, led by Deputy Defence Minister General Mohibullah, met General Abdul Rashid Dostum, the latter's forces advanced into more territory in Faryab province. The government rushed troops to Maimana on April 8 but they arrived too late to stop the takeover of the city. Karzai ordered the immediate withdrawal of Dostum's fighters from the province, but the demand has so far been ignored. Habibi said, "Dostum's forces captured Belcheragh early this morning and our forces have retreated. But now fierce fighting is raging in Gurzawan."

Reuters report on the same incident on April 10: An adviser to President Hamid Karzai has withdrawn his forces from the centre of the remote provincial capital they had overrun, leaving the national army in control, the Defence Ministry said. "The Afghan National Army has secured the city and they are moving forward to secure the area around Maimana," ministry spokesman General Zahir Azimy told a news briefing.

Suspected Taliban commander arrested in Kabul. (AFP)

A suspected top Taliban commander was arrested by Afghan police. Abdul Hadi, who commanded the Taliban forces in northern Afghanistan until late 2001, was arrested in an affluent Kabul neighbourhood, Deputy Interior Minister said. Hadi was a former commander for the Hezb-i-Islami fundamentalist faction of wanted warlord

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar but later joined the Taliban movement, Hilal said. Hadi's arrest follows the detention by US-led forces of another Hezb-i-Islami commander, Amanullah, in nearby Wardak province a week ago.

Northern Afghan commander Ustad Atta Mohammad says not involved in land disputes, clashes. (Afghan television Balkh TV)

Ustad Atta Mohammad, the commander of Military Corps No 7, denied that his men have seized plots of land outside Mazar-e Sharif, the capital of Balkh Province in northern Afghanistan. Speaking at a press conference, Atta Mohammad also said his men were not involved in the fighting in neighbouring Fariab Province.

April 8

Six die in Afghan clashes in Helmand province. (Reuters)

Three Afghan security men and three Taliban guerrillas were killed in clashes in Helmand province in which a U.S. soldier was also wounded, security officials said. An Afghan soldier was killed and two were wounded, along with an American soldier, when a guerrilla opened fire as the troops searched a house in a joint operation in the province's Sangin district, a senior provincial official said. Later in the same district, three guerrillas were wounded after attacking a security post elsewhere in the district, local security commander Bahadur Khan said. In the Kotali Dahna area of Helmand's Nauzad district, meanwhile, three police vehicles providing security for opium eradication efforts also came under Taliban attack. Two police officers were killed and three wounded and one of their vehicles was set on fire, Helmand's security chief Abdul Rahman Sabir said.

Afghan intelligence chief kidnapped in Uruzgan province. (AFP)

Suspected Taliban militants kidnapped a high-ranking local government officer in Uruzgan province, an official said. "Our intelligence chief, Haji Ahmadullah and two of his bodyguards have been kidnapped by Taliban while driving to the provincial capital Tarin Kowt from a mission in neighboring districts," a security official said. The official said that the three men are believed to have been taken to remote Shah Wali Kot district, a southern mountainous area believed to be the main hideout for Taliban remnants in Uruzgan. Abdul Razaq, formerly a high-ranking Taliban official during the 1996-2001 fundamentalist regime, has been blamed for much of the unrest in Uruzgan.

Iranian radio Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran report on the same incident on April 12: The head of the Uruzgan Province's intelligence service and his two bodyguards who had been abducted by the Taleban were killed on April 11.

April 10

Afghan government urges removal of "rebel" forces in the north. (AFP)

The Afghan government branded thousands of militiamen who overran a northern provincial capital as "rebellious forces" threatening the country's peace and stability. "The legitimate government institutions were attacked... by these rebellious forces," Defence Ministry spokesman General Mohammed Zahir Azimi said. Troops loyal to

feared Uzbek strongman Abdul Rashid Dostum, who dominates northern Afghanistan, overran the remote province of Faryab on April 8. One of Dostum's soldiers, Commander Lal Mohammed, stated in Mazar-i-Sharif there had been two demonstrations in Meymanah, one for Dostum and one against him in support of the central government. Some people were injured in scuffles when the two groups met but Mohammed said he had no figures on the number hurt, although it was not expected to be high.

