



Afghanistan:

MONTHLY REVIEW

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IN THIS ISSUE:

- At least 97 civilians killed as a direct consequence of the actions of international forces.
- At least 83 police, police trainers or their relatives killed or injured in targeted attacks.
- At least 39 civilians killed or injured in terrorist attacks on international forces.
- At least 50 people killed in flash floods.

Human rights

President Karzai has come under considerable public pressure over the continuing high level of civilian casualties caused by international forces, as a consequence, in part, of air raids conducted in pursuit of counter-insurgency operations. He is also clearly angered by what he perceives as the failure of international forces to coordinate sufficiently with the Afghan Government in planning its military offensives.

Speaking on 23rd June, he criticised the “extreme” use of force by international forces, commenting that “innocent people are becoming victims of reckless operations”. He added: “As you are aware over the past several days, as a result of indiscriminate and imprecise operations of NATO and coalition forces, our people suffered casualties. We are thankful for their help to Afghanistan. But that does not mean that Afghan lives have no value. Afghan life is not cheap and it should not be treated as such”. In concluding, he insisted that, in future, every military operation should be co-ordinated directly with his government, in accordance with the written plans that were already in existence.

A proportion of civilian casualties would appear to be a consequence of incidents in which international forces come under attack and respond in a manner which is not always carefully considered, in terms of the strategic benefit to be gained, nor proportionate to the scale of the original attack. Further civilians are killed, according to NATO and the US-led coalition forces, when Taliban forces use private homes to fire on international forces and the homes are then targeted as air raids are called in. There would also appear to be a pattern in which civilians are killed when their vehicles fail to heed warnings that they should stop at check points.

The specific incidents include the following:

- On 12th June, it was reported that seven Afghan policemen had been killed by US forces in a ‘friendly fire’ incident in the eastern province of Nangarhar. It would appear that US and Afghan forces retaliated, from both the ground and the air, after coming under fire from the police. A spokesman for the Afghan President stated that the police had incorrectly made the assumption that the US and Afghan forces, which were engaged in a counter-insurgency operation, were armed opposition fighters. It is not clear from the report whether the US and Afghan forces were in uniform.
- On 12th June, three civilians were killed in the eastern province of Kunar, when the vehicle in which they were traveling failed to stop at a checkpoint when gestured to do so and in spite of a warning shot into the ground.
- On 16th June, one civilian was killed and several were injured when US soldiers opened fire in the immediate aftermath of a suicide attack on an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) convoy in Kabul.
- On 18th June, seven children were reported to have been killed when the madrasah in which they were studying was targeted in an air strike by US-led coalition forces in the eastern province of Paktika. The coalition issued a statement to note that the compound in which the madrasah was situated had been targeted because

- of “credible intelligence” that individuals linked to Al-Qaida were there. A spokesman for President Karzai expressed his extreme unhappiness over the incident and renewed his previous call for international forces to work more closely with the Afghan military. The Governor of Paktika was said to have visited the area, to seek forgiveness from local people and to inform them that he had ordered an investigation.
- On 19th June, local residents in the city of Kandahar protested after US soldiers were said to have abruptly searched civilian homes and killed one person and detained 11 others. They also expressed their concern that the police were neither present, during the search, nor informed.
 - On 19th June, a spokesman for the Afghan Interior Ministry stated that ten civilians had been killed during recent fighting in Chora District of Uruzgan Province. Other estimates put the number of deaths as high as 60. The provincial hospital advised that it was treating more than 100 people for injuries incurred and that it had requested the government to send helicopters to evacuate people to Kabul. It is not clear how many of these were opposition fighters.
 - On 22nd June, 25 civilians were reported to have been killed in air strikes in Gereshk District of Helmand Province. These included nine women, three infants and the local mullah, according to a senior police officer. The air strikes were called in when police posts came under fire.
 - On 24th June, ISAF acknowledged killing a child, a woman and seven men on the Pakistan side of the border when a rocket fired by ISAF hit a building as warplanes were pursuing insurgents preparing to attack a base across the border into Afghanistan. Pakistan has protested.
 - On 29th June, at least 30 civilians were killed, including women and children, when air strikes were called in against Taliban fighters who had fled to a nearby village for cover, after an attempted ambush of a US military-Afghan army convoy in the district of Girishk, in Helmand.
 - On the same day, according to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, an 85 year old man was killed, together with two of his sons and a grandson, during a pre-dawn raid by US soldiers in Khogiani District of Nangarhar. The US-led coalition stated that it had raided compounds thought to be “harbouring Taliban and foreign fighters”. Villagers were reported to have protested, chanting anti-US and anti-Karzai slogans.

Estimates of the number of civilian casualties inevitably vary. However, the following may be regarded as indicative:

- Human Rights Watch estimated that at least 230 civilians were killed during operations by NATO or US-led coalition forces in 2006.
- The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) estimated the number killed by Afghan and international forces during the first five months of 2007 to be 207.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has publicly expressed its own concerns over civilian casualties. The Director of Operations for ICRC, Pierre

Krähenbühl, stated, on 12th June, that the conflict between the Afghan Government, NATO and US forces, on the one hand, and armed opposition elements, on the other, had “significantly intensified” in the south and east of the country, since 2006, and had also spread to the north and west, resulting in “a growing number of civilian casualties”. He added that the increasingly polarised situation was hampering humanitarian and development work outside the major cities, leaving many civilians “in dire need of emergency assistance.” The population was also said to lack access to basic services. He commented that it was “incredibly difficult for ordinary Afghans to lead a normal life”.

The Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief, which brings together nearly 100 Afghan and international NGOs, issued a statement on 19th June in which it called on international forces to do more to protect civilians in their combat operations. It expressed its strong condemnation of “operations and force protection measures carried out by international military forces in which disproportionate or indiscriminate use of force has resulted in civilian casualties”. It notes that such operations “have frequently been carried out by forces or agencies outside NATO command, often American forces in Operation Enduring Freedom and sometimes in conjunction with Afghan forces”. It also notes that, according to NGO sources, “many of these incidents have occurred due to the provision of inaccurate or false information regarding insurgents to international forces”. The agency comments that the “use of major air strikes ...creates hostility towards international forces, perpetuates insecurity and jeopardises the safety and scope of operations of non-governmental organisations”. The statement refers to “abusive and culturally insensitive raids and searches in Afghan houses” and stresses that, “in Afghan culture, women represent the integrity and honour of the family and that the home is regarded as sacred”. It comments that “a single mishandled raid can cause long term widespread anger and resentment” and that “excessive and disproportionate use of force is not only illegal ...but is also counter-productive”. In noting that ACBAR members have “a long experience of working in Afghanistan and have an awareness of public perceptions, particularly in rural areas”, it reflects that “initial goodwill towards the international military presence in 2002 has substantially diminished in many parts of the country”. It also concludes that “excessive use of force and abusive raids and searches are undermining support not just for foreign and Afghan militaries but for those involved in humanitarian and development work”.

Italy’s Defence Minister, speaking on 24th June, noted the impact that civilian casualties were having on the political climate in Italy and, thereby, the continued ability of the Italian Government to deploy troops in Afghanistan. He thus commented: “We, Italians, remain in Afghanistan, and this decision lays a heavy political burden on the ruling centre-left coalition, but the Romano Prodi cabinet cannot tolerate mass killings of civilians in Afghanistan any longer.”

Germany’s Social Democrat opposition has also raised the issue of civilian casualties in the context of a call for the withdrawal of Germany’s 100 Special Forces troops from the US-led coalition in Afghanistan. The party’s leader, Hans-Peter Bartels, commented: “We shouldn’t take responsibility for something we cannot, at all, influence”.

