

Daily Times, 1 August 2006

31 killed in Afghanistan

JALALABAD: At least 31 people including 23 Taliban militants were killed in violence across Afghanistan. A provincial governor survived a bomb blast that ripped through a parked car near a mosque in eastern Afghanistan on Monday, killing five policemen and three passers-by. The car exploded as the anti-Taliban governor of Nangarhar province left the mosque on the outskirts of the provincial capital Jalalabad after prayers for a respected former guerrilla who died this month. Another three passers-by were killed, Nangarhar police chief Basir Salangi said, confirming that five policemen were dead. Governor Gul Agha Sherzai was 15 metres from the explosion. He was unhurt. The car carrying the policemen was destroyed while a second car nearby carrying the governor's bodyguards was damaged. A correspondent at the scene said the blast sent pieces of the vehicle flying. The correspondent said five of the wounded were children. The prayer ceremony was for Maulawi Yunus Khalis, a major mujahideen leader during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan who died this month. Khalis also supported the Taliban. Meanwhile, Afghan and coalition forces killed 23 Taliban militants in clashes in a southern district briefly held by them earlier this month, a district police commander said on Monday.

Daily Times, 1 August 2006

NATO enters restive Afghan South

KANDAHAR: NATO took command of international troops in southern Afghanistan on Monday, embarking on its most ambitious mission and hoping a new approach will break a grinding Taliban insurgency. NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) took authority from a US-led coalition, with the occasion to be marked at a ceremony in southern Kandahar city later on Monday. The transfer brings around 8,000 British, Canadian, Dutch, US and other troops under ISAF command in six provinces in the south, expanding the number of its troops nationwide to 18,000. The move demonstrates the international community's commitment to war-ravaged Afghanistan, according to the commanders of the NATO and US forces. "NATO is here for the long-term, for as long as the government and people of Afghanistan require our assistance," ISAF commander, British Lieutenant General David Richards, said in a statement.

Daily Times, 2 August 2006

Three British troops killed in ambush in Afghan south

Kabul: Three British soldiers were killed in an ambush in southern Afghanistan the day after NATO forces took over the violence-plagued region from US troops. A British convoy was attacked on Tuesday by rebels using rocket-propelled grenades and heavy machine guns in Helmand province - one of the most dangerous in the country - a British Defence Ministry spokeswoman said in London. "Two UK soldiers have died. One is missing presumed killed and another is seriously injured," she said. British officials later confirmed a third soldier had died. A Taliban spokesman, Qari Yousuf, said the group carried out the ambush, killing six NATO soldiers. He said the rebels had killed another seven in a separate clash further south. But an ISAF spokesman rejected the Taliban death toll claim. Residents said heavy fighting erupted in Musa Qala district where the soldiers were ambushed. The ISAF spokesman confirmed the fighting, saying it was part

of an ongoing operation but giving no further details. On Tuesday, Afghan and coalition forces detained four suspected Al Qaeda operatives during a raid on a village in the southeastern province of Khost, a coalition statement said. The raid was part of an operation to stop attacks on Afghan and coalition forces in eastern Afghanistan, and smuggling of explosives. The men, whose names and nationalities were not revealed, were seized during an early morning raid in Khost province.

Daily Times, 2 August 2006

South Korean Christians in Afghanistan despite warning

SEOUL: Nearly 900 South Korean Christians have arrived in Afghanistan to attend a peace festival despite government warnings they could be potential targets for attacks, a Foreign Ministry official said on Tuesday. The three-day event that starts in Kabul on Saturday comes amid increased attacks by Islamic fundamentalists and insurgents, the South Korean official said. "We are very worried about their safety. It is just like jumping into a fire," the official, who asked not to be named, said by telephone. South Korea has warned its citizens not to travel to Afghanistan, which is going through its bloodiest phase since the Taliban government was ousted in 2001. A US State Department travel warning said that foreigners in Kabul and elsewhere throughout Afghanistan were targeted for violent attacks and kidnappings.

Dawn, 3 August 2006

Kabul to join Saarc in April

DHAKA, Aug 2: Afghanistan will join the south Asian economic grouping at its next summit meeting in New Delhi in April, India's foreign secretary said on Wednesday. The decision was formalised at a conference of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) foreign ministers which ended in Dhaka on Wednesday, Shyam Saran said. The New Delhi summit would be held on April 3-4, he added. Afghanistan's entry was proposed at the previous summit of the grouping in Dhaka last November. Kabul hopes its membership will boost development and trade in the war-battered country. Afghan officials took part as observers at this week's Dhaka conference.

