

The News, 1 December 2006

Former Afghan commander injured in attack

PESHAWAR : Unidentified gunmen attacked and injured a former Afghan Mujahideen commander and one of his bodyguards in northern Takhar province while his second bodyguard was killed. The press office of the interior ministry in Kabul told the Afghan Islamic Press that commander Arbab Ali was fired at when he came out of his house in Taluqan, capital of Takhar, Thursday morning. It said the commander and his bodyguard received bullet injuries. It added that the police arrested the assailant soon after the attack.

Daily Times, 1 December 2006

Troop increase for Afghanistan: Taliban tell NATO to 'bring it on'

KABUL: A Taliban commander on Thursday welcomed NATO's plans to send more soldiers to Afghanistan, saying it would provide the insurgents with more targets. "Increasing or expanding NATO troops in Afghanistan is not a worry for the Taliban, instead it will make targets for the Taliban mujahideen much easier," Commander Mullah Obaidullah told Reuters, adding that the hardline Islamists could fight for 20 years. "After five years of continuous fighting against foreign troops, the Taliban have become a strong military power and the Taliban are able to fight and defeat the strongest army..."

Daily Times, 1 December 2006

Kasuri did not say Taliban were winning: FO

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office (FO) on Thursday denied a report in British newspaper the Daily Telegraph that Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri had said that the Taliban were winning the war in Afghanistan and NATO member states should not send more troops to Afghanistan. The FO said that Kasuri had only repeated what Pakistan had stressed all along the need for a comprehensive strategy in Afghanistan. Kasuri had emphasised that a military approach alone would not resolve the problem in Afghanistan. The FO said that Kasuri had urged the international community to encourage reconciliation and undertake an extensive reconstruction programme in Afghanistan. staff report

The News, 2 December 2006

Denmark accused of handing over Afghan prisoners to US

COPENHAGEN: Danish opposition parties on Friday accused their country's defence ministry of handing over prisoners in Afghanistan to United States forces who allegedly later abused them. "The army took prisoners and handed them over to the Americans. Already at this point the Americans had been accused of treating prisoners badly," the opposition Unity Party said in a statement. Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen promised an investigation into the allegations. The Scandinavian country has some 290 troops deployed in the province of Helmand in the south of Afghanistan under British command as part of ISAF (the International Security Assistance Force)...

Daily Times, 2 December 2006

16 Taliban killed

KANDAHAR: NATO and Afghan troops killed 10 Taliban rebels and captured two suspected militant leaders in a raid on an alleged suicide bomb cell in southern

Afghanistan, the alliance said Friday. Separately, six Taliban were killed and two other insurgents arrested after a three-hour gunbattle with Afghan police. One NATO soldier was lightly wounded in the operation against the suicide cell carried out early Thursday in the troubled Sangin district of Helmand province, a spokesman for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said. The identity of the suspected commanders captured in the raid was not revealed. An ISAF statement said troops seized two suicide vests, several rocket-propelled grenades and a cache of equipment and weapons "that were ready to be used in future attacks". Warplanes and helicopters backed up the troops in the operation, it said, adding that there were no civilian casualties. Most of the NATO troops stationed in Helmand are British. Afp

Daily Times, 2 December 2006

Kabul says NATO summit ignored long-term needs

KABUL: Afghan officials and analysts have responded to NATO's summit in Latvia by warning that the western alliance must place more emphasis on long-term solutions to Afghanistan's intractable problems. NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said at the end of the two-day meeting on Wednesday in Riga that the alliance was winning the battle to set the Central Asian nation on the road to peace and democracy. The Afghan Defence Ministry welcomed NATO's pledges of more troops with a more flexible mandate to confront the increasingly powerful Taliban-led insurgency, but said this was a short-term fix. "The summit was a show of political support for Afghanistan and a practical support for insuring peace," Defence Ministry spokesman General Mohammad Zahir Azimi told AFP...

The News, 3 December 2006

Truce between tribal elders, govt in Helmand

KABUL: The Afghan government struck on Saturday a peace deal with tribal elders in Helmand province, arranging for a cease-fire and the withdrawal of both sides from one southern district. The accord, reached with virtually no public consultation and mediated by the local governor, has brought some welcome peace for residents of the district, Musa Qala, and a respite for British troops, who had been under siege by the Taliban in a compound there for three months. But it has sharply divided former government officials, legislators and ordinary Afghans. Some say the agreement points the way forward in bringing peace to war-torn parts of the country. Others warn that it sets a dangerous precedent and represents a capitulation to the Taliban and a potential reversal of five years of American policy to building a strong central government. They say the accord gives up too much power to local leaders, who initiated it and are helping to enforce it...

