

Chronology of Events in Afghanistan, March 2003*

March 1

UNHCR seeks slower return of Afghan refugees. (Reuters)

The United Nations said it would work for the return of about 1.2 million Afghan refugees this year, far fewer than the massive influx last year which strained the war-torn country's scarce resources. U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers stated that it was important to build houses, schools and ensure sources of drinking water before all Afghans could be brought home. "We are shifting the emphasis from maximal repatriation to a more sustainable return," Lubbers, on a 10-day tour of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, said. "We are in the process that Afghanistan accommodates itself to the Afghans coming back." The Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit said in a report this month that last year's mass repatriation was driven more by neighbouring countries wanting to be rid of refugees and donors trying to legitimise the country's new government. Lubbers said the refugees would be encouraged to return to their home towns and villages, rather than big cities such as Kabul, which are unable to cope with the inflow. "We hope to shift a little bit to the countryside," he said. "It's clear that somewhat too many of those who are coming back prefer to go to the city." Lubbers said rival warlords in the volatile northern provinces had given him personal guarantees of the safe return of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Pashtuns who fled to the south.

Four wounded in Kabul protest against rising crime. (Reuters)

At least four Afghans were wounded as hundreds of men protested in the streets of the capital against what they called police inability to control crime. An increase in crime, both in Kabul and in the rural areas, since the overthrow of the former Taliban militia in late 2001 has raised concerns about the stability of Afghanistan's fledgling government. About two dozen armed Afghan soldiers and foreign peace keepers from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) blocked protesters from entering a police station. The protesters accused two policemen of trying to abduct a woman in a Kabul suburb on February 28 evening in the latest of security incidents in the area. Demonstrators, made up of ethnic Hazaras, said policemen who were ethnic Tajiks opened fire to disperse the protesters who had gathered outside the police station since mid-morning to demand the two be handed over. "Four people, a couple of them demonstrators, were wounded in the police firing," a protester said. Kabul police chief Basir Salanig denied that there had been an attempted abduction or that anyone had been wounded in the protest. The police force, which the international community is trying to rebuild, is composed of former rival armed men and of opposing ethnic

* *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*

groups. Several police officials said a grenade was thrown at the police station and that several of the protesters carried pistols.

Radio Afghanistan report on the same news on March 6: The report of a hand grenade attack by a demonstrator on Police Station No 14 is incorrect. The deputy chief prosecutor and the head of the investigation commission for the demonstration, held on 12 Hout [2 March 03], the lawyer Fazl Ahmad Faqiryar said the commission and the officials of the criminal techniques team had inspected the area and heard the evidence of eyewitnesses, but no signs of a hand-grenade attack could be found. He said the injuries [to police personnel] had resulted from stones that had been thrown at them. Fazol Ahmad said, in keeping with the order of the head of state, the investigation of the incident had been started from 13 Kub [3 March] to find out who was involved in the incident and it was still ongoing. He said the rules and regulations of the state make it necessary to put any complaints before the authorities, and then it was the duty of the related officials to study the cases fairly and in detail. The Identification Department [of the Interior Ministry] has given out a list of new appointments at Police Station No 14, which has been prepared by the Interior Ministry of Interior and Kabul Security Command.

Herat official discourages sale and showing of unsuitable films. (Afghan Herat TV)

The head of the Endowment and Islamic Affairs Department of Herat met hotel owners and video cassette sellers. He stated the following: “ The selling of unsuitable films, which are contrary to the tenets of Islam, is prohibited. Showing unsuitable films in shops and hotels should be avoided.”

March 2

US forces arrest police commander in Nangarhar Province. (Afghan newspaper Erada)

The police commander of Shinwar District [Nangarhar Province], Mohammad Ghaleb, has been arrested by US forces. However, it is not yet known where he is being detained. The district of Shinwar is a major opium-producing region in Nangarhar. According to an eyewitness, Mohammad Ghaleb might have been arrested on account of slow progress in eradicating opium cultivation.

Increasing lawlessness and illegal checkpoints on the roads reported. (Afghan newspaper Arman-e Melli)

It is reported that the security situation is not satisfactory on the highways of southwestern provinces like Kandahar, Zabol, Helmand and Urozgan. Moreover, in every district of these provinces illegal checkpoints have been re-established, at a distance of every 10 kilometres. It has created lots of problems for passengers. However, when these people's superiors are asked for information they explicitly say that their armed men are not given salaries and they are compelled to plunder people's property and receive money in this way to give to their men. It was reported that the governors of these provinces know of their armed men's crimes, however, they have not taken any measures worth mentioning to prevent such illegal acts.