Dawn, 3 August 2006

Taliban lose 18 in Helmand

KANDAHAR, Aug 2: Dozens of Afghan police raided Taliban hideouts in southern Afghanistan, killing 18 militants and injuring four others, police said on Wednesday. A policeman was also killed during the day-long raid on Taliban strongholds in Helmand province's troubled Garmser district on Tuesday, district police chief Mohammad Rasoul Aka said. The raid was launched to "clear" Taliban. "Our operations will continue," the police commander said. He would not give details, citing security reasons. The Taliban are still active mostly in southern and eastern Afghanistan where they carry out regular attacks.

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Daily Times, 4 August 2006

Security along Pak-Afghan border: Pakistan and US sign MoU

Islamabad: Pakistan and the United States on Thursday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) whereby Washington pledged to provide its key ally in the war on terror US\$2.7 million in security and communications equipment to bolster security along the Pak-Afghan, in a bid to root out terrorism and drug trafficking. Sources said that the MoU, signed by Interior Minister Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao and US Ambassador to Pakistan Ryan C Crocker at the Interior Ministry, would supplement Islamabad's efforts to increase Frontier Constabulary capacity by raising an additional 50 platoons to protect the 286-kilometre border. The agreement follows through on US commitments pledged last autumn to provide Pakistan with \$30 million in supplementary funds to fight narcotics and enhance border security. Sources said that more than \$15 million of this assistance would be dedicated to delivering communications, transport and security equipment to the NWFP and Baloch Frontier Corps, which the Ministry of Interior also manages. A large portion of this equipment would be delivered to the Frontier Corps by the end of this year, they added.

Daily Times, 4 August 2006

35 killed in Afghanistan

Kandahar: At least 35 people including 10 Taliban militants were killed in the latest violence across Afghanistan. A suicide car bomber Thursday killed 21 civilians in one of Afghanistan's deadliest attacks this year, while four North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) soldiers from Canada died in other violence. "Twenty-one civilians, including children, were killed and 13 others were injured," ministry spokesman Yousuf Stanizai said. NATO said one of its convoys was a few hundred metres away when the bomb exploded in Panjwayi district but it was not affected and it was unclear if it was the intended target. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) convoy had been passing through to recover vehicles involved in two earlier roadside bombings that killed a Canadian soldier and wounded four others, spokesman Major Quentin Innes said. The earlier bomb blasts were about 10 kilometres further west. A Canadian soldier was killed and another wounded. The second blast hit the same area hours later and wounded three more Canadian troops. None suffered life-threatening injuries.

Daily Times, 5 August 2006

Karzai vows action to 'defeat terrorism'

Kabul: Afghanistan's government is taking steps to end a Taliban-linked insurgency that will "finally earn security" for the country, President Hamid Karzai said on Friday, a day after a series of deadly attacks. The president made the assurances in a specially called press conference at his palace after 21 civilians and four Canadian troops were killed in

one of the country's bloodiest attacks. US-backed Karzai expressed sorrow at the deaths in southern Kandahar province and condemned the attackers as cowards. He added that the government and its international allies had a plan to bring security. "We have begun very broad actions. You will see some actions that will finally earn security for Afghanistan," he told reporters. But Karzai could not give a timeframe. "No one can answer when Afghanistan will be freed. But the war on terror will continue until we've defeated the terrorism," he said. There are thousands of foreign troops in Afghanistan trying to round up Taliban and other militants following the country's slide into poverty and chaos, which led to it becoming a haven for Islamist militants groups. Karzai said he had consulted with various community and religious leaders and his international partners on a strategy to defeat the insurgents, who have stepped up their attacks in a more organised campaign this year.

The Frontier Post, 5 August 2006

Canada to bolster troop numbers for mission

Toronto (Agencies): Prime Minister John Howard will next week announce plans to bolster Australia's troop numbers in Afghanistan to deal with the nation's deteriorating security situation. A suicide bomber killed 21 civilians in Afghanistan's southern Kandahar province during an attack on a crowded bazaar that turned into one of the deadliest this year. Four Canadian soldiers died in other blasts in the region. Around 240 Australian troops are currently preparing to head to central Afghanistan to work with Dutch troops as part of a provincial reconstruction team. Half of the taskforce will be trades people and engineers, with the remainder an infantry protection unit. The Australians will be located with the 1,600 member Dutch task group at a base outside the Oruzgan capital, Tarin Kowt, and are expected to rely on them for primary protection. But as the security situation worsens, Australia is looking to send in more troops of its own to increase protection for the engineers and tradesmen. Defence Minister Brendan Nelson flagged an announcement next week that Australia will increase its security numbers, and indicated troops are in training for the deployment. He would not give any indication of how many extra soldiers Australia might send but said the military had the capacity to provide reinforcements.