Security

The Afghan police, together with those training them and their relatives, have been actively targeted this month. The casualty levels have been particularly high. The killing of relatives, including the beheading of a young man, is a disturbing new development. The specific incidents include the following:

- On 1st June, one policeman was killed and four were injured when a police post was attacked in the eastern province of Nuristan.
- On 2nd June, the wife, two sons and a nephew of a police commander were among those killed in an attack on his home in Jaghorai district of Ghazni Province, to the south of Kabul.
- On 8th June, two policemen were killed and two others were injured when their vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb in the province of Kandahar, near the border with Pakistan.
- On the same day, a policeman was killed by a remote-controlled bomb in the district of Alishing, about 80 km to the north-east of Kabul, in the province of Laghman. Three others were injured.
- On 9th June, the head of a police training centre was shot dead in the city of Kandahar.
- On 10th June, five policemen were killed and four were wounded when their patrol was ambushed in Shah Wali Kot District of Kandahar.
- On 11th June, eleven people were wounded when a suicide car bomber blew himself up as police were approaching to search his vehicle at a police post in Gurbuz district of Khost, in eastern Afghanistan.
- On 17th June, 35 policemen and civilians were killed when a powerful bomb exploded on board a bus outside the police headquarters in Kabul. Many more were wounded. These included two Afghan women, who were walking past the bus, and Japanese, Korean and Pakistani nationals. The bus was carrying Afghan police instructors to the Kabul Police Academy.
- On 22nd June, three policemen were killed and one was wounded when rocket-propelled grenades were fired at a police patrol in Chaparhar District of Nangarhar Province, in eastern Afghanistan.
- On 24th June, the Chief of Police for Sangin District of Helmand advised that the Taliban had abducted his 18 year-old son and beheaded him.

- On 28th June, a US national was killed, along with an Afghan woman in the vicinity, when a suicide bomber exploded his car near the vehicle of a private security company, involved in training the Afghan police, in Kabul. Three other Afghan civilians were injured, together with five further foreign nationals.

On 12th June, the Afghan Ministry of the Interior advised that, during the previous three months alone, over 210 police officers had been killed and 330 wounded.

Civilians have continued to be killed or injured as a consequence of terrorist attacks on international forces. It is likely that those committing the attacks would have known that civilian casualties would be caused. The specific incidents include the following:

- On 15th June, at least eleven children were killed and four were injured when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives after driving towards a group of children talking to some soldiers from the ISAF contingent in Tarin Kot, the provincial capital of Uruzgan, in southern Afghanistan. Some ISAF soldiers were also killed.
- On 16th June, at least three civilians were killed and five were wounded when a suicide car-bomber attacked an ISAF convoy in Kabul.
- On 16th June, at least one civilian was killed and fifteen were injured when two suicide bombers on a motorcycle attacked a Swiss military convoy near a crowded vegetable market in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif. Some of the injured were said to be in a critical condition and the death toll was expected to rise.

In yet another targeted attack, on a school, two school girls were killed and six others were injured, on 12th June, when two gunmen on a motorcycle sprayed bullets at girls leaving a school near Pul-e-Alam in Logar Province, immediately to the south of Kabul. A woman who was passing by was also killed. Two of the injured students needed extended treatment.

The Afghan Ministry of Education advised, in response to this attack, that at least 85 students and teachers were killed in attacks on schools during 2006. It added that 187 schools had been burned down and that 350 had been closed due to security concerns. A subsequent statement issued on 21st June, covering casualties for the previous 13 months, noted that 110 students and teachers had been killed and a further 52 wounded. 226 schools had been burned down and 350 had been closed because of Taliban threats. There has, thus, been an increase in the number killed and the number of schools burned down, even allowing for the fact that the second set of figures relates to a thirteen-month period. The Ministry added that many of those burned down were run from tents and noted that only 40% of schools were operated from buildings.

The murders of two female journalists are also of serious concern, notwithstanding the fact that the motive for the first of these was said to be unrelated to her work. In this case, a 22 year-old female TV journalist, Shakiba Sanga Amaj, was shot in her home in Kabul

on the evening of 31st May. She worked as a reporter and newscaster for the private Shamshad TV channel, where she was also the anchorwoman of a popular programme. Her father alleged that his relatives had tasked the killer to carry out the act and ruled out any political motives. It was reported, on 3rd June, that the killer of the journalist had been arrested.

On 6th June, the female owner of a radio station was shot as she slept, with her children, in her home in Jabal Siraj, to the north of Kabul. The victim, Zakia Zaki, had operated the US-funded station, Radio Peace, for the previous five years. She had also worked as a radio journalist during the previous three years, when Jabal Siraj was still under the control of Jamiat-e-Islami forces, during the period of Taliban rule. It is not clear what the specific motive for her killing was, although she had received threats as a direct response to the content of her programmes. She was also said to have been outspoken in her criticism of powerful individuals.

Random terrorist attacks have also been in evidence, with no obvious connection to the insurgency. The specific examples include the following:

- On 2nd June, several shopkeepers were among those injured when an improvised explosive device on a bicycle was detonated near a mosque in the southern province of Uruzgan.
- On 20th June, three people were killed and four were injured when gunmen fired on people praying in a village mosque in the eastern province of Khost.

However, the abductions of government staff, aid workers and others associated with the State-building process are clearly related to the insurgency. The specific examples include the following:

- On 5th June, the Taliban announced that they had beheaded one of the five government health workers taken hostage in Kandahar in March, after issuing a demand that the body of Mullah Dadullah should be handed over to his family, in return for their release. They subsequently advised that they had done this because of a delay in the government's response. The government did subsequently agree to hand over the body and the four surviving hostages were released.
- On 15th June, two Afghan staff members, a doctor and a driver, of the Dutch NGO, Healthnet TPO, were kidnapped in Nangarhar Province, in eastern Afghanistan. A ransom demand was subsequently received. The kidnappers threatened to behead the men if the ransom was not paid.
- On 23rd June, eighteen staff members of the Afghan NGO, Mine Detection and Dogs Center, were abducted in the Andar District of Ghazni, after their convoy had been stopped as they were heading for a demining site. However, a representative of the NGO advised, on 25th June, that, as a result of negotiations, they were hopeful of securing their release in the near future.

- On 28th June, the body of an Afghan interpreter working with NATO-led forces in the eastern province of Paktia was found, beheaded, in the neighbouring province of Logar. He had been abducted several days previously.

The UN has also found itself seriously constrained in its operations. On 20th June, two Afghan guards were killed and another was wounded when a UN convoy, in which a senior UN official was travelling, was ambushed on the main Kabul-Kandahar highway in Zabul Province.

On 21st June, the World Food Programme advised that it had halted deliveries of food aid from Pakistan into seven southern and western provinces, four weeks earlier, in response to the growing insecurity. It anticipated that it would run out of food for its programmes in these provinces within a few weeks.

The World Food Programme noted that 85 of its trucks had been attacked, set on fire or looted during 25 incidents over the previous year, including 13 in the previous three months. It added that there had been no incidents during the first half of 2006. As a result, it had lost about 600 tons of wheat, and cooking oil to a value of \$400,000. A majority of the incidents have taken place on the highway linking Kandahar with Herat. The provinces of Paktika and Ghazni have also proved difficult to access.

It is not clear whether rockets fired, on 10th June, in the vicinity of a meeting of elders that President Karzai was addressing, in Andar District of Ghazni, were simply intended to represent a show of strength. The rockets fell a few hundred metres from where he was standing. If they had been intended to hit the President, there would have been the inevitable risk of high casualties among those attending, which those launching the rockets may have wished to avoid.