The News, 3 December 2006

Despite Nato, Afghan opium cultivation grows

WASHINGTON: Opium poppy cultivation shot up a whopping 61 per cent in Afghanistan this year in a setback for US and Nato efforts to clamp down on the country's illegal drug industry, according to new figures released by the White House. The anticipated record crop is seen as another boost for the resurgent Taliban as the Islamic guerrilla movement is often accused by US officials of using proceeds from drug sales to buy weapons and attract new recruits. The annual US government estimate for

Afghan opium poppy cultivation shows that approximately 172,600 hectares (426,503 acres) of poppy were cultivated throughout the country this year, an increase of 61 per cent over 2005, the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy said on Friday...

da, 3 December 2006

US troops' prey turns out to be Afghan cop

KABUL, Dec 2: US troops operating under the Nato-led force mistakenly shot dead an Afghan policeman and injured a second officer in southern Afghanistan, Nato and Afghan officials said on Saturday. The policemen were on patrol in the southern province of Ghazni when they came under fire from a Nato convoy patrolling the same area late on Friday, interior ministry spokesman Zemarai Bashary said. One policeman was killed and a district police chief was injured in the shootout, he said. "American soldiers were on patrol. It was late at night. They opened fire on (police) men on the road thinking they were insurgents," Bashary said...

Daily Times, 3 December 2006

'Islamabad interfering in Afghanistan'

QUETTA: Mahmood Khan Achakzai, chairman of the Pakhtoonkhawa Milli Awami Party and president of the Pakistan Oppressed Nations Movement (PONM), has criticised the government and intelligence agencies for their alleged interference in the affairs of Afghanistan. Speaking at a public gathering here on Saturday on the eve of his father Khan Abdul Samad Khan's 33rd death anniversary, Achakzai accused Pakistan of creating law and order problems with the help of its intelligence agencies in Afghanistan. These moves, he alleged, were intended to convert Afghanistan into a colony of Pakistan, a step that would be opposed tooth and nail by the Pashtoon people...

Daily Times, 3 December 2006

Taliban kill 4, helicopter disappears

KUNAR: Taliban militants have killed four Afghan road workers whom they accused of spying for US forces in eastern Afghanistan, the militant group and police said on Saturday. The men, working on a US-sponsored road construction project in eastern Kunar province, were kidnapped nearly two weeks ago and their bodies were found on a mountain on Saturday, said counter-terrorism police chief Abdul Mateen. They were executed by gunshot, Mateen said. He blamed the killings on the Taliban, who are waging a guerrilla-style insurgency. "Their bodies were found today. Taliban have killed them," Mateen said, adding that the men were ordinary workers. He ruled out the Taliban's claim that the victims were US spies. A purported Taliban spokesman, Mohammad Hanif, claimed the killings on behalf of the Taliban and said the men were spying for US forces based here to hunt them. Meanwhile, US troops operating under the NATO-led force 'mistakenly' shot dead an Afghan policeman and injured a second officer in southern Afghanistan. A civilian helicopter transporting equipment for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force disappeared in bad weather in southern Afghanistan on Saturday, ISAF said. The helicopter had left the city of Kandahar to deliver gear to ISAF soldiers at their Tirin Kot base in the province of Oruzgan, an ISAF spokesman said, adding that no ISAF personnel had been on board.

Afp

The News, 4 December 2006

NATO kills over 70 Taliban in Afghanistan

KABUL: About 80 Taliban fighters were believed killed in a clash with NATO-led troops and Afghan security forces in insurgency-hit southern Afghanistan at the weekend, a NATO spokesman said Monday. A reconnaissance patrol hunting Taliban engaged a large group of fighters on Sunday about 15 km (9 miles) from the village of Musa Qala in Helmand, a stronghold of the guerrillas. In a four-hour battle backed by attack helicopters and close air support, the ground commander estimated 70-80 guerrillas were killed, a NATO spokesman said. There were no NATO casualties, but three soldiers from NATO's International Security Assistance Force were wounded during another clash earlier in the day.

The News, 4 December 2006

30 killed in Afghanistan; Nato 'copter shot down

KANDAHAR: At least eight people were killed in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar on Sunday in a suicide car bombing against Nato troops and subsequent gunfire by soldiers, police and witnesses said. Three civilians died when the bomber struck a military convoy and five more were shot by troops afterwards, they said. Nato said three of its soldiers were wounded in the attack for which the Taliban claimed responsibility. Asked about the accounts of troops shooting civilians, Nato spokesman Major Luke Knittig said: "We will establish the facts. It is still unclear in what way the troops reacted." Britain's Ministry of Defence said the three injured soldiers were British Royal Marines commandoes. It said one was seriously wounded and the others were in stable condition. "The convoy was attacked by a suspected suicide bomber in a vehicle, who attempted to ram the British vehicles. A number of Afghan civilians were also injured in the blast and at least two were killed," the ministry said...