Daily Times, 5 August 2006

25 Taliban killed

Kandahar: Two bombs exploded on Friday near NATO patrols in an area of southern Afghanistan that saw a series of bloody attacks a day earlier, while security forces said they had killed 25 rebels. The early morning bombs exploded in restive Kandahar province as NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) patrols passed, but caused no damage or casualties to the force, a spokesman said. The first destroyed a civilian vehicle but it seemed unlikely it was a vehicle-borne suicide bomb of the sort that killed 21 civilians in the area on Thursday, Major Scott Lundy said.

Daily Times, 6 August 2006

Two killed in Afghanistan

Kandahar: Taliban attacked a police patrol in southern Afghanistan overnight, with an intelligence official and a militant killed and two police wounded in the ensuing gunfight,

police said on Saturday. The patrol was attacked in Ghazni province late on Friday, provincial police chief Tafsir Khan said. "One intelligence official and two police were wounded in the fire fight," Khan said. "One Taliban was also killed and four were wounded." Police arrested 15 suspects in a subsequent sweep of the area. A Canadian soldier with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)-led peacekeepers died on Saturday and three others were wounded in a traffic accident in southern Afghanistan, a statement said. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) soldiers were travelling in an armoured jeep as part of a convoy when the accident took place. The cause is not known but "enemy action has been ruled out", it said. "One ISAF soldier is dead and three others are wounded following a vehicle accident at noon today in Kandahar province," according to the NATO statement said.

Daily Times, 6 August 2006

South Koreans shunted from Afghanistan

Kabul: Hundreds of South Korean Christians were being shunted out of Afghanistan on Saturday after their planned "peace festival" was called off amid concerns that their presence could spark violence. Around 100 were to be flown to New Delhi while an estimated 200 more were escorted across the northern border from Mazari Sharif into Uzbekistan, South Korean and Afghan government officials said. The South Korean government was assessing how many remained in the country "because so many people were around many different cities," an official said on condition of anonymity. A couple of dozen were ill, some suffering diarrhoea and a South Korean military medical team was treating them. "We are worried about the children, some of them are in a serious condition," the official said. Around 195 South Koreans who arrived in the northern city of Mazari Sharif from the capital were driven to the border early on Saturday and crossed over, a provincial government spokesman said.

Daily Times, 7 August 2006

Afghan forces kill 17 insurgents

Kandahar: Afghan troops and police killed 17 rebels and wounded another five in two separate clashes in the southern province of Helmand, police said on Sunday. Three insurgents were killed and one was wounded in a firefight with police in Garmser district on Saturday afternoon, district police chief Ghulam Rasoul Aka told AFP. Following the incident Afghan soldiers and police launched a joint search in the district overnight. This sparked a battle lasting several hours with the Taliban in which 14 insurgents were killed, he said. "At least 14 Taliban bodies are still at the site of the clash from the overnight battle. Four Taliban were also wounded," said Aka. No soldiers or police were hurt in either encounter, he said.

The News, 7 August 2006

Spanta for new dimension in Pak-Afghan ties

Kabul: Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Rangeen Dadfar Spanta on Sunday urged the international community to do more to stem the flow of extremists, weapons and terror funding into the country. Spanta, in an interview with The Associated Press, called for a "new dimension" in relations with Pakistan. "It is evidently necessary to extend cooperation with our brothers in Pakistan against the centre of terrorism," Spanta said.

“In this field we have the possibility to do more.” He said his country remains the main victim of the international terror network led by Osama bin Laden. Eliminating the network is “an international task,” he said and urged the international community to do more to fight the “sources of terrorism: Islamic schools, international sponsors, and the influx of weapons”.

Daily Times, 8 August 2006

‘British forces in Afghanistan need reinforcements’

London: A former British colonel hailed for his impassioned speech to soldiers before the Iraq war said on Monday that British forces in Afghanistan needed far more support if they are to succeed. Tim Collins said a “radical rethink” of funding for the Afghanistan mission was needed, a day after the British deployment in the troubled central Asian nation suffered its 17th fatality since 2001. Collins said forces in Afghanistan were taking on Taliban fighters with too few soldiers and he warned that Britain needed to brace itself for further troop deaths.

Dawn, 8 August 2006

Afghan drug war has failed: UN

Kabul, Aug 7: The war against drugs in Afghanistan is a failure and the strategy needs to be changed, the top United Nations official in the world’s biggest heroin-producing country said on Monday. “Nobody can say that we have been successful if the poppy production has increased,” Tom Koenigs, the UN Secretary-General’s special representative in Afghanistan, told a monthly press conference. “Certainly the strategy and the effort have to be rethought,” said Koenigs, adding: “The problem has increased and the remedy has to adjust.” Figures for Afghanistan’s 2006 harvest of opium poppies — which are used to make heroin — are not yet known but the UN has said that it is set to pass the 4,100 tonnes produced in 2005. Last year’s haul was worth 2.7 billion dollars, forming a sizeable part of the destitute and insurgency-racked country’s economy.