Counter-insurgency

ISAF advised, on 1st June, that they were making progress in clearing the Sangin Valley and the Kajaki Dam area of Taliban fighters. However, it is far from clear whether they will be able to prevent the Taliban from returning. The US company, Louis Berger, is nonetheless hoping to start work on the 180 km stretch of road that links the Kajaki Dam to the Kandahar to Herat highway, as a prelude to work on the dam itself. To this end, it has been negotiating with tribal elders along the route for them to provide a degree of protection in return for the employment of people from the area.

It was reported, on 19th June, that the police had retaken Miya Nishin district of Kandahar Province, a day after Taliban forces had captured it. However, on the same day, the Taliban were said to have taken Ghorak district in the same province.

In an interview on 14th June, the Commander of NATO forces in Helmand commented that NATO operations over the winter appeared to have disrupted the supply chains of the Taliban forces, making it more difficult for them to mount the large-scale attacks that

were common in 2006.

There are indications, from ICRC and journalistic sources, that the Taliban may be focusing increasingly on the north-western provinces of Afghanistan in building up their support base. They may be helped, in so doing, by the expulsion of over 100,000 Afghans from Iran. The Taliban may thus be able to offer a source of income which is hard to find elsewhere as well as capitalise on any sense of grievance which is felt by those who have been expelled.

There has clearly been a growing Taliban presence in the western province of Farah and periodic evidence of a Taliban presence in the north-western province of Badghis again became evident when it was reported, on 10th June, that, according to the Chief of Police for the province, Taliban fighters had attacked police positions in the Bala Murghab and Ghormach districts on the previous day. It is unclear what the final outcome was of the fierce fighting that ensued, in which two policemen were killed.

There are also indications that the Taliban, along with fighters from other parts of the Islamic world, have a greater presence in the eastern province of Nangarhar. There would, in addition, appear to be an increased focus on Kabul, through the organisation of suicide attacks.

It has been suggested, that, with the killing of Mullah Dadullah in May, the centralised leadership that he provided has given way to a more de-centralised operation in which multiple commanders are seeking to build support bases over a large area of the country and thus stretch international forces.

In an interview with Associated Press on 12th June, the Commander of ISAF, General Dan McNeill, commented that Taliban fighters were demonstrating, through their manoeuvres, that they had benefited from improved training. He added that operations by NATO forces had slightly reduced the number of insurgents entering Afghanistan from Pakistan. He noted that recruitment to the Afghan National Army had increased from 600 soldiers per month in 2006 to 2,000 soldiers per month in 2007. He expressed the hope that some units of the ANA would be able to operate independently in 2008.

On 5th June, the French Government announced that it had no plans to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. Prior to the recent French elections, the French presidential candidate, Nicolas Sarkozy, had indicated that he might consider a withdrawal.

Iranian arms

Further assertions have been made this month on the question of Iranian arms reaching the Taliban. Because of the potential consequences of such assertions for the security of the region, it is important to note the content of the various statements made.

On 3rd June, the Afghan Defence Ministry rejected allegations by the US that Iran is providing weapons to armed groups within Afghanistan.

On 4th June, the US Defence Secretary, Robert Gates, commented on the question of Iranian arms during a news conference at the presidential palace in Kabul. He thus stated: “There have been indications over the past few months of weapons coming in from Iran. We do not have any information about whether the government of Iran is supporting this, is behind it, or whether it’s smuggling, or exactly what’s behind it.” He added that the weapons were being supplied to insurgents in Afghanistan and also, possibly, to criminals involved in Afghanistan’s drugs trade. He was thus referring to the fact that drug smugglers are regularly crossing the Iranian border with Afghanistan and may have bought arms in Iran to protect the drug routes. Some of these may have been provided to the Taliban to also accord protection to the drugs trade. President Karzai commented that his government did not have “any evidence so far” regarding Iranian government involvement.