Factional fighting in Daikondi Province. (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty RFE/RL Afghanistan Report)

An unspecified number of people were killed in fighting between rival commanders in Daikondi Province. The fighting reportedly erupted on 9 April when forces loyal to Afghan Commerce Minister Sayyed Mostafa Kazemi attacked forces supporting Abdul Karim Khalili, a deputy of Chairman Karzai. Daikondi Province Governor Mohammad Ali Sedaqat said that tension between armed men in the region had been brewing for some time and that the fighting in the Dara-ye Khudi region lasted until 10 April. Unidentified local sources have disclosed that the main factor behind the fighting has been the central government's March recognition of Daikondi as a province.

April 11

Afghan leader issues decree to prevent moral corruption. (AIP)

The head of Afghan Transitional Administration in his latest decree instructed all concerned departments to prevent all actions which spread moral corruption in the country. Hamed Karzai, in his decree, No 422 issued, ordered the prevention of moral corruption in the country. In his decree, Karzai mentioned that the Constitution, which was approved by the people's representatives at the Loya Jerga, says that all moral corruption and diversion from Islam should be stopped. In the second article of the decree, the head of the Transitional State instructs all ministries and related offices to stop such actions. Another article of the decree, strongly instructs the Information and Culture Ministry and the municipalities to strictly stop all films and broadcast on televisions and cinemas which spread moral corruption. The decree asked the public, particularly the religious leaders, to fully cooperate with the relevant officials to attain this objective. The last article of the decree instructs all courts to strictly deal with those who commit such crimes according to the penal code and give them heavy penalties.

Casualties as new fighting erupts near Mazar-e Sharif. (AFP)

Up to five soldiers were injured and two killed when troops of a local commander blamed for resurgence in provincial unrest clashed with rivals in northern Afghanistan, military commanders said. The skirmishes, involving forces of ethnic Uzbek strongman Abdul Rashid Dostum, took place in Kod-i-Barq, 20 kilometres south of the main northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, on April 10. Accounts of the fighting varied, with Dostum's deputy Majit Roozi claiming two dead and five injured while blaming the clashes on troops loyal to the Uzbek warlord's regional rival, ethnic Tajik Atta Mohammed. Mohammed's spokesman put the casualties in clashes at just four injured, blaming Dostum's forces for launching the offence. Schools, shops and

other public institutions in Kod-i-Barq, previously controlled jointly troops of both men, were closed on April 11 as a result of the fighting.

UN Secretary-General appoints human rights expert in Afghanistan. (UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan / UNAMA)

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan approved Cherif Bassiouni, an Egyptian with a long record in international criminal law and human rights, as the UN's Independent Expert on Human Rights in Afghanistan for a period of one year.

Dostum's forces face unrest in Balkh province. (RFE/RL Afghanistan Report)

A supporter of Dostum's Junbish-e Melli was killed in an apparent attack by Jamiat-e Islami supporters in the Kod-e Barq District of Mazar-e Sharif on 10 April. That and other reports also suggested that three Dostum supporters were abducted. A house belonging to Dostum was plundered in the attack.

April 12

Afghan government releases Taliban fighters Pakistan says are innocent. (AFP)

Nine Pakistani men jailed in Afghanistan for spying and helping the Taliban during the war with the US were released from prison, in a goodwill gesture towards Pakistan which claimed the nine were innocent. Two of the nine had been arrested for spying and were sentenced to eight and 10 years and the others were taken as war prisoners and jailed for 3 to 16 years.

Panjshir declared Afghanistan's newest province. (AFP)

A stronghold of anti-Taliban resistance has been named as Afghanistan's newest province in honour of assassinated leader Ahmad Shah Massoud, a spokesman for the Afghan Transitional Administration (ATA) said. President Hamid Karzai signed a decree declaring the Panjshir Valley the war-ravaged country's 34th province, slicing the territory out of mountainous Parwan province. Panjshir has an estimated population of some 387,620, Elmi said. The provincial capital will be Bazarak.