Dawn, 8 August 2006

NATO to seek Pakistan’s cooperation

Kabul, Aug 7: Afghanistan’s foreign minister urged the world to stem the flow of extremists, weapons and terror funding into the country, as a Nato-led security force suffered its ninth fatality and its main base came under rocket attack. Insurgents fired three rockets at Kandahar Air Field, a sprawling base near the main southern city of Kandahar, home to some 10,000 international troops and civilians, military spokesman Maj Scott Lundy said Monday. The attack, launched late Sunday, caused no damage or injury. Tom Koenigs, the top UN official in Afghanistan, warned on Monday that the Taliban still posed a threat to Afghanistan and warned the insurgency could not be defeated quickly. In conciliatory comments after months of acrimony, he also called for a “new dimension” in relations with Pakistan.

Daily Times, 9 August 2006

Seven Taliban killed, commander captured

Kabul: Seven Taliban were killed and a commander was captured in the latest spate of attacks in Afghanistan, officials said Tuesday. Four Taliban were killed in a clash in the

Andar district of Ghazni province. Two militants were killed when the Taliban attacked a police post late on Monday in Garmser district in the Helmand province. In the north of the province, British troops shot dead an armed Afghan policeman outside a base in Musa Qula. The Afghan was in civilian clothes and was mistaken for an insurgent. In another attack late on Monday in Paktika province, one insurgent was killed while four others and a policeman were wounded following a short battle, said provincial spokesman Sayed Jamal. He said that around 50 Taliban crossed into a remote area of the Paktika province from Pakistan and traded heavy machine gun fire with police. The militants slipped back into Pakistan after the fight, he added.

Dawn, 9 August 2006

Drug use has doubled in Afghanistan: UN report

Washington, Aug 8: Drug addiction in Afghanistan has doubled during the last two years and nearly a million people are now using illegal drugs, says a UN report. The rise in addiction followed a steady rise in the production of illicit drugs since the collapse of the Taliban government in 2001. The country's main drug crop is poppy which is processed into opium and then to heroin. Afghanistan produces an estimated 90 per cent of the world's illegal opium. The United Nations and the Afghan government estimate the total export value of Afghanistan's opium in 2005 was \$2.7 billion equivalent to 52 per cent of the country's official gross domestic product. The international community has provided millions of dollars for development but Afghanistan's economy still relies heavily on the trade in illicit drugs.

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Dawn, 10 August 2006

Opium eradication a must for peace in Afghanistan: US

London: America's drug tsar, John Walters, on Wednesday acknowledged that US allies have voiced doubts about the wisdom of opium eradication in parts of southern Afghanistan where insurgents have killed 10 British troops over the past two months. Speaking during a visit to London for talks with British officials, Mr Walters recognised that the situation in Helmand province had been "difficult". In recent months, officials within the British government and military have privately expressed growing disquiet about the role of opium eradication in fuelling the Afghan insurgency. Unrest in Helmand, where 4,800 British troops are stationed under the command of the

International Security Assistance Force (Isaf), has claimed the lives of 10 British soldiers since the start of June. Before then, only two British soldiers had been killed in the whole country since October 2001. The British army chief, General Sir Mike Jackson, has said eradication would be “counterproductive” unless done when all other conditions were right and the Conservative whip, Tobias Ellwood, last month called for the opium crop to be legalised. But Mr Walters said that eradicating the opium crop was the only way for Afghanistan to achieve lasting peace.

Daily Times, 10 August 2006

19 Taliban killed in Afghanistan

Kabul: US-led soldiers and warplanes killed 19 Taliban militants who attacked a coalition compound with rockets and rifles in mountainous eastern Afghanistan, the coalition said on Wednesday. Two US soldiers and an Afghan policeman were wounded in Tuesday evening's battle in Nuristan province, it said in a statement. It said 30 insurgents had attacked a provincial reconstruction team base in Nuristan's Kamdesh district and coalition forces responded with small arms and mortar fire. “Coalition soldiers killed 19 extremists” during the firefight, the statement said, adding that the base was undamaged.