The News, 4 December 2006

Taliban are not a bad memory

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan: From the dusty shops in the bazaar to the austere halls of the universities, the people of Kandahar say they want only one thing: security. Some in the volatile southern Afghan city even say they sometimes miss the puritan Taliban regime that "knew how to keep order". In the market, business has collapsed after a wave of suicide attacks, bomb blasts and assassinations that have struck the Pashtun-majority southern capital this year. Businessmen are hoping for a return to peace even if it is with those who are responsible for much of the insecurity, the extremist Taliban...

Dawn, 4 December 2006

Kasuri to finalise jirga plan during Kabul visit

ISLAMABAD, Dec 3: Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri will visit Kabul from December 7 to 9 to give final shape to the proposed peace jirga of tribal elders on both sides of the Durand Line. "On top of the agenda will be an attempt to firm up the constitution of the grand jirgas and a schedule for convening them," a senior Foreign Ministry official told Dawn, adding that the two sides have been in touch over the modalities for such a jirga. Joint jirga of Pakistani and Afghan tribal elders is to be held under a plan agreed by

President Gen Pervez Musharraf and Afghan President Hamid Karzai at a White House tripartite summit meeting hosted by US President George W. Bush on September 27. The underlying objective of convening the grand jirga is to find a viable solution to militancy in the region...

Daily Times, 4 December 2006

At least 8 killed in Afghanistan

KANDAHAR: At least eight people were killed in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar on Sunday in a suicide car bombing against NATO troops and subsequent gunfire by soldiers, police and witnesses said. Three civilians died when the bomber struck a military convoy and five more were shot by troops afterwards, they said. NATO said three of its soldiers were wounded in the attack for which the Taliban claimed responsibility. Asked about the accounts of troops shooting civilians, NATO spokesman Major Luke Knittig said: "We will establish the facts. It is still unclear in what way the troops reacted." Another Afghan civilian was killed and six others were injured as NATO troops opened fire on a civilian car, fearing it might be a second bombing attempt after the early morning attack in the Dorahi area of Kandahar, they said...

The News, 5 December 2006

Pakistan urges 'Marshall Plan' for Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD: Controversy has erupted over finalising plans to hold a Loya Jirga of elders on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border, even before Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri leaves for Kabul on December 7 for a three-day visit. Former officials of the Foreign Office are cautioning against the holding of such a Jirga. Senior officials like former foreign secretary Tanvir Ahmed Khan say, "There is no point in recommending early Jirgas unless there is a clear and comprehensive vision of where they fit into the larger design for Afghanistan and the region. Kasuri would be doing well to both the countries if he were to spell out this vision in strategic rather than tactical terms." Earlier giving details of the Pak-Afghan Jirga, Foreign Office spokesperson Tasnim Aslam told a weekly press briefing that the idea of this Jirga came about during the meeting of President Pervez Musharraf and his Afghan counterpart amid Karzai in Washington, earlier this year...

The News, 5 December 2006

Corrupt police in Afghanistan eat up millions

WASHINGTON: Epidemic corruption in the American-trained police force in Afghanistan has led to wastage of most of the \$1.1 billion spent by the US in the last five years, the New York Times (NYT) reported on Monday. Quoting a joint report by the Pentagon and the State Department, the newspaper said the American-trained police force in Afghanistan is largely incapable of carrying out even routine law-enforcement work, and that managers of the \$1.1 billion training programme cannot say where thousands of trucks and other equipment issued to police units have gone. In fact, most police units had less than 50 per cent of their authorised equipment on hand as of June, says the report, which was issued two weeks ago but is only now circulating among members of relevant Congressional committees...

The News, 5 December 2006

Nato states being urged to accept Taliban

WASHINGTON: Senior Pakistani officials are urging Nato countries to accept the Taliban and negotiate a series of regional peace agreements similar to those negotiated by Pakistan in tribal areas along with its border with Afghanistan, says The Washington Times. A Western official told The Washington Times: "(Pakistan Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmud) Kasuri is basically asking Nato to surrender and to negotiate with Taliban." In 1997, the Nawaz regime had sent then foreign minister, Gauhar Ayub Khan, to Washington urging recognition of the Taliban regime but the effort was snubbed. Although The Times did not disclose the identity of the "Western official", it may be mentioned that Nato Commander in Afghanistan British Lt-Gen David Richards and Dutch Ambassador Daan Evert had five-day talks in Islamabad during which they urged Pakistan "to do more" to restrain Taliban fighters which, they allege, have a "sanctuary" in Pakistan. They were not satisfied with Pakistan's response, The Times claimed.

Dawn, 5 December 2006

\$1.1bn US training for Afghan police termed failure

NEW YORK, Dec 4: A joint report by the Pentagon and the State Department has found that the American-trained police force for Afghanistan is largely incapable of carrying out routine law-enforcement work. The report says that managers of the \$1.1 billion training programme cannot say how many officers are actually on duty or where thousands of trucks and other equipment issued to police units have gone. The report, published in the New York Times on Monday, said that in fact, most police units had less than 50 per cent of their authorised equipment on hand as of June...

Dawn, 5 December 2006

80 Taliban killed in Helmand: Nato

KANDAHAR, Dec 4: About 80 Taliban fighters were believed killed in a clash with Nato-led troops and Afghan security forces in insurgency-hit southern Afghanistan at the weekend, a Nato spokesman said on Monday. The fighting in southern Helmand province's Musa Qala district at dawn on Sunday was the heaviest since September, when local tribal chiefs had agreed to push the Taliban out of the area. Some "70 to 80 insurgents were killed" after they attacked a Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) patrol in the area, ISAF spokesman Maj Luke Knittig said. The toll was an estimated number reported by military commanders in the fighting zone, located between Musa Qala and neighbouring Nawzad district, Mr Knittig said. He said Nato warplanes were also called in to support ground troops...

Daily Times, 5 December 2006

'British Defence Ministry sent defective bullets to Afghanistan'

LONDON: The British Defence Ministry dispatched 22,000 rounds of faulty ammunition for use in Afghanistan, at one point leading a platoon of paratroopers to refuse to go on patrol, The Daily Telegraph reported on Monday. The newspaper said that British soldiers had to use ammunition from Canadian and Estonian troops to fight off Taliban attacks in Helmand province. A spokeswoman for the British Defence Ministry, however, denied that the bullets in question were the problem, saying instead that the "soft mount",

or aiming device placed on top of the gun, was to blame. According to the Telegraph, when the 16 Air Assault Brigade was sent to Afghanistan in June, the defence ministry dispatched 178,000 FN03 rounds, and 22,000 FN02 rounds. FN03 rounds were developed after FN02 rounds were found to lack propellant for British-made machine guns. An unnamed Defence Ministry official told the newspaper: "Although in an ideal world we would have sent all FN03 there was not a sufficient amount of it in stock." "It would have been irresponsible to hold back ammunition that was deemed suitable for us, even though we knew that the FN03 had higher propulsion than the FN02. It would have been irresponsible also to leave people in theatre with a shortfall of ammunition." The Defence Ministry spokeswoman, meanwhile, told AFP: "The machine gun stoppages were not caused by the ammunition. There was a problem caused by the soft-mount of the gun, which we have fixed."

The News, 6 December 2006

A Marshall plan

The belief expressed by Pakistan that the US needs to put forward in Afghanistan a plan similar to its efforts in post-WWII Europe vis-à-vis the Marshall Plan is a correct assessment of the situation on the ground. President Musharraf has, on a number of occasions, reiterated his belief that a combination of military, social and economic efforts was needed to improve conditions in Afghanistan. However, the nature of the strategy pursued in the country by the US and its allies does not allow for such an initiative to be adopted. The Marshall plan, it may be recalled, revolved around a complex strategy of reconstruction in war-torn regions of Europe. The idea was that there had to be a transcending of austere military efforts and the delineation of people-friendly economic and social programmes. The first goal of this initiative was the erasing of the starvation and poverty on the ground in the aftermath of the war which eventually ushered in unprecedented economic growth in the region. In the end, it proved to be an inspirational turnaround for a continent ravaged by two great wars in three decades...

The News, 6 December 2006

1 American, 2 Afghans killed in suicide bombing

KANDAHAR: A suicide bomber on foot walked up to a group of security contractors in southern Afghanistan on Wednesday, blowing himself up and leaving one American and two Afghans dead, an official and witnesses said. The bomber hit the men as they came out of the Kandahar compound of the security company, said Capt. Howard Chafe, a spokesman for the Canadian troops in the area. Four others were wounded. The area where the attack happened is located opposite the Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team inside Kandahar city. The blast was the sixth suicide attack in Kandahar province in the last nine days...

The News, 6 December 2006

Experts suggest Afghanistan be declared 'neutral state'

WASHINGTON: Two South Asian US experts on Tuesday presented a five-point Afghanistan plan asking the United Nations to call an international conference to declare Afghanistan a "neutral state" like Switzerland. The plan proposed by former assistant secretary of state Karl Inderfurth and former ambassador and expert Dennis Kux also

asked Afghanistan to declare the Durand Line as the permanent border with Pakistan. The plan coincided with a New York Times editorial on Tuesday which said because of the Bush administration's inattention and mismanagement, even the good war in Afghanistan is going wrong...

Dawn, 6 December 2006

Afghanistan border area of concern: US

WASHINGTON, Dec 5: The White House has said that the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is "an area of concern", which needs to be addressed. Commenting on media reports that Taliban insurgents are moving across the border to carry out attacks inside Afghanistan, White House spokesman Tony Snow said that the Bush administration continued to watch the events in Afghanistan. He said that when President George W. Bush hosted a dinner for President Musharraf and President Karzai at the White House in September, there were "considerable conversations" about border security. In that meeting, the Pakistani and Afghan leaders agreed to work on this problem, he said. "It is an area of concern, and it does need to be addressed," the spokesman said...

Dawn, 6 December 2006

Afghanistan urged to accept Durand Line

WASHINGTON, Dec 5: The US and its key allies should urge Afghanistan to recognise the Durand Line of 1893 as the border with Pakistan, say two prominent US scholars. In a joint article published on Tuesday in the Baltimore Sun, Dennis Kux and Karl Inderfurth urge Kabul to override the decision of the 1949 loya jirga, which, "contrary to international law," declared Afghan agreements with the British not binding after the formation of Pakistan. Mr Inderfurth is a former Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs and Mr Kux is a former US ambassador and a South Asia expert...

Dawn, 6 December 2006

Taliban repel UK assault

GARMSER (Afghanistan), Dec 5: British Marines attacked a Taliban-held valley in southern Afghanistan on Tuesday but withdrew after a ferocious counterattack that withstood air strikes and artillery fire, witnesses said. One Royal Marine was killed and a second wounded during the battle, the UK Helmand Task Force (UKTF) said. Scores of soldiers ran across a bridge over the Helmand River under a full moon shortly before daybreak and began sweeping south through wheatfields in the south of the province, the opium centre of the world's major producer...

Daily Times, 6 December 2006

Force no solution to Afghan problems

PESHAWAR: NWFP Governor Ali Mohammad Jan Orakzai said on Tuesday that the use of military force was not the solution to problems in Afghanistan, and hoped that the proposed jirgas on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border would help restore peace in the region. "The foreign offices of both countries have been working on the modalities for the jirgas, and Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri will visit Afghanistan tomorrow to discuss arrangements with his Afghan counterpart," said Orakzai at press conference at the Peshawar Cantt Railways Station, after the inauguration of the Peshawar Express that

will run between Peshawar and Rawalpindi. "A chance should be given for negotiations because peace cannot be restored by the use of military force in the troubled region," he said. He said that the Peshawar Express would help boost economic and trade activities in NWFP and the tribal areas...

Daily Times, 6 December 2006

Karzai asked to do more to curb corruption

WASHINGTON: President Hamid Karzai, the New York Times writes in an editorial on Tuesday, needs to do a "lot more" to curb corruption that is rife among his political appointees, while President Musharraf "needs to do a lot more to stanch the torrent of Taliban fighters crossing his border into Afghanistan". The newspaper also urges NATO members need to send more troops to Afghanistan, with far fewer restrictions on how they fight. The "good war" that was supposed to be Afghanistan, has gone wrong, having fallen a victim of the Bush administration's "inattention and mismanagement". Despite the billion dollars spent by the US to train Afghan police, it is still unable to provide security to citizens. Equipment supplied by the US has simply disappeared. As a result, a growing number of Afghans is again turning to the Taliban for protection. The failure to stand up an effective police force also helps explain why opium cultivation rose by nearly 60 percent this year. Private contractors to whom US authorities handed over police training work have failed to produce the results desired...

The News, 7 December 2006

Taliban kill district chief in Afghanistan

HERAT: Suspected Taliban gunmen shot dead a district chief in an ambush in western Afghanistan, officials said Thursday, as another official escaped a similar attack in the east of the country. Abdul Zahir, chief of Gulran district in western Herat province, was gunned down in his car while travelling to Herat city, the provincial capital, the interior ministry said. One of his bodyguards was wounded, ministry spokesmen Dad Mohammed Rasa said.

The News, 7 December 2006

Eight dead in Afghan violence

KANDAHAR: A suicide bomber killed two Americans and five Afghans outside a US security firm's office on Wednesday and a British soldier died after a gunbattle with Taliban guerrillas. The bomber approached the US Protection and Investