

## **Chronology of Events in Afghanistan, February 2003\***

### **February 1**

#### **Eight persons arrested for fatal blast in Kandahar. (Agence France-Presse / AFP)**

Eight people were arrested in connection with a powerful explosion that tore apart a minibus in Nimroz province killing most of its passengers, officials said, as the death toll from the blast was sharply reduced. Khalid Pashtun, a spokesman for the governor of Kandahar province, said that the men arrested were suspected of planting a landmine on a road south of Kandahar city which exploded on January 31. He said that the death toll was around nine persons. In Kandahar, tightened security was deployed around the blast site with large numbers of police checking vehicles. A police checkpoint was also set up near the huge crater caused by the explosion. The security commander said he believed extremists belonging to the al-Qaeda network and the radical Hezb-i-Islami party of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar were behind the blast.

**Reuters report on the same news:** The governor of Nimroz province blamed Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters for the attack and said he had been the target. The provincial governor Karim Brahawee said the mine had been recently planted. The four-wheel-drive vehicle destroyed in the attack was part of the governor's security escort, Nafass Khan, a provincial security official said. Brahawee warned that Taliban fighters were trying to regroup in Nimroz, as well as the nearby provinces of Kandahar, Helmand and Farah.

#### **Afghan refugees reported seeking asylum in Iran. (Afghan news agency Hindokosh)**

The number of refugees seeking asylum in Iran has multiplied. Recently, the Afghans have started taking refuge in other countries and it is because of the shortfall of living facilities. Katy Grant, the representative of the UNHCR in Herat Province, said about the return of refugees back to the neighbouring countries, especially Iran, that the fact, based on the statistics in hand, is that the number of people seeking asylum in Iran has multiplied. She said: "However, the UNHCR is striving to provide the new returnees with employment, but the unexpected return of the refugees during the first months has faced the programmes with problems. And it truly is beyond our control. Hence unemployment and many other problems have forced the refugees to seek refuge back in Iran." She said that on the one hand the rate of the refugees returning back to Iran has increased, but on the other hand the forced repatriation of the refugees by the Iranian authorities has also been stepped up.

---

\* *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*

## February 2

### **Afghan prosecutor attacks government in a letter spread in Herat. (Afghan newspaper *Erada*)**

Herat Prosecutor Fazal Ahmad Payman has circulated a letter on his own, complaining of human rights violations, torturing of people and the corruption in the government offices. This is the first time that a member of the judiciary in Herat has exposed the abuse of power by the government authorities. One hundred copies of the letter are said to have been circulated in Herat city, and government officials have received most of them. The prosecutor says that the militants detain people unlawfully, while the prosecutor is totally unaware of it.

### **More than 100 Afghan tribal leaders arrested in Nangarhar province for anti-government incitement. (Afghan newspaper *Erada*)**

The authorities in Nangarhar arrested more than 100 tribal leaders, accusing them of inciting people against the government's decision to destroy the crops of opium poppies. Security officials in Nangarhar say that the tribal leaders were holding meetings to incite the peasants against the government's policy of destroying the poppy crops.

## February 4

### **Seven killed as local commanders clash in Ghowr province. (*Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran*)**

It was reported that there were clashes today between local commanders in Tulak District of central Ghowr Province as a result of which seven people were killed on both sides.

### **Harekat-e Eslami says there are no problems in the areas under the party's control in Urozgan Province. (Afghan newspaper *Mardom*)**

An official of the Afghan party Harekat-e Eslami [Islamic Movement of Afghanistan] said there are no problems in the areas under the party's control in Urozgan Province. Mohammad Anwar Moballegh said the party had been defending the rights of the people but said that there were "self-interested" people who conspired against them.

## February 9

### **Anti-government leaflets distributed in Afghan south. (*Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran*)**

It was reported that anti-government leaflets have been distributed by opposition parties in the areas of Rod-e Arghistan, Khakrez and Panjwai of Kandahar Province. They have also threatened the local school teachers of the area. Similarly, anti-government leaflets and leaflets opposing the presence of foreign forces in the area have also been distributed in Khost Province.

## February 10

### **Afghan official, foreigners reported kidnapped in Spin Boldak. (*Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran*)**

It was reported that the head of Kandahar Province's department for foreign affairs, Khaled Atsakzai, along with a number of foreign visitors, were kidnapped by people affiliated with Taleban commander Hafiz Abdol Rahim while crossing the Spin Boldak border. The issue is being investigated by local officials.