Daily Times, 11 August 2006

Pakistan must fight terror ‘bravely’, says Afghan FM

Kabul: Afghanistan expects Pakistan to fight the Taliban-led militants “bravely” in a bid to stop cross-border attacks, Afghan Foreign Minister Rangeen Dadfar Spanta said on Thursday. Spanta said that terrorism would spill back into Pakistan if not stopped by a coordinated effort between the two countries, which are both allies of the United States in its ‘war on terror’. His comments come amid months of bad blood between Islamabad and Kabul over Pakistan's alleged failure to tackle the Taliban rebels operating from its restive border regions. “We believe we are the main victims of terrorism. At the same time I, myself, personally believe that... Pakistan will also become one of the victims” if it does not crack down on militants, Spanta told reporters. “The 9/11 experience showed that terrorism goes out of control. The countries which were previously supporting the Al Qaeda as a political tool against the Soviets became victims of the Al Qaeda themselves,” he said. “We expect Pakistan, our brotherly and friendly neighbour, to cooperate more with us in our fight against terrorism.... We expect them to coordinate this struggle,” he added. The minister however said that Kabul was ready to discuss the issue with Islamabad in a friendly manner.

The News, 11 August 2006

Three suspected al-Qaida members killed in Afghanistan

Kabul: U.S.-led coalition troops and Afghan forces raided a building in southeastern Afghanistan on Friday, killing three suspected al-Qaida members, officials said. The alleged al-Qaida operatives were killed in the village of Ya'Qubi in southeastern Khost province, the coalition said in a statement. Three other suspects were detained. “The purpose of this operation was to capture an al-Qaida facilitator considered a significant threat to Afghan and coalition forces,” the statement said.

Dawn, 11 August 2006

Eight policemen, 12 Taliban die in clash

Kabul, Aug 10: Eight policemen and 12 Taliban died in a clash in southern Afghanistan, and a bomb injured seven civilians near a meeting with a top US general, officials said on Thursday. The fire fight came after insurgents ambushed a police patrol in Kandahar province's volatile Panjwayi district on Wednesday, provincial spokesman Daud Ahmadi told AFP. Another seven policemen and nine rebels were wounded, he said. Panjwayi is a known stronghold of the Taliban, the militia that was toppled from power by US-led forces in 2001 but which is now leading an increasingly bloody insurgency. A suicide car bomber blew himself up in a bazaar in Panjwayi on Aug 3, killing 21 civilians and injuring several Nato soldiers in a passing convoy in one of the deadliest attacks in Afghanistan this year. The district, some 30 kilometres west of Kandahar, was the scene of fierce clashes between the coalition and Taliban troops in mid-May. Around 34 civilians also died when US-led warplanes bombed a village in Panjwayi. Separately on Thursday, seven civilians, including an elderly woman, were wounded when a roadside bomb exploded in the centre of the eastern city of Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar province, police said. Earlier, witnesses had said that the explosion was from a rocket.

Daily Times, 12 August 2006

Three coalition soldiers killed in Afghanistan

Kabul: Three soldiers from the US-led coalition were killed Friday in a "battle with extremists" in northeast Afghanistan, the US military said. Two soldiers were also wounded in the clash in Waygal district of Nuristan province, the coalition said in a statement. The soldiers' identities and nationalities were being withheld pending notification of their next-of-kin, it said. Meanwhile, a Taliban suicide bomber detonated an explosives-filled car near a NATO vehicle, killing one of the alliance's soldiers, NATO and the militia said. The bombing occurred in Spin Boldak in Kandahar, the NATO-led ISAF said in a statement. Separately, US-led and Afghan forces killed three suspected Al Qaeda fighters and arrested three more in a raid, the US military said in a statement. The raid was aimed at an Al Qaeda operative linked to a series of roadside and car bombings in Khost. "Upon arrival, the assault force received small arms fire from the targeted building," the statement said.

The Frontier Post, 12 August 2006

UK forces facing worst fighting after World War-II

London (Agencies): British soldiers in Afghanistan are involved in some of the worst and most prolonged fighting since World War II, the British commander of NATO forces in the country said. This sort of thing hasn't really happened so consistently, I don't think, since the Korean War (in 1952) or the Second World War (in 1939), Lieutenant General David Richards told the BBC World Service on Thursday. It happened for periods in the Falklands (in 1982), obviously, and it happened for short periods in the Gulf on both occasions (1991 and 2003). But this is persistent, low-level, dirty fighting. He said some British troops would be withdrawn from parts of the southern province of Helmand to be replaced by soldiers from the Afghan Army. Richards's comments came after news on Wednesday that another British soldier, Private Leigh Reeves, 25, was killed in Afghanistan, the 18th since November 2001 when the country's troops were deployed

there.