March 3

Taliban claim recent Afghan attacks. (Reuters)

Afghanistan's ousted Taliban have claimed responsibility for a series of recent attacks across the country and warned Afghans not to help the United States. A two-page faxed statement to news offices in the Pakistani city of Peshawar described at least 50 recent attacks across Afghanistan as the handiwork of the Taliban. "Over 1,600 clerics say jihad (holy war) against infidels is incumbent on every Muslim," the statement said. "Anyone who opposes this jihad is also an infidel." The statement, in the Pashto language, warned Afghans to stop assisting the Americans and said anyone who continued to do so would also be considered an infidel. Most attacks have involved ineffective rocket fire near U.S. bases. But more than 20 Afghan civilians have been killed in attacks in Kandahar province in recent weeks and local officials have been attacked in neighbouring provinces.

Afghan Interior Ministry official arrests security commander in Kabul. (Afghan news agency Hindokosh)

Forces of the Public Order Department have arrested the security commander of Charasiab [district south of Kabul city]. Head of the Public Order Department of Interior Ministry General Din Mohammad Jorat and his subordinates arrested the security commander of Charasiab District after laying siege to the centre of the district. The reason behind the arrest of the district security commander is said to be negligence in performing his duties. However, reports say the arrest was made when the district security commander repeatedly ignored Mr Jorat's order to release a detainee from detention in the district. According to another report, a group of Public Order Department soldiers have entered Shakardara District and detained several police officers for negligence in their duties. The detainees were being transferred to Kabul when they were stopped by armed men loyal to the security commander of the district. Before the situation began to aggravate and turn into a clash, soldiers of Public Order Department released the detainees. It has been said that Gen Jorat carried out the operation in Charasiab District without the agreement of the other departments.

Leaflets in Kandahar province warn children not to attend schools. (Afghan news agency Hindokosh)

"*Shabnama*"s [leaflets distributed clandestinely at night] urge students not to go to schools. Such night leaflets have been distributed in some districts of Kandahar. The leaflets warn people not to send their children to schools. The leaflets have strongly warned girls against attending school.

Tensions mount in Afghanistan's north as warlord orders rival's arrest. (AFP)

Tensions mount in the key northern Afghanistan city of Mazar-i-Sharif after powerful commander Atta Mohammad ordered the arrest of a leading commander from a rival faction [Jonbesh-i Melli]. The order was made a day before a visit by General Dan McNeill, the US commander of an international military coalition in Afghanistan, aimed at improving the fragile security situation in the north. Mohammad demanded the arrest of General Ali Sarwar, a senior commander loyal to General Abdul Rashid Dostum, who shares joint control of the strategic northern region with Mohammad,

for flouting security regulations. The move also comes only days after uneasy allies Dostum and Mohammad signed a UN-backed agreement to end regional conflict which has displaced thousands of Afghans from their homes. The dispute centres on Sarwar's refusal to remove window-tinting film on his vehicles, a privilege reserved for Mohammad, Dostum and another key northern leader Ustad Sayeedi. Sarwar has already been arrested once for violating the restriction, imposed as a security precaution in an area where vehicles are closely monitored for outlaws and potential terrorists, but managed to evade jail.

Unidentified group sets fire to girls' school in Konduz Province. (*Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran*)

A girls' school in the capital of Konduz Province, Konduz, has been destroyed by a fire. Konduz Province's security sources said the school was destroyed by a fire in the morning. The report indicates that an unidentified group set fire to a girls' schools after distributing "Shabnama"s [leaflets] against the continuation of girls' education.

March 4

Key Khost road reopens. (UN Integrated Regional Information Network / IRIN)

A key road in the volatile eastern region of Afghanistan that was blocked for five days by gunmen loyal to a commander has reopened following successful negotiations. The issue was resolved through negotiations rather than force. Zakamdad Sarmalim, a senior official in Khost, said that the road had been closed last week by the Dari Khel subclan of the Zadran, who were allied to the renegade commander Padshah Khan Zadran. "They used to snatch vehicles and harass our people. But when we arrested them, they closed the road," he said. Paul Barker, the head of the NGO CARE International, stated that the closure of the road had hampered staff movements between the two towns. "It is symptomatic of how much normal life is disrupted by the ongoing warlord rule in parts of Afghanistan," he said.