## February 11

### **Prisoners released in Herat to mark Muslim holiday. (*Afghan Herat TV*)**

On the occasion of *Eid* [Muslim holidays] some of the political and criminal prisoners of Herat Province were set free. Alhaj Mohammad Esmail, the [self-proclaimed] “General Emir of the Southwest Zone” pardoned some 47 criminal prisoners, some 72 captives of Taleban and some 19 Pakistani captives with the approval of the “Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan”.

## February 14

### **Baghran residents stage protest march over civilian casualties. (*Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran*)**

Residents of Baghran of Helmand Province marched to the centre of the town in protest against the death of civilians recently as a result of US and Danish air raids on the town. The protesters, in a discussion with officials of the Helmand Province administration, urged the authorities to take serious measures to prevent a repetition of such attacks.

## February 15

### **Clashes reported between tribes in Nangarhar. (*Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran*)**

It was reported that clashes took place between the Gerdee and Ahmadzai tribes in the area of Momindara of Nangarhar Province. No possible casualties have been reported yet. After the incident, with the intervention of the Nangarhar police, the clashes were prevented and the leaders of these two tribes were arrested and imprisoned. An investigation into the cause of the clashes is under way.

## February 18

### **Bomb blast at UN Afghan compound but no injuries. (Reuters)**

A crude bomb exploded inside the compound of a United Nations affiliate in northern Afghanistan but there were no casualties, [a UN spokesman](#) said. UN offices and bases of the U.S. led military coalition in Afghanistan have come under repeated attacks in recent months, but damage has been minimal. The blast at the premises of the

International Organisation of Migration (IOM) in Kunduz at night was followed an hour later by another explosion near the local headquarters of the Afghan National Army that also caused no casualties.

## **February 20**

### **Afghan Defence Ministry reshuffles. (AFP)**

Afghanistan's defence ministry staged a major reshuffle, unveiling a multi-ethnic department clearly aimed at dispelling accusations of heavy racial bias in the government. "We have started certain reforms, changes and reshuffles in the structure of the Ministry of Defence to create a balance and ensure the multi-ethnicity of leadership," Defence Minister Mohammad Qasim Fahim stated. Fahim said several key offices formerly held by ethnic Tajiks would now be filled by Pashtuns, Uzbeks and Hazaras. Fahim, himself a Panjshiri Tajik widely seen as the true power behind the government, said the new appointments including his new Pashtun deputy minister General Gul Zarak would represent a greater balance. "Mainly those who are being replaced are Tajiks, especially from Panjshir Valley," Fahim said.

## **February 22**

### **Police station opens in district of Kabul. (Radio Afghanistan)**

Police Station No 14 was established in Dasht-e Barchi area of Kabul. An official of the Kabul security command said that the establishment of this police station is aimed at bolstering the security of this region for its residents. The No 14 Police station consists of three departments and has started its activities in the security, criminal and training sectors in Dasht-e Barchi area.

### **Rival commanders of Jamiat and Junbesh clash in Fariab Province. (Afghan news agency *Hindokosh*)**

Two opposing commanders have clashed in Fariab Province. The clash took place between two opposing commanders of Jamiat-e Eslami [party of former President Borhanoddin Rabbani] and Junbesh-e Melli [party of Deputy Defence Minister Abdorrashid Dostum] in the Ghond Sang area of Pashtunkot District in Fariab Province. General Abdol Sabur, an official of Mazar-e Sharif military corps, asserted that the attack was launched by forces loyal to Junbesh-e Melli against Abdol Rasul, a commander of Jamiat-e Eslami. He added that General Atta Mohammad [commander Military Corps No 7, loyal to Jamiat-e Eslami] and General Dostum contacted each other to know about the causes of this confrontation. However, there have been no details about the reason for the confrontation.

**Reuters report on the same news on February 25:** A ceasefire had been agreed between rival factions in northern Afghanistan after three days of fighting in which six people were killed. A joint team representing Abdul Rashid Dostum's Junbesh militia and Ustad Atta Mohammad's Jamiat-e-Eslami group went to the scene of the fighting in Fariab province to persuade the combatants to stop, said Atta's deputy, General Abdul Saboor. "It is quiet now. With the arrival of the delegation sent from Fariab, the fighting stopped yesterday afternoon," Saboor said. Saboor said those

killed in exchanges of tank and shell fire included a commander, his wife, daughter, cousin and two of his fighters. He said Dostum had sent extra forces from neighbouring Sari Pul and Jozjan provinces and that could be a stumbling block to a long-term ceasefire.