Iranian authorities limit Afghan refugees' stay in country. (Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

The director-general of Interior for Foreign Nationals has said that legal stay visas for Afghans in Iran are valid until the end of Jawza [Solar year 1384 - 21 June 2004]. Ahmad Reza Hoseyni, Director-General of Interior for Foreign Nationals, said that this year was the final opportunity for the Afghan refugees to return voluntarily to their country.

April 13

Sacked Afghan officers protest against delays in paying salaries. (Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

Over 500 officers sacked from the Afghan Ministry of Defence staged a protest meeting near the UN office in Kabul. The protesters criticized the delay in their salaries and said that the government should pay their delayed salaries.

Afghan president appoints two new ministers. (AFP)

Afghan Transitional Administration's head Hamid Karzai appointed two new ministers, bringing the strength of his cabinet to 29, a government spokesman said. The president brought in Mohammed Hakim Taniwal as Minister of Mines and Industries and Besmillah Besmill as Minister of Civil Aviation. Taniwal, an ethnic Pashtun, was governor of the Khost province before his appointment to the cabinet. The Industries Ministry was without a minister since the death of previous holder Juma Mohammed Mohammedi in a plane crash early 2003. The previous Aviation Minister, Mohammed Mirwais Sadiq, son of a powerful Herat governor, was killed during clashes between troops loyal to his father and those appointed by central government in March 2004. Besmill, an ethnic Tajik, was director of education in Herat.

April 14

Three Afghan troops, local police chief wounded in bomb attack in Kandahar. (AP)

A roadside bomb wounded a senior police official and three Afghan soldiers near a U.S. base in Kandahar, police said. The policeman and soldiers were driving by when the bomb exploded at 7:45 a.m. close to a U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Team base, where dozens of U.S. forces are deployed to provide security and promote development work. No one else was hurt.

Seven civilians killed in Paktika province. (AFP)

Suspected Taliban militants executed seven Afghans, including two children and three officials, after they professed support for President Hamid Karzai, an Afghan commander said. The execution-style killings occurred in Birmal district in southeast Paktika province near the Pakistani frontier. One woman survived the attack with injuries. Paktika's governor refused to confirm the attack, saying only that the government planned to try to retake control of Birmal in a fortnight.

Kabul protest condemns Afghan president ahead of polls. (AFP)

Some 200 Afghans, mostly supporters of Abdul Rashid Dostum, staged a demonstration in Kabul to denounce President Hamid Karzai over his willingness to negotiate with moderate Taliban. The rally was arranged by the newly established National Congress party led by Abdul Latif Pedram, an Afghan poet and writer who recently returned from France. "We have organized protests in seven provinces including Kabul," party activists said.

Afghan government troops suspected of involvement in Kandahar blast. (Afghan news agency Hindokosh)

General Salem, head of security in Kandahar Province, has been wounded in a powerful blast. The explosion took place in the morning in district No 6, northeast of Kandahar city where the US command unit and PRT [Provincial Reconstruction Teams] are stationed. Gol Mohammad Parwani, head of a security department in Kandahar Province said that eight of their armed security troops suspected of being involved in the incident had been detained.

Hekmatyar's 'senior ally' held in Kabul. (AFP)

A suspected senior ally of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and five of his followers have been arrested in Kabul, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) announced. An Afghan security official said the arrests followed the detention of another Hekmatyar ally, identified only as Amanullah from neighbouring Wardak province, in March 2004.

Taliban kill two Afghans accused of spying for USA. (Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

A Taliban spokesman said that the Taliban killed two Afghans accused of spying for the Americans. The spokesman for the Taliban, Latifollah Hakimi, said that one of the accused spies, named Shahaboddin, was from a village in Shah Wali Kot, Kandahar Province. Shahaboddin and soldiers under his command had been used to fight against Taliban fighters. He was shot dead by the Taliban militants in his house. Naik Mohammad, who was from Albek village in Shah Wali Kot, Kandahar Province, was also accused of spying and helping US troops. He was killed by the Taliban insurgents.

Afghan official, 10 others killed in ambush in Zabul province. (AFP)

Suspected Taliban fighters killed a district police chief and his nine bodyguards in Zabul province. Yar Mohammed, police chief of Mizan district in insurgency-hit Zabul province, was travelling from neighbouring Kandahar province when his convoy was ambushed in Kandahar's Chinarto district, Zabul intelligence director said.