March 5

Bomb explosion next to WFP compound. (IRIN)

The World Food Programme (WFP), reported a bomb explosion next to its compound in the eastern city of Jalalabad on Wednesday. "The explosion took place at 12:15 [PM] on one of the walls of the WFP compound and fortunately no one injured or killed," the agency said.

Governor of Herat Province bans satellite dishes. (*Radio Afghanistan*)

Department of Islamic Affairs and Endowment of Herat Province has restricted the use of satellite antennas and films. The Department of Islamic Affairs and Endowment has said that if this order is violated, the violators will be penalized.

Clashes between Jamiat-e Eslami commanders in Sar-e Pol Province result in three deaths. (*Radio Afghanistan*)

Two regional commanders of Jamiat-e Eslami party clashed in Gosfandi District of Sar-e Pol Province, resulting in two deaths [as given, number later quoted as three].

Two other people have been injured. The armed clash occurred between two regional commanders, namely commander Ayob and commander Rahin. Both commanders belonged to the Jamiat-e Eslami Party in that district. The clash resulted in the death of commander Rahin along with his two bodyguards. Two other bodyguards have been injured.

March 6

UN: Despite progress Afghan women still subject to intimidation, violence. (UN News Service)

Despite progress in some sectors since the overthrow of the Taliban, intimidation and violence against Afghan women continue unabated in rural regions where their situation remains unchanged, according to a new report by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. But despite the challenges, the status of women and girls has advanced steadily and continues to give every sign of being irreversible, the report, entitled "The Situation of Women and Children in Afghanistan," adds. It notes that since the country's emergence from 24 years of conflict, women have gone from total denial of rights to participation in key institutions of reconstruction. One major change has been their re-emergence in urban areas with relatively better access to employment, healthcare and education. But women's progress is determined by the complexities of Afghan society, the report notes, including patriarchal values and deeply ingrained traditions, and a lack of security across the country that impedes their advancement. "Despite positive developments regarding women's rights, intimidation and violence by regional and local commanders against women continue unabated," the report says. "In many rural areas, especially in the more conservative tribal belt, the situation of women has not changed to any great extent since the removal of the Taliban. The prevalence of conservative attitudes limits the full, equal and effective participation of women in civil, cultural, economic, political and social life throughout the country at all levels of society." Noting women's lack of access to skilled healthcare services, as well as food, water and shelter, the report says the UN system, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Health, has taken steps to tackle the high rates of maternal mortality, including access to skilled prenatal care, skilled birth attendants, education programmes on basic health issues, community information activities and emergency obstetric care.

March 8

Several said killed in factional fighting in Fariab province. (Reuters)

Several people have been killed or wounded in a fresh outbreak of fighting between supporters of two rival commanders in Afghanistan's northern province of Fariab. Fighting erupted on March 7 when Uzbek commander General Abdul Rashid Dostum's men attacked positions held by supporters of Ustad Atta Mohammad's Jamiat-e-Islami faction in Pashtoon Kot district, south of Fariab's provincial capital. "It is still going on," Sayed Mohammad, an aide to Atta and a top general in Fariab, stated. "Several people from our side have been either killed or wounded and they have taken five of our people prisoners," he said. General Majid Roozi, a deputy for

Dostum said he was unaware of any clashes. About six people, mostly family members of one of Atta's commanders, were killed by Dostum's soldiers in Pashtoon Kot two weeks ago. Tensions have since been on the rise between the factions in several parts of Fariab, Mohammad said. He said both factions were building up their strength in the area of previous day's clash and other parts of northern Afghanistan, which could lead to a spread of the fighting. The fighting came days after several people were killed in skirmishes between supporters of Atta and Dostum in Sari Pul province and despite U.N. efforts to encourage commanders to disarm.

Another school is burnt down in Kandahar Province. (Radio Afghanistan)

According to incoming reports, a school has been set on fire in Kandahar Province. Shah Mahmud Hotaki School, which was a compound made up of tents, used as classrooms, near Kandahar city has been burnt down by unidentified people. This incident has occurred a few days after a school was burnt down in Konduz Province, and another school was looted in Panjwai area of Kandahar city.