The US Commander of ISAF, Gen. Dan McNeill stated, in an interview on 12th June, that he had no hard evidence that the Iranian government had helped the Taliban. He added that munitions, particularly mortar rounds found on Afghan battlefields, “clearly were made in Iran” but said that this did not prove that the Iranian government was formally involved.

However, in an interview on 13th June, US Under-Secretary of State, Nicholas Burns, stated: “There’s irrefutable evidence the Iranians are now doing this. It’s certainly coming from the government of Iran. It’s coming from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard corps command, which is a basic unit of the Iranian government”. However, he appeared to indicate that the scope of the alleged Iranian arms supplies were limited when saying: “I don’t think it’s made a substantial difference in the greater theatre of war. It is not going to turn the tide against us, but it is very troublesome, it is illegal under international law ...and the Iranians need to stop it.” He also acknowledged that it was “curious” that Iran would aid the Taliban. The US State Department later appeared to step back from this assertion of “irrefutable evidence”, commenting that “at this point we can’t make that assessment”, but stated that it had proof that weapons from Iran were reaching Taliban fighters in Afghanistan.

On 14th June, Afghanistan’s Defense Minister, Abdul Rahim Wardak, dismissed the claim of “irrefutable evidence. He added that there had “been evidence of weapons” but noted that it was “difficult to link it to Iran”. He further stated: “It is possible that (they) might be from Al-Qaida, from the drug mafia or from other sources”.

Gen. McNeill gave another interview on 18th June in which he stated: “What we’ve found so far hasn’t been militarily significant on the battlefield”. He added: “There are a hell of a lot of mortars here – and they come from a lot of countries”. He speculated that the arms could have come from black market dealers, drug traffickers or Al-Qaeda backers or could have been sold by low-level Iranian military personnel. He also implied that not all the arms coming from the Iranian side of the border were necessarily Iranian-made.

The former Pakistani Ambassador to Afghanistan, Rustam Shah Momand, expressed the view, in an interview on 19th June, that, given that the Taliban now controlled areas on the Iranian border for the first time, they were in a position to buy small quantities of arms in Iran and smuggle them back into Afghanistan. He insisted that the Iranian government was not, itself, involved in the trade in arms.

On 21st June, the Iranian Government issued another denial of the claim that it is supplying arms to the Taliban.

Refugees

The situation remains somewhat unclear with regard to the closure of the Katcha Gari and Jungle Pir Alizai camps in Pakistan, which, between them, accommodate more than 82,000 registered refugees. The initial deadline of 15th June, for their closure, was extended to 30th June. However, by this date, only 16,600 had returned to Afghanistan under the assisted voluntary repatriation programme. Of these, only 600 were from Jungle Pir Alizai camp, which is in Baluchistan. None had requested relocation to other camps proposed as alternatives. Some were refusing to move, stating that they were Pakistani. UNHCR advised that a majority of those in Jungle Pir Alizai camp were from areas of Afghanistan which are seriously affected by the ongoing conflict. The UNHCR Representative to Afghanistan, Salvatore Lombardo, commented: “We are also very concerned about the fact that the capacity of this country to absorb a large number (of returnees) is very limited”.

UNAMA advised, on 8th June, that a total of 98,712 Afghans were deported from Iran between 23rd April and 31st May 2007 and that, on average, 1,300 Afghans were continuing to cross each day. It added that almost all of these had been sent across at the Zabul border crossing, from where they were returning to their places of origin in the south-western provinces of Nimroz and Farah. They were said to have failed to comply with a directive from the Iranian Government that all foreign nationals should leave the Zabul-Zahedan area of south-eastern Iran. This was thought to be linked to a concern that the Afghan population, many of whom were Baluch, might strengthen the position of a Baluch opposition group. However, it has also been suggested that the expulsions may be aimed to put pressure on the Afghan Government over the quantity of water from the Helmand River which reaches Iran. Both Zahedan and Zabul suffer from severe water shortages and depend heavily on being able to access water from the River Helmand. This was significantly reduced during the drought of 1999-2001 and drought conditions have persisted, to a greater or lesser extent, in the southern provinces since then. UNAMA noted that there are 920,000 registered Afghan refugees in Iran and up to one million more living there illegally.