April 15

Three Afghan soldiers killed in attack in Khost Province. (Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press news agency / AIP)

Unidentified men killed at least three Afghan soldiers in Shenkay area in Khost Province at night. The sources added that the assailants used heavy weapons and the fighting lasted for a long time and at least three people were killed and a number of others injured in the clash.

April 16

US forces fire on car in Paktika Province. (AIP)

It was reported that, in Paktika Province's Orgun District, US troops shot at passengers in a small car, called a Saracha, on the Orgun-Khost highway about two kilometres from Orgun bazaar. As a result, five people including two women were seriously injured.

Afghan TV "imposes ban" on broadcast of women's songs in Nangarhar Province. (AIP)

Officials of Jalalabad, capital of Nangarhar Province, have imposed ban on broadcast of women's songs on local TV. The governor of Nangarhar instructed Jalalabad TV not to broadcast women's songs any more.

Reuters report on the same incident on April 22: An Afghan province lifted a ban on women performers on television and radio just days after imposing it, following pressure by reformists in Afghan Transitional Administration (ATA).

Eight Afghan security men killed on Herat-Kandahar highway. (AIP)

Suspected Taliban militants attacked a security post on the Herat-Kandahar highway killing eight security officials. The assailants arrived in three vehicles after sunset and opened fire on a government security post on the Herat-Kandahar highway. The attackers reportedly fled towards the Bakawa region of Farah province.

School teachers kidnapped by Taliban in Zabul province. (AFP)

Five school teachers have been captured in troubled southeastern Afghanistan reportedly by militants from the former Taliban regime. Zabul provincial spokesman Alhaj Ghulam Rabani said the five were seized in the province's Shajoy district, a known stronghold of the extremists, who have attacked several foreign aid workers in the area. "The government has no control over the districts of Zabul province. Taliban rule and threaten villagers not to register for elections," Rabani said at a disarmament seminar in Kabul at which he urged the government to send troops.

April 18

Knife-wielding attacker kills three policemen in Mazar-i-Sharif. (AFP)

A knife-wielding attacker killed three Afghan policemen at their headquarters in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, police said.

Women-only internet cafe opens in Herat province. (Afghan news agency Herat News Centre)

Neday-e Zan [Woman's voice] organization opened an internet cafe and English and computer courses for women in Herat. At the opening ceremony, Soraya Pakzad, the head of Neday-e Zan Organization, delivered a speech on the objectives of this organization: "Neday-e Zan is a cultural-educational organization and tries to resolve the Afghan women's problems," she said

April 19

One Afghan soldier killed in missile attack in Paktia province. (AIP)

One Afghan soldier was killed in an attack mounted by unidentified persons in Paktia Province's Zormat District. It was reported that unidentified men fired RPG-7s [rocket-propelled grenades] at Khatawa checkpoint of Zormat. As a result at least one of the Afghan soldiers was killed and another injured, said the sources. The Zormat area is of a great strategic importance because of its location in the foothills of the famous Shahi Kot mountains.

Dostum arrives in Kabul for talks with Karzai. (AFP)

Powerful ethnic Uzbek *mujahideen* commander Abdul Rashid Dostum arrived in Kabul for talks with ATA Chairman Hamid Karzai after recent unrest in northern Afghanistan blamed on his armed militia, his aide said.

Afghan security chief orders enhanced security checks in Mazar. (Afghan Balkh Province television)

The northern Afghan Balkh Province security commander, Lt-Gen Mohammad Akram Khakrezwal, said security is being stepped up in Mazar-e Sharif in the wake of recent "disturbances". He said measures are being taken to prevent gunmen from entering the city.

April 20

Protests in Uruzgan province. (RFE/RL *Afghanistan Report*)

Thousands of residents in the Gazab District of the central Afghan Uruzgan Province reportedly protested against a decision by Kabul to designate Daikondi District a new province. Demonstrators demanded that the Afghan Transitional Administration solve people's problems instead of expanding administrative structures, and asked that Kabul reverse its March 2004 decision to designate Daikondi a province. It was reported that dozens of people have been killed in the region in recent months in fighting between rival commanders trying to gain control of the new province.

Taliban threaten voters with death, women specifically targeted. (AFP)

Taliban insurgents threatened to kill Afghans if they vote in September 2004 elections, an intelligence official said. The threats were carried in pamphlets distributed in Logar province. "We advise all Afghans not to risk their lives for attending the elections," the pamphlets warned. "Women especially will face the death penalty if they try to take part in the elections. Husbands are responsible for the blood of their wives if they fail to stop them voting in elections."

Four Afghan civilians wounded by US soldiers in Khost province. (AFP)

Four Afghan civilians were wounded when American soldiers patrolling the area opened fire on a vehicle, witnesses said. The four, two men and two women, were wounded when their "fast driving" taxi came under fire by American soldiers patrolling near Khost city, villagers in the Nadir Shah Kot district said. "The American soldiers fired on the taxi without warning as it drove fast towards them," one villager said. The injured Afghans who were taken to the Khost hospital asked for compensation for their injuries and for the taxi, which was damaged by bullets.

April 21

Blast kills two in Kandahar, misses governor. (Reuters)

At least two people were killed and two more wounded when a bomb went off in Kandahar, in what officials suspected was a failed attack on the provincial governor. Kandahar Governor Mohammad Yousuf Pashtun was chairing a meeting at the headquarters of Spin Boldak district, near the Pakistani border, when a bomb attached to a motorbike went off in a parking area outside the compound, they said. An Afghan soldier and a young girl were killed and another soldier and a second civilian were wounded, the officials added.

April 22

Supporters of Zadran demand share in government. (AFP)

Thousands of supporters of ethnic Pashtun *mujahideen* commander Pasha Khan staged a demonstration in Khost to press President Hamid Karzai for a role in government. More than 6,000 people, mostly from Khan's Zadran tribe, threatened to cut off the road link to Kabul if the tribe were not given a share in the administration, witnesses said.

April 23

Aid agency attacked in Kandahar. (Reuters)

A group of 50 armed men attacked aid workers in the province of Kandahar, setting fire to eight vehicles, but no casualties were immediately reported, Western aid workers said. In the pre-dawn attack, the men burst into a compound of the Central Asia Development Group, a non-governmental organisation partly funded by the United States, in a Panjwai district village and torched the vehicles and destroyed equipment, they said. CADG is involved in a major road reconstruction project in the area, they added. Afghan aid workers were in the compound at the time of the attack.

Eight buy freedom from Afghan jail, arrested on return to Pakistan. (AFP)

Eight prisoners who bought their freedom from a jail in northern Afghanistan arrived in the Pakistani tribal city of Miranshah where they were taken into custody. The prisoners, five of them from the southern Pakistani city of Karachi, were held by paramilitary forces at Ghulam Khan checkpoint on the border with Afghanistan soon after they entered Pakistan. The Pakistanis told reporters they had to pay bribes of 150,000 rupees (2,590 dollars) each for their release. They said they were kept in a private jail in Shiberghan in northern Afghanistan, an area under the control of Abdul Rashid Dostum.

April 24

Afghan Taleban commanders escape from prison Zabol Province. (Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

Three senior commanders and two other members of the Taliban escaped from a prison in Zabol Province. The identity of the escaped Taliban militants was not made public so far.

One soldier, one attacker killed in attack on border post in Kandahar Province. (Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

Two people have been killed and some injured in an attack by unidentified people on a government border post in Kandahar Province.

April 25

Afghan president says negotiations are ongoing with less radical Taliban. (Associated Press / AP)

Afghan President Hamid Karzai said that he only considers about 150 hardcore Taliban as criminals and urged other holdouts from the ultra-religious militia to rejoin the fold and participate in the reconstruction of the country. "But those Taliban who are doing jobs and tilling the fields and working as shopkeepers, we want to welcome those Taliban," he said. Karzai reiterated that the government has been in negotiations with less radical Taliban leaders for months, though he did not give any details or names.

UN office attacked in Konduz. (Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran)

The Konduz-based UNHCR office was attacked by some unidentified armed men. Nobody was harmed during the attack. A UNAMA [United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan] officer in Afghanistan said: "Right now, all employees of international organizations are working in Konduz Province and this incident has not interrupted their activities."