Afghan government forces take control of Bamian Province district. (Afghan news agency Hindokosh)

Kohmard District in Bamian Province has been included in the government's jurisdiction by government forces. This district, which was previously ruled by rebel commanders, came under the joint ground operations of the Afghan government forces and US forces supported from the air. The ruling commanders there have fled into the nearby mountainous area, and the district is now under the control of the government forces. Meanwhile, US forces have detained a commander, Abdol, as they have called him, for negotiations. Later on, he was transferred to Bagram District. Residents of Kohmard District are hesitant to openly back the government forces, as they are still afraid of the regional commanders. The people of that district are afraid that some day those commanders may again control that area and they would penalize those assisting American forces.

Two of Deputy Defence Minister's men injured in ambush in Fariab Province. (Afghan news agency Hindokosh)

In an ambush by supporters of [the Afghan leader's special envoy and the deputy Defence Minister] General Abdorrashid Dostum, in the District of Pashtunkot in Fariab Province, two soldiers of the opposite group were injured. It was reported that men loyal to Dostum ambushed a group of the regional commander Faruq, who belongs to the Jamiat-e Eslami party in this district. During the ambush two militants of Commander Faruq were injured.

Local commander arrested murderer of his militant. (Afghan news agency Hindokosh)

Commander Haji Rahim in the Gosfandi area of Fariab province has arrested the murderer of one of his militants. He has handed over the killer to the tribal council. Thus, tension expected to arise from this incident has been prevented.

March 10

Three killed in Kandahar car bomb. (*Radio Afghanistan*)

A bomb has exploded in a car in Jali district of Kandahar Province. Three people have been killed and five others were injured in this incident. The victims were three members of the tribal council of the district. No one has so far claimed responsibility for the attack, but officials in Kandahar blame Al-Qa'idah, Taleban and Hezb-e Islami for this attack. No-one has so far been arrested in connection with the incident.

Afghanistan seizes illegal images of Muslim Prophet. (Reuters)

Afghanistan's Chief Justice Shinwari accused Iranian Jews of insulting Islam by producing images of the Prophet Mohammed after they were found on illegal sale in shops in Kabul. Mawlavi Fazl Hadi Shinwari said that hundreds of images of the prophet had been seized in police raids after being discovered on sale in contravention of Sharia, or Islamic law. Islamic law considers such images to be blasphemous. Shinwari said he had informed President Hamid Karzai. "An immediate ban has been put in place on their sale, purchase and import," he said. He said it was unclear who had brought the images to Afghanistan, but added: "It seems they were printed in Iran by Jews because they have old enmity with Islam and want to insult the prophet." He offered no evidence to back up his allegation that the images were produced by Jews. As well as images of the prophet, police found others of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary in several stationery shops in Kabul, Deputy Chief Justice Fazl Ahmad Manawi said. A Supreme Court official said an investigation had begun into the origin of the images and warned of severe punishment for those found guilty.

National Democratic Front of Afghanistan launched. (Institute for War & Peace Reporting / IWPR)

Dozens of progressive, democratic parties have formed an electoral coalition in a bid to bolster the moderate wing of Afghan politics and take a leading role in the running of the country. The United Nations and representatives from a number of western governments assisted in the creation of the National Democratic Front, whose members have already suffered intimidation from extremist organisations which appear to regard it as a threat to the existing political order. The idea for the alliance was first raised after the Loya Jirga last June, when some Afghans expressed dissatisfaction with the grand council's decisions, notably the retention in power of various Islamic extremists and warlords who have sought to block democratic movements and parties. Liberal-minded intellectuals have grown worried about the influence of extremists in President Hamed Karzai's transitional government, detecting their hand behind moves to ban cable TV, plus local-level prohibitions on women singing and being taught by men. In January, a group of young intellectuals proposed a broad-based political coalition to counter the radicals and offer an alternative to religious and ethnic-based parties. They sought to support human rights and democracy, and gain support from other countries. The National Democratic Institute, an American NGO affiliated with the Democratic Party, took an active role in the formation of the front. A member of UNAMA, the UN political office for Afghanistan, and political representatives from the Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish and British governments also participated.