The Frontier Post, 12 August 2006

Up to 50,000 troops needed to control Taliban-led insurgency

Kabul: Between 40-50,000 NATO forces would be needed to control Taliban fighters in the troubled Afghan province of Helmand, a senior British official said. The number far exceeds the 4,500 UK troops currently in the region and their Nato counterparts. But the source insisted it was never the intention to put international troops in every village in the province, but rather disrupt Taliban influence and encourage stability in rural areas. There is absolutely no way that we can garrison Helmand with 4,500 troops, said the source. If Nato was going to garrison Helmand and carry out that sort of operation, heaven knows how many troops you would need, 40-50,000. But we wouldn't even think about that. Up to 20,000 troops were deployed at the peak of the troubles in Northern Ireland and 40,000 Nato troops were used in Bosnia. British forces in Afghanistan - which were recently swelled by 1,000 additions - have been surprised by the strength of the Taliban resistance. They have found themselves facing guerilla-style tactics rather than terrorist attacks.

Daily Times, 14 August 2006

Afghanistan fighting kills 30

Kabul: Fighting in Afghanistan left at least 24 insurgents and five Afghan security forces dead, as unknown attackers hit a house with mortar fire, wounding 20 civilians, officials said on Sunday. In a flood-hit province, authorities found bombs planted under the car of a senior Afghan Red Crescent official and outside a government refugee office. In Kabul, the education minister teamed up with the top US general in Afghanistan to thwart attacks on schools that have killed 41 students and teachers over the last year. In eastern Paktika province, insurgents attacked an Afghan army post, leaving five soldiers and at least 18 militants dead on Sunday, the US-led coalition said. Six soldiers were hurt, three seriously, before the attackers were fended off by mortar fire from nearby military bases, said a coalition statement. Coalition troops were embedded with the Afghan troops but suffered no casualties, it said. In the southern Helmand province, police on Saturday killed six Taliban militants and wounded four in the mountains of Garmser district, said Ghulam Rasool, the district police chief. The clash continued Sunday, during which three officers were wounded, Rasool said.

Daily Times, 14 August 2006

NATO to redeploy forces in south to tackle insurgents effectively

Kabul: NATO will redeploy its forces in southern Afghanistan so it can take the fight to Taliban and other insurgents more effectively, a spokesman said on Sunday. British Lieutenant-General David Richards, commander of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), "intends to rebalance his forces, replacing some ISAF soldiers with Afghan security forces at static defensible locations," ISAF spokesman Toby Jackman told a press conference. He denied media reports of a "retreat" by the force, and also denied reports of a planned major offensive involving thousands of troops. "General David Richards has no plans to withdraw troops from the south," Jackman said. The aim is to bring back soldiers assigned to guard public buildings in some districts so they can fight insurgents more effectively. British newspapers have reported problems

encountered by British troops in maintaining an adequate presence in advance positions in Helmand province, where they face severe and sometimes daily attacks in some districts. Some politicians and experts have called for reinforcements to relieve a contingent exhausted by the severity and frequency of combat in southern Afghanistan. London is sending 900 extra soldiers to Helmand.

The News, 15 August 2006

25 die in Afghanistan clashes

Kabul: Five Afghan soldiers and up to 20 extremists were killed in an ambush in southeast Afghanistan on Sunday, the US-led coalition said. Six Afghan soldiers were also wounded in the ambush when extremists attacked their command post with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades in the Bermel district of Paktika province, the coalition said in a statement. Three of the wounded soldiers suffered only minor injuries and returned to duty after being treated on the scene, the statement said. The three others were evacuated by air to a hospital run by the coalition. The country has suffered a surge in violence by remnants of the ousted Taliban whose regime was toppled by a US-led invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001. Afghan forces and a US-led coalition have extended their presence in the country's east since a Nato-led International Security Assistance Force took command of military operations in the restive south on July 31.

Daily Times, 15 August 2006

Coalition forces kill 9 Taliban

Kandahar: Afghan and US-led coalition forces killed nine militants after suspected Taliban fighters attacked two army checkpoints in the latest fighting to rock southern Afghanistan, an Afghan official said on Friday. Six militants were wounded in three hours of clashes but escaped, and one other militant was arrested, said Mohammed Zahir Khan, chief of Khas Uruzgan district in southern Uruzgan province where the fighting occurred late on Thursday.

The News, 17 August 2006

At least 15 abducted in Afghanistan

Kabul: Gunmen abducted at least 15 people, including a doctor and nurses, as they traveled to a refugee camp in southern Afghanistan on Thursday, officials said. Aga Jan Nazari, provincial director of the refugee department, said 15 people were kidnapped in Kandahar province. Dr. Abdullah Fahim, spokesman for the Public Health Ministry, said 20 people were abducted, including a doctor and five nurses who were on their way to Zadi refugee camp in the province's Zhela district.