### **February 23**

#### **Paper defends Western-trained Afghans against "warlord" press attacks. (Afghan newspaper *Arman-e Melli*)**

The Afghan newspaper 'Arman-e Melli' has responded to attacks against Western-trained Afghan intellectuals in a newspaper controlled by the Northern Alliance, namely the weekly 'Payam-e Mojahed'. 'Arman-e Melli' said these people fled to the West to escape successive tyrannies and they have now returned to help rebuild the country. The paper accused its rival of backing warlords and gunmen, and warned that Western assistance to Afghanistan will continue to be sluggish as long as the warlords continue to have influence.

### **February 25**

#### **Rebel commander blocks highway in Khost. (AIP)**

The Zadran tribe has blocked the Gardez-Khost highway since February 22. Local sources say that the administration in Khost has seized a number of vehicles belonging to Zadran tribe because of disagreements between Pacha Khan Zadran and the government. The Khost administration is saying that Pacha Khan Zadran is causing problems for government vehicles on the highway. The highway is blocked in Lakatizha area situated 30 km from Gardez city. Talks are going on between the Zadran tribe and government official on the issue.

#### **Senior official assassinated in Nimroz. (AP)**

A senior government official was assassinated in Afghanistan's southwestern Nimroz province. Twelve men have been taken into custody in connection with the killing of Habibullah Jan, a district administrator in the province. Jan was shot and killed as he left a mosque in Dilaram, roughly 225 kilometers northwest of Kandahar. Jan's bodyguard was wounded.

### **February 27**

#### **Afghan government forces take control of Kahmard District in Bamian Province. (Radio Afghanistan)**

Government forces have entered Kahmard District in Bamian Province without any resistance. They have taken complete control of all the areas of that district. Kahmard District was the scene of regional rivalries. These rivalries had created problems for the residents of the area, which compelled the security forces to take practical measures. Officials of Military Battalion No 2, who are responsible for monitoring security in the area and carrying out the disarmament process in that region, were warmly welcomed by the people. With the cooperation of people, the government

forces discovered 11 arms stores in Dasht-e Safed and Roisang. Eight arms stores belonging to a local commander named Mola Nasim were discovered.

### **Internet centre opens in Kandahar. (Afghan newspaper *Tolu-e Afghan*)**

For the first time in Kandahar an Internet centre by the name of 'Etehad' belonging to Afghan businessman Haji Atiqollah was inaugurated by the deputy governor of Kandahar during a ceremony.

## **February 28**

### **Northern Afghan leaders agree to end ethnic strife. (UNHCR)**

Senior officials representing northern Afghanistan's main political and ethnic factions agreed to improve security and work to end ethnic tensions in the north during the first-ever meeting of Afghanistan's Return Commission, opened by UN refugee agency chief Ruud Lubbers. The inaugural meeting of the Return Commission, which was chaired by the Minister for Refugees and Repatriation, Enayatullah Nazari, included the region's main commander, General Abdul Rashid Dostum, General Ustad Atta Mohammad, and the Hezb-e-Wahdat party's local head, Saradar Saeedi. The meeting is the first in a series of government-sponsored Return Commissions to explore ways to help displaced Afghans return to their communities. But continuing ethnic tension in some parts of Afghanistan is a major impediment to return and development aid, UNHCR has warned. Under an accord signed by the three leaders following the meeting, they agreed to broadly publicise the groundbreaking agreement. They also said that they would take measures against any of their local commanders who do wrong.

UNHCR estimates that there are more than 700,000 displaced people in Afghanistan, the majority of them driven from their homes by the record-long drought that still affects many areas of the country. Up to 15 percent of the 400,000 displaced Afghans living in the southern provinces are ethnic Pashtuns originally from the north.

### **UN convoy attacked in Paktika province. (AFP)**

Up to eight gunmen opened fire on a United Nations two-car convoy as it travelled in southeastern Afghanistan, but there were no injuries, a spokesman for the organisation said. The UN's David Singh said that one of the vehicles, an unmarked rental car carrying two government workers and an Afghan World Food Programme (WFP) employee was riddled with bullets in the attack. UN road movements have been suspended following the incident on the route between Wazakhan and Khairkot in Paktika province, Singh said. While the gunmen hijacked the unmarked car, the WFP vehicle following it turned back to fetch help. "They returned to the scene of the incident with local authorities, they found the three passengers unharmed by the side of the road," Singh said. "The armed men reportedly harassed and threatened the passengers and took their vehicle," he said, adding the car had since been recovered.

*UNHCR Ankara  
Country of Origin Information Team*

*Revised February 2004*