Abul Ahrar, chief of the party National Progressive Council of Afghanistan and coordination head of the front, said that 10 new parties initially worked together on the coalition: Mashal-e-Democracy (the Torch of Democracy), National Democratic Council of Afghanistan, National Progressive Council of Afghanistan, Protectors of Peace and Democracy, Republican Party, Union of Democracy of Afghanistan, Movement of Peace and Democracy, Democrats Center of Afghanistan, Welfare and Justice Party and Afghanistan Women's Union. The parties were all formed after the collapse of the Taleban in December 2001. On January 27, after numerous meetings, they agreed to establish the new alliance. The founders later drew in a number of other organisations such as the Developed Afghanistan Party, the Democratic Womens' Unions, the Union, Peace and Development Party of Afghanistan and some influential friends and supporters of the former king, bringing the total membership to around 60 parties. The platform of the National Democratic Front, completed and presented by the founders to the membership on February 28, is highly progressive. Its main elements include equal rights for men and women; separation of military and civilian authority; freedom of speech and religion; a campaign against drugs and terrorism; the creation of a tribunal for trying war crimes; and the building of a civil society.

The launch of the coalition has been kept under wraps because several extremist organisations have been threatening parties that have shown an interest in joining it. As a result, a number of parties have left the city.

March 13

Hezb-i Wahdat hits out at Herat governor. (Agence France-Presse / AFP)

In a speech at a mosque in Herat, a spokesman for the Hezb-i-Wahdat party of the ethnic Hazaras launched a public tirade against provincial governor Ismail Khan's "monopoly" in the region. "A group of leaders and commanders are monopolising and taking control of government facilities. They have limited the situation for other people to take part in government or to have a political presence," said Musa Razayee. Khan, an ethnic Tajik, was formerly aligned with the leading Jamiat-i-Islami party of former president Burhannudin Rabbani, but is now seen as a more independent figure. Razayee said the final straw was the lack of any coverage of the eight anniversary of the death of Hezb-i-Wahdat hero Abdul Ali Mazari on local state media in Herat. Razayee's comments come at a time when Hazaras, a minority across Afghanistan, are increasingly disgruntled with their treatment in Herat, where Khan is also accused of persecuting other ethnic groups. Hazaras initially took control of Herat following the December 2001 collapse of the hardline Taliban regime, but surrendered control to Khan to avoid further conflict.

Army withdrawn from posts on Afghan Khost-Gardez highway. (Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press news agency / AIP)

The spokesman for the Gardez army division says they have removed their checkpoints on the Khost-Gardez highway. The spokesman for the 3rd division of the Gardez army, commander Mohammad Esmail, stated that all the posts at which a total of 170 soldiers were deployed on the Gardez-Khost highway had been vacated in accordance with Order No 60 of the general commander of the army division. And the

soldiers have been restationed in the army division. He said that now this highway would be protected by nationals. The spokesman for the American forces said that these forces had been attacked on the Khost-Gardez highway. A section of the Khost-Gardez highway, which passes through the mountainous region of Zadran, is controlled by the opposing commander, Padshah Khan Zadran, who threatened this morning that Afghan forces would never be allowed to travel on this highway. But the northern section of this highway was occupied by the 3rd army division who, according to the statement of Mohammad Esmail, have now moved to Gardez.

Bomb explosion outside mosque in Helmand province wounds three people. (AP)

A remote-controlled bomb exploded outside a mosque in Afghanistan's southern Helmand province, wounding three people. The bomb was hidden beneath a cart outside the mosque in the city of Lashkar Gah, 120 kilometers southwest of Kandahar, said Wali Mohammed, spokesman for the provincial governor. The explosion occurred as worshippers gathered at the mosque. No one immediately took responsibility for the attack.

March 14

Afghan religious scholars ban some books in Kandahar Province. (Afghan newspaper *Erada*)

The Council of Ulema [scholars] of Kandahar Province has banned *Nawakhat* [Innovation] magazine and some other books. The Council of Ulema says that this magazine writes articles against ethnic groups, language, Islam and other issues. Similarly, the [religious] scholars have imposed a ban on the sale of a number of other books. Booksellers in Kandahar Province have said that religious scholars have seized not only their Russian books, but some other books on history such as "The History of Afghanistan" and some English books.

March 15

Afghanistan invalidates degrees issued under Taleban. (*Radio Afghanistan*)

Afghanistan's Ministry of Higher Education has announced as invalid the university degrees issued under the Taleban regime. An official of the Ministry of Higher Education said that the issuing of university degrees in the Taleban era was influenced by corruption and forgery. The Ministry of Higher Education is planning to print new degrees shortly.

Afghan army's first two brigades inaugurated. (AFP)

The first two brigades of the new Afghan National Army were inaugurated by President Hamid Karzai. Karzai, Defence Minister Qasim Fahim and several other members of the government took part in the tightly-guarded ceremony at Kabul's military academy on the eastern edge of the city. Each brigade, trained by the American and French militaries, consists of 1,900 men in three battalions. The soldiers were recruited from across Afghanistan and represent each of its many ethnic groups. About 1,000 have deserted because of low pay or because they found the

training too tough. The ANA is scheduled to be 70,000 strong by 2004, although many observers say recruitment difficulties and the high levels of desertion make this target almost unreachable.

March 17

Three Afghans killed in Jamiat-Jonbesh clashes sparked by sheep rustling. (Radio Afghanistan)

Three people were killed and one was injured in an armed clash that took place in the southeast of Sar-e Pol Province among the supporters of Jamiat-e Eslami Afghanistan and Jonbesh-e Melli Eslami led by General Dostum. The clash broke out among the supporters of the Jonbesh-e Melli Eslami and Jamiat-e Eslami parties in Sar-e Pol Province when 250 sheep were stolen in an area controlled by Jamiat. The clash took place between the commanders of Jamiat and Jonbesh, Commander Nabi and Commander Separodin, and lasted for hours. The clashes claimed the lives of three people from both sides. It is said that commander Nabi of Jonbesh-e Melli Eslami Party is one of those commanders who was previously removed from his post by the head of the government. An officer of the Sar-e Pol Military Division, Ma'lim Aziz, and the office of UNAMA have also confirmed the reports on the clashes.

Afghan father forced to sell his child to beat starvation. (Afghan news agency Herat News Centre)

A father has sold his child due to poverty and hunger. Poverty and starvation have made the internally displaced persons in Maslakh camp sell their children. Tur Jan one of the internally displaced persons in Maslakh camp said, "I am one of the thousands of internally displaced persons, who have moved with my wife and six children to Herat Province due to the successive years of drought in Badghis Province." He added, "Here we receive only five loaves of bread per day. Except for this, there is no more assistance for us, and I do not have any other income to cover the expenses of my family. As a result, I had to sell my new-born child to cover the expenses of my family."

March 18

Afghan leader issues decree for the release of prisoners. (Radio Afghanistan)

According to a decree issued by the head of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan, Hamed Karzai, 36 prisoners were released from the general jail of Kandahar. The prisoners that had been imprisoned were charged with minor crimes, and those sentenced to detention of from six months to one year were also released.

Bomb explosion damages house in Jalalabad. (AIP)

A strong explosion occurred in the house of a senior local official in Jalalabad, capital of Nangarhar Province, in the morning, causing heavy damage to the house. According to information, unidentified people planted a bomb on the roof of the house of the head of the administration department of Nangarhar Province, Malek Mohammad Nazir, and detonated it in the morning. The bomb was detonated through

an about 1 km long wire. As a result of the explosion, the roof of the house was destroyed. After the explosion, security forces of Jalalabad found two more bombs in the house and one bomb near the house and destroyed them. During the period of jihad, Malek Mohammad Nazir lived in the Naser Bagh camp and worked as a representative of the refugees in the camp.

March 19

Journalist beaten, arrested at human rights event in Herat. (Agence France-Presse / AFP)

An Afghan journalist was arrested after challenging senior government officials at the inauguration of a human rights organisation in Herat, a United Nations official confirmed. Ahmad Shah Behzad, a reporter with the US-funded Radio Liberty, stated that he was hauled off by security agents after quizzing Afghan Interior Minister Ali Ahmad Jalali in western Herat on the local government's human rights record. Jalali, along with other government and United Nations officials, was in Herat for the opening of an office of the independent Afghan Human Rights Commission in Herat, where local leaders have been accused of rights abuses. Behzad said he was arrested after the Interior Minister accepted his allegations of corruption and abuse by local police, incensing local governor Ismail Khan. "Khan began using offensive language and ordered me from the room," Behzad said. Once outside, Behzad said he was accosted by Herat Security Director Naseer Ahmad Alawi, who slapped him in the face. Alawi's men then began beating him before he was taken to jail. "Alawi asked me why I asked my question while Ismail Khan was present," he said.

Afghan newspaper *The Kabul Times* report on the same news on 26 March: Following the beating and short arrest of Radio Liberty correspondent, Ahmad Behzad, upon the orders of Herat Governor Esmail Khan, he together with his two colleagues, namely Hasanzada, working for Voice of America, and Hadi Ghaffari, a Radio Iran correspondent, arrived in Kabul to protest the governor's highhandedness. Esmail Khan had said in a press conference in Mashhad, during his recent visit to Iran, that he had ordered the provincial security officer, Alawi, to expel Behzad from Herat but the latter had hesitated. Esmail Khan in one of his Friday speeches at the Herat Grand Mosque had branded these correspondents as "traitors" and his police had beaten up a local newsman earlier. Behzad said in his interview with the daily 'Anis' that he had brought a petition addressed to President Hamed Karzai and the three of them would observe a week's silence in Kabul. Deputy Information and Culture Minister Abdol Hamid Mobarez in an interview also published in 'Anis', commenting on the incident, says the Press Law is in full force and any move to curb the freedom of information is not to be tolerated. "While we are incensed by the way in which newsmen are treated in Herat, we ask the provincial authorities to revise their attitude to let the reporters resume their work there," declared Mobarez.

March 20

Herat governor urges girls' families not to force them into marriage. (Afghan Herat TV)

Governor Esmail Khan attended the feedback session of the Women's Council of Herat Province. Sharifa Rahgozar, the deputy head of the Council, read the agenda. During the session some proposals were put forward for solving women's problems, the establishment of branch offices of the council in the districts, keeping traditional values, changing the dress-making section into production section and facilitating visits by the members to jails for women. The "General Emir of the southwest zone", in a speech addressed to them said, "You can make families aware by advising them to prevent the forced marriage of girls". He also made it the duty of the Council to take effective steps to carry out some of the orders.

Suicide rate among young girls reported on increase in Afghanistan. (Afghan news agency Herat News Centre)

It is reported that the rate of young girls committing suicide in Herat has increased. The rate of suicides committed by girls has increased due to the negligence of the families. One of the female surgeons said that the reason for most of such suicides is compulsory marriages, which have been forced by families on their girls. The girls who suffer from such marriages and do not have any choice but marriage prefer committing suicide.

March 21

Factional fighting ends in Khost. (*Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran*)

The situation in southeastern Afghan Khost Province improved after the removal of a jihadi commander from his post there. It was reported that the forces of Military Corps No 25 managed to disarm the head of the province's security department and stabilized the situation in the region. With the intervention of US and Italian forces, the jihadi commander of Khost Province, Gen. Mustafa [head of province's security department] was removed from office and disarmed, which ended tension in the region. After the removal of Gen. Mustafa from office, Lt. Mohammad Zaman was appointed as the head of the Khost Province's security department.

March 25

Afghan police baton charge students during anti-war rally, seven injured. (AP)

More than 2,000 university students protesting the U.S.-led war on Iraq clashed with the security forces in eastern Afghanistan, police and residents said. Seven students were lightly injured. Police used batons to break up the confrontation, which began when students tried to remove barricades set up to prevent them from blocking the main Jalalabad-Kabul highway, police said. The students also threw stones on two vehicles carrying U.S. special forces on the Kabul highway, but U.S. personnel diverted their route, said an Afghan security official. It was the second student protest

against the war this week. On March 23, about 1,000 people held a demonstration in Mehtar Lam, 100 kilometers east of Kabul.

Security situation "unstable and tense " in Ghazni province. (*Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran*)

Security and the social situation are unstable and tense in Ghazni Province. It was reported that passengers coming from Afghanistan's Ghazni Province to Kabul had described the province's security situation as vulnerable and insecure. Those eyewitnesses have also claimed that a group of security and military officials and irresponsible armed commanders are detaining businessmen and tradesmen for various reasons and set them free after a short period of detention and after taking money from them. Based on the report, pamphlets, which were dropped in the province's small towns and remote villages in the past, are being distributed in the capital at the present. Incoming reports from the capital of the province, Ghazni, indicate that unidentified people, who are said to have links with the Taleban group, have dropped many leaflets over the past few nights. Furthermore, unidentified people have partly destroyed a public Afghan girls' school in the city of Ghazni, Jan Malika, by planting a bomb in that school.

Ismail Khan accused of attacks on Pashtuns in Badghis province. (AIP)

Heavy fighting is under way between the forces of the governor of Badghis and local Pashtuns in Badghis near Turkmenistan border. A Pashtun senior commander, Joma Khan, said that for the last 12-18 months the local administration which is supporting the governor of Herat, Mohammad Esmail Khan, are oppressing the people of the area. He said that the Pashtuns of the area were being beaten, tortured, their belongings were being looted and they were being deprived of their houses. In cases of resistance Pashtuns were being killed and every Pashtun was treated as if he was Al-Qa'idah member. He added that to safeguard their aims and interests Commander Esmail Khan's forces had launched a severe attack against Pashtuns in Mangan, 10 km from Turkmenistan's border. He said that the people of the area were defenceless against Esmail Khan forces. According to him, Esmail Khan's forces have also launched an attack in the area of Tori Shikh, near the Turkmen border which caused an unspecified number of casualties and displacement. Joma Khan demanded Hamed Karzai to send a delegation immediately to carry out an investigation. He also demanded the transfer of the governor of Badghis, Gol Mohammad, and other authorities because they were loyal to Mohammad Esmail Khan.

March 26

People protest arrest of local representatives by Paktia provincial authorities. (AIP)

People in Zormat District in eastern Paktia Province have come out to the streets following the arrest of a number of leaders of Zormat Council by the authorities in Gardez. They have threatened to stage a national uprising if the detainees are not freed. An elder in Zormat said that members of the Zormat Council went to Gardez at the invitation of the provincial authorities. However, upon reaching Gardez a number of the council members were beaten by the security officers and were arrested,

including Dr Hafizollah, the chairman of the council. Haji Khial Mohammad, the security commander of Zormat, has described the situation as grave. He said that many people had come out to the streets with a view to stage an uprising. He added that he had not been able to establish contact with Gardez and that efforts were under way to establish contact and resolve the problem. There has been tension for some time between local administration and people in Zormat District.

Authorities in Herat province free 74 prisoners. (Afghan Herat TV)

Based on a decree by the head of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan and the instructions of the “General Emir of southwest zone”, 74 male and female prisoners in Herat city and its districts were released. A ceremony held on the occasion in Herat prison was attended by Sayed Fazl Ahmad Paiman, head of the prosecution department, Mohammad Anwar Paigham, a prison prosecutor, Abdol Majid Sadeqi, head of prison, a number of prison staff and the pardoned prisoners. The head of the Prosecution Department addressed the pardoned prisoners, saying that many sick prisoners who have been sentenced to life imprisonment and people who have spent some of their time in prison are pardoned all over Afghanistan and will be set free.

March 27

Nearly 2,500 internally displaced persons return to Herat Province. (Afghan Herat TV)

Some 621 families of internally displaced persons returned to their home towns. It was reported that some 2,455 persons returned to Obe, Ghowrian and Adraskan districts on 65 trucks, with the assistance of the Refugee Repatriation Department and the association of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Dostum appointed new officials in Afghan “northern zone”. (Afghan Balkh Province TV)

Order No 07, dated 6 Hamal 1382 [27 March 03], of the special envoy of the president of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan and the Deputy Defence Minister General Abdorrashid Dostum says that the following officials are appointed as it is necessary to improve affairs in the northern provinces. [A deputy of the northern leadership council] Lt-Gen Majid Rozi is appointed a deputy of the Control and Management of Northern Zone office; Lt-Gen Mohammad Shahzada - head of the departments of the Control and Management of Northern Zone office; Lt-Gen Mohammad Daud Azizi - a deputy of the Control and Management of Northern Zone office; Lt-Gen Esmatollah - a deputy of the head of the departments of the Control and Management of Northern Zone office and general head of operations of the Control and Management of Northern Zone office. [Note: The Afghan president has ordered that there must be no zones in Afghanistan, but Dostum himself has created an office for the Northern Zone of Afghanistan]

March 30

Herat connected to international phone network. (Afghan Herat TV)

The international and provincial telephone codes were released in a ceremony held in the telecommunications department. The manager of telecommunications gave some detailed information about the recent improvements and the use of the new system of provincial and international telephone codes. He said that the telecommunications office with its low number of staff and 1,500 telephone lines has been able to distribute and activate more than 8,000 telephone lines in Herat.

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