Daily Times, 17 August 2006

US to compensate Afghan airstrike victims

Kabul: The US-led military said on Wednesday it would pay 90,000 dollars in compensation to the victims of a May air attack which killed at least 16 civilians in southern Afghanistan. But the compensation process would not start until security improves in Kandahar province's Panjwayi district where the incident happened, US military spokesman Colonel Tom Collins said. Collins said the Afghan government and the US military put the death toll from the air strike at 16. But a respected rights group

and local residents say 37 people were killed. "The village of Tulokan was the location of a significant combat engagement on May 21-22 in which several non-combatant civilians were killed following a coalition operation," Collins told a news conference. The operation was aimed at some 200 Taliban fighters massing in the village, he said. "90,000 US dollars will be provided to address the immediate requirements in family assistance, reconstruction and projects in the village," he said. "Assistance to this village ultimately is based on when security conditions allow aid workers to enter the village. Taliban extremists continue to target aid workers in the area," the colonel said.

The Frontier Post, 17 August 2006

NATO upbeat about Afghanistan's future

Kabul: NATO will sign a long-term strategic partnership agreement with Afghanistan next month to ensure the alliance's future commitment to the war-torn country, announced NATO's civilian representative to Afghanistan Hikmat Cetin during a press conference. He said the agreement was aimed to guarantee that the world community, at top of it NATO, will not abandon Afghans. Next month, NATO and Afghanistan will sign an agreement on the NATO-Afghanistan Enduring Partnership cooperation. We are here because the people want us here and we want the people to see Afghanistan as a prosperous and stable country, said Cetin on the last day of his two and a half-year mission in Afghanistan. He said the country had made 'huge' achievements, such as ending the Taliban regime, successful holding of the presidential and parliamentary elections and enrolment of six million children at schools, over the past five years. However, he said a lot of problems were still there to be dealt with. He said life was better but not for every one and many expected to get more and faster.

Daily Times, 18 August 2006

Poppy cultivation gains ground in Afghanistan

Kabul: The area of Afghanistan planted with poppies increased by more than 40 percent this year compared to last, suggesting there will be a strong rise in opium production, a Western source said on Thursday. Around 150,000 hectares (370,500 acres) of poppies - the base ingredient for heroin - were cultivated in 2006 in Afghanistan compared to 104,000 hectares in 2005, the anti-drug official said on condition of anonymity. This represents an increase of 44 percent in the area under cultivation at a time when the government and its international partners, notably the United States and Britain, have stepped up an anti-drug campaign that has already cost millions of dollars. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Afghan government would not comment on the figures, saying they were still assessing the situation.

The Frontier Post, 18 August 2006

US, Afghan troops detain eight 'terrorists'

Kabul: US-led coalition and Afghan troops arrested eight terror suspects in raids on two al-Qaeda sanctuaries in the southeastern Khost province on Wednesday. The US military said the soldiers targeted the compounds after intelligence linked people living there to helping foreign militants and plotting roadside bomb attacks. In a statement, the coalition said the compounds near the villages of Parukhel and Jابه were suspected of being sanctuaries for al-Qaeda facilitators. During each operation, it added, the assault forces

requested a peaceful surrender of people within the compounds. Eight suspected terrorists were taken into custody during the operations. Several women and children, present within the Parukhel compound, were not harmed, the statement said, claiming the troops also seized assault rifles, ammunition, telecommunication devices and improvised explosive device material at the sites. 'The purpose of these operations (in Yaqubi district) was to capture terrorists who are considered significant threats to peace and stability in Afghanistan,' the statement said.

Daily Times, 19 August 2006

NATO appeals for help in curtailing Afghan drugs

Washington: NATO's top general appealed to the international community on Thursday to do more to curb Afghanistan's growing drug trade, which he said is helping finance a resurgent Taliban and fueling instability. "It certainly cries out for more international focus," said US Marine Corps Gen James Jones, NATO's supreme allied commander Europe. Jones, briefing reporters at the Pentagon, also said NATO troops would aim to improve stability gradually in the region in the coming months. "The international community understands that we have to have more success in the narcotics field and we have to do that in the fairly near future," Jones said. Ninety percent of the Afghan drug output is sold in Europe, with profits used "to finance at least some part of the terrorist organisations that are doing battle with us in Afghanistan," Jones said. Narcotics money is supporting violent drug cartels, resurgent Taliban Islamic militants and possibly the al Qaeda network, as well as contributing to tribal warfare, Jones said. Jones said NATO and US forces are not playing a direct role in fighting the narcotics trade and will not carry out eradication of opium poppies. The drug trade is considered a prime threat to US-led efforts to rebuild Afghanistan.