Afghan government bans Pakistani students. (Pakistani newspaper *Ausaf*)

It was reported that higher authorities of the Afghan administration imposed restriction on Pakistani students to study in Afghanistan and formally informed Pakistan's Ambassador to Afghanistan Rustam Shah Mohmand about the decision. The reason given for this ban is that Pakistani students can have links with Taliban and Al-Qa'idah leadership hiding in the area along the Pakistan-Afghan border. This restriction affected thousands of Pakistani students.

April 26

Independent Human Rights Commission in Herat gets new chairperson. (Afghan Herat TV)

Qazi Gholam Nabi Hakak [former head of the Constitutional Loya Jerga commission in Herat] was appointed as the new Head of the Independent Human Rights Commission in Herat.

April 27

Three killed in raid by suspected Taliban in southern Afghanistan. (AFP)

Suspected Taliban shot dead three people and injured two during a raid at an aid agency's compound near the southern city of Kandahar, officials said. The attack occurred in the Panjwayi area about 50 kilometres west of Kandahar, the city's military spokesman General Abdul Wasay said. The regional director of the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, Hayatullah, confirmed that his non-governmental organisation had been attacked. "Last night about 11:00 pm armed men walked into our office and killed two of our employees," he said. "One person has been slightly injured." Hayatullah said he did not know why the humanitarian organisation, whose compound is next to the district government's headquarters, had been targeted.

Radio Afghanistan report on the same incident: Four people were killed and six others were wounded in a suspected Taliban attack on Panjwai District, Kandahar Province. The Taliban burnt down a charity organization, Coordination of Humanitarian Aid. According Sadollah, Security Commander of Panjwai District, about 70-strong Taliban group, attacked Panjwai District at 23:00 hours last night. Taliban, riding pick up vehicles, launched their attack on the district building from three directions. The suspected Taliban also burnt down three vehicles and five tractors belonging to the local council of that district. The attackers also killed a clergyman in a mosque. The Taliban wanted to enter the district building but were faced with serious resistance by the security forces. In the counterattack a number of Taliban were also killed by security forces. Following an hour-long skirmish, the rest of the Taliban carried away their injured and dead and fled in their vehicles. This was the second attack by armed Taliban forces on the district Panjwai over a week. National police forces have been deployed in Panjwai District since the first attack to ensure security.

Afghanistan conducts first execution since Taliban. (AFP)

Afghanistan reportedly carried out its first execution since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, killing a military commander found guilty of murder in a trial described by an independent rights group as unfair. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission said that Abdullah Shah should have faced an international tribunal for war crimes he allegedly committed during the country's civil war and not included on his charge sheet. Commissioner Ahmad Nader Nadery said rights groups had been opposed to the execution of the former commander. The Commission said it did not know the method of execution or when it took place. Abdullah Shah was a commander from Paghman district northwest of Kabul and was charged in July 2002 over the murders of one of his wives, two of his children and two villagers from Paghman. The Supreme Court confirmed that Abdullah Shah had been handed the death penalty on two occasions, the second after President Hamid Karzai had asked for a review of the case. However, they were unable to comment on whether the execution had taken place. According to Amnesty International the execution took place on approximately April 19. The method used to kill the man was not disclosed.

Reuters report on the same event on April 28: The execution of an Afghan murderer, kept secret for over a week, does not mean the government has decided to reintroduce capital punishment, a presidential spokesman said. Karzai approved the execution, which has raised concern among human rights groups, although the president initially asked the Supreme Court to commute the sentence to life imprisonment. Court authorities say they have handed out the death penalty to 20 convicted murderers, but add that the U.S.-backed president would have the final say over their destiny.

Former head of endowment department of Kandahar province killed. (AIP)

The former head of the Endowment and Islamic Affairs Department of Kandahar Province of the present Afghan government, Mowlawi Abdol Bari, was killed in Kandahar at night.

April 28

Two Afghan officials killed in attack in Zabul province. (Reuters)

A mine planted by suspected Taliban militants in Zabul province killed two district officials, the provincial governor said. The chief of Daichopan district, Abdul Wali, and a fourth man were wounded in the blast near the provincial capital Qalat, the governor said.