On 12th June, the Afghan Cabinet endorsed a ruling by the Supreme Court that the Foreign Minister, Rangin Dadfar Spanta, should remain in office. The Wolesi Jirga (Lower House of Parliament) had voted for his dismissal on the grounds that he had failed to prevent the large-scale expulsion of Afghans from Iran.

Humanitarian developments

The Afghan Ministry of Public Health announced, on 4th June, that over 300,000 mothers, and a similar number of children between nine months and five years of age, had been vaccinated against tetanus and measles in Kabul. This represented 60-70% of eligible women and 85% of eligible children. These figures may usefully be compared with Helmand and Kandahar where, although the percentage of children vaccinated was roughly equivalent, only around half of the eligible women could be vaccinated. This was partly due to insecurity but negative information campaigns by the Taliban, which suggested that some harm could come to women if they were vaccinated, also influenced the outcome.

The same negative information campaigns have also reduced the willingness of the population to allow their children to be vaccinated against polio. A three-day immunisation drive began on 17th June in the south, east and south-east of Afghanistan. During the previous drive, 100,000 of the targeted children could not be reached. Afghanistan is one of four countries, along with Pakistan, India and Nigeria, where polio is still found. The number of cases showed a dramatic rise, to 31, in 2006. Three cases were said to have been identified to date during 2007, two in the south and one in the east.

It was reported on 28th June that at least 50 people, mostly women and children, had been killed in unusual flash floods in the provinces of Kunar, Parwan, Panjshir, Kapisa and Paktia. In addition, six children were killed in a landslide in the northern province of Kunduz.

Education

It was reported on 5th June that the Afghan Minister of Education, Hanif Atmar, had provided indicators of progress in the education sector during a recent visit to Japan. He had thus noted that, since 2001, the number of students had increased from 900,000 to around six million, of which 35% were girls. He added that the number of teachers had increased from 21,000 to 143,000. Of these, 28% were women. He also advised that the number of schools had increased, by more than 5,000, to 8,400. In identifying the need for additional resources, he noted that a little over 6% of the government's non-defence budget is spent on education. He stated that some 5,000 schools lacked adequate buildings and that nearly half the school age population was not receiving an education. He estimated that a further 73,000 classrooms needed to be constructed. In addition, 80% of teachers were untrained.

Health

During a press conference in Kabul on June 19, Minister for Public Health Sayed Muhammad Amin Fatimi advised that five of the 184 HIV positive patients in the country had died so far.

It was announced on 20th June that the telecommunications company, Roshan, had launched an initiative, in which it is joining forces with another telecommunications company, Cisco, and the Aga Khan University Hospital, together with the French Medical Institute for Children, to provide real-time access for Afghan hospitals to specialist diagnosis, treatment and training expertise from abroad. The project will use broadband technology, wireless video consultation and digital image transfer.

Economic developments

The Afghan Communications Minister, Amirzai Sangin, launched a programme, on 10th June, to provide 102,000 telephone lines in Kabul, 15,000 in Kandahar, 15,000 in Mazar-e-Sharif, 10,000 in Jalalabad and 8,000 in Kunduz. The work is being undertaken by an Iranian company, Shaheedi Qandi, and an Indian company, Astar.

It was announced on 14th June that the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Canadian Government were jointly supporting the rehabilitation of the remaining 42 km of the Kandahar to Spin Boldak road. Work to the initial 61.4 km of the road was commenced in October 2002, with grants from the ADB's Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction and the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development. This provided employment to local residents and returning refugees. The contract for the next stage has been granted, through a competitive bidding process organised by the Afghan Ministry of Public Works, to Hamkar Construction Company, Afghanistan. The work will be overseen by the Ministry.

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