Daily Times, 19 August 2006

Afghan official rejects claim

Kabul: Afghan officials on Friday dismissed "diversionary" Pakistani claims that an Al Qaeda kingpin linked to an alleged plot to blow up airliners is based in eastern Afghanistan. Pakistani security officials said on Friday that Islamabad had informed US-led coalition forces in Afghanistan that the unidentified Al Qaeda member was based in Kunar. But a senior adviser in the Afghan Foreign Ministry accused Pakistan of trying to shift the blame and said Afghanistan was no longer a haven for Al Qaeda.

Dawn, 20 August 2006

Four foreign soldiers killed in Afghanistan

Kabul, Aug 19: Four foreign soldiers were killed in two clashes in Afghanistan on Saturday, officials said, the latest casualties among foreign forces in the rising violence with the Taliban. Three soldiers with U.S.-led coalition forces were killed in a clash in the eastern province of Kunar. A soldier with NATO troops was killed along with an Afghan soldier in a gun battle with Taliban fighters in the southern province of Uruzgan. Three other NATO soldiers were wounded in the Uruzgan incident, a spokesman for the force said.

The News, 21 August 2006

71 Taliban killed in major Afghan offensive

Kandahar: Afghan and Nato forces battled Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan's volatile south with rockets, artillery and air strikes killing 71 militants on Sunday in one of the country's bloodiest clashes in five years. Five Afghan troops were also killed in the series of battles, which started late Saturday and spilled into Sunday morning after the Taliban attacked a police convoy in Panjwayi district of southern Kandahar province, said Niaz Mohammad Sarhadi, the district government chief. In the neighbouring Helmand province, a separate clash with insurgents on Sunday left one British soldier dead and three others wounded, Britain's defence ministry said. Militants ambushed another police patrol in western Afghanistan's Farah province, sparking a gunbattle that left one officer and two attackers dead, a regional governor said.

Daily Times, 21 August 2006

Former Taliban commander held in refugee camp

Quetta: Anti-terrorist forces arrested four suspected terrorists, including a former Taliban commander, in a raid on Punjpai refugee camp early on Sunday. Locals told Online that the forces cordoned off the area at 3 am and raided houses. However, the police, when contacted, denied having any knowledge of the raid.

Daily Times, 22 August 2006

Germany reaffirms support to Afghanistan

Kabul: German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier reaffirmed on Monday the commitment of his country and the world to Afghanistan even as the conflict in the Middle East grabs public attention. Steinmeier arrived on Sunday for a three-day tour that will include talks with President Hamid Karzai and a visit to German troops based in the less violent north. He said in Kabul that at such times of unrest in the Middle East it was "important to show our engagement and that the international community is not only for the moment but is lasting." His comments came during a visit to the city's police training academy. Germany has led the rebuilding of the Afghan police since the ousting of the Taliban in late 2001. The police force is often targeted by insurgents but also has a reputation for being corrupt and violating human rights. Steinmeier acknowledged that security in Afghanistan had become "much more difficult to enforce as compared to last year."

Daily Times, 22 August 2006

Clashes reveal NATO challenge in Afghanistan

Kabul: Deadly weekend clashes in southern Afghanistan have highlighted the scale of the task facing NATO as it tackles the dual challenge of establishing security and promoting reconstruction to break a resilient Taliban insurgency. Nearly 90 people were killed in a series of attacks in the deadliest weekend since NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) took over command of the south from a US-led coalition on July 31. In one attack overnight Saturday, more than 70 rebels were killed by Afghan and NATO forces after they tried to storm a district headquarters in the southern province of Kandahar. Five Afghan police or soldiers also died. On Sunday, the British soldier was killed in a gunfight in neighbouring Helmand province becoming the 10th ISAF soldier

to die in hostile action since the takeover. Other clashes claimed the lives of four US coalition soldiers in attacks on Saturday in the eastern province of Kunar and southern Uruzgan. Establishing security is the priority, spokesman Major Toby Jackman said. "What has been made completely obvious to us is that the key requirement in the south is security. And that is what we are going to deliver," he said.

Dawn, 22 August 2006

Agreement with NATO soon: FO

Islamabad, Aug 21: A Nato delegation is here to firm up an Afghanistan-specific agreement with Pakistan on the same lines as the understanding that the government has with the ISAF for providing logistical support, Foreign Office Spokesperson Tasnim Aslam told a weekly news briefing here on Monday. Referring to Pakistan's understanding with ISAF that was put in place in the beginning of 2002 under which Pakistan provided logistical support to it, Ms Aslam said: "It is going to be a similar agreement and basically the Nato has the same mandate. Perhaps, it may be even less than that because now the allied forces in Afghanistan have their own systems and are very well-established there."