Pakistani government abolishes major Afghan refugee camp. (Islamic Republic News Agency / IRNA)

Pakistan government decided to vacate Afghan refugee camp in the outskirts of capital Islamabad and asked the Afghan refugees to leave the camp within two months. The refugees were offered to be moved to Mianwali in Punjab Province in case they do not want to go back to Afghanistan. This camp has been providing refuge to almost 25,000 Afghans for 20 years.

Two schools burned down in Kandahar. (AFP)

A school which had recently been rebuilt with international aid was burned down by suspected Taliban in Kandahar, an official said. The school in Landai village of Dand district south of Kandahar city was torched allegedly by Taliban and their allies. A second primary school was attacked in Arghandab district, about 30 kilometres north of Kandahar city, the administrator of the governor's office said.

April 29

Suspected Taliban kill two soldiers, injure local official in assault on government office in Uruzgan province. (AP)

Suspected Taliban attacked a government office in southern Afghanistan, killing two soldiers and wounding the mayor, officials said. Gunmen fired on the headquarters of Khas Uruzgan district, provincial police chief Rozi Khan said. Two other soldiers and Haji Obaidullah, the district mayor, were injured in the assault, he said. The insurgents also set fire to two pickup trucks parked near the building before retreating into the nearby mountains, Khan said. A Taliban spokesman, Abdul Hakim Latifi, claimed four Afghan government soldiers had been killed and two others injured in the attack.

17 children rescued as kidnappings seen on the rise in Afghanistan. (AFP)

Seventeen children kidnapped from the streets of Kabul have been liberated by authorities facing what appears to be a growing problem in Afghanistan, Interior Minister Ali Ahmed Jalali said. Most of the children are snatched on their way to schools, parks, videogame saloons, clubs and other areas. At least 750 Afghan children were abducted and taken to Saudi Arabia in 2003 with about 250 of them eventually returned home, the minister said.

Suspected Taliban kill 6 Afghan soldiers in Kandahar. (AP)

Suspected Taliban ambushed six Afghan soldiers on a road in southern Afghanistan, killing all of them including a local commander, a provincial government spokesman said. The soldiers, who were on three motorcycles, came under attack in the village of

Thaloqan in Panjwayi district, said Khalid Pashtun, a spokesman for the Kandahar provincial governor. He identified the slain commander as Abdul Razzaq.

April 30

Taliban allegedly poisoned three schoolgirls in Khost. (AFP)

Three Afghan schoolgirls were in critical condition after being poisoned in the town of Khost in what officials said was a Taliban attempt to discourage female education in the region. A Taliban spokesman denied the allegation. The girls, aged between 10 and 15, ate poisoned biscuits offered to them by a man on April 28, said the spokeswoman for the provincial department of Women's Affairs, Shahina Sharif. The girls had been attending the only school which accepts females in Khost.

Afghan soldiers given prison sentences for robbery. (Radio Afghanistan)

An open session of the judicial delegation in Gardez, capital of Paktia Province, sentenced two soldiers of Paktia Province's Security Command to four years imprisonment for robbery. The judicial session convicted the two soldiers for committing robbery on 28 April by wearing police uniforms. They were sentenced to four years imprisonment and also asked to pay around 104,000 Pakistani rupees to the owner of the tractor. Three soldiers from the same Security Command were also sentenced to two years imprisonment for similar offences a week ago.

Prisoners fail to escape from northern Afghan prison, 10 injured. (Radio Afghanistan)

Prisoners of the Sheberghan Prison have gone on a hunger strike after making a failed attempt to escape. The number of Afghans and Pakistani prisoners amounts to 800 people. They resorted to violence at night and called for their future to be determined. They attacked a number of criminals in the prison injuring 10 of them and set the prison canteen on fire but they failed to escape from the prison. They succeeded in reaching the last gate of the prison but were returned to their quarters by the security guards. Officials have requested that the British Provincial Reconstruction Team, based in Balkh Province, resolve the matter.

*UNHCR Ankara
Country of Origin Information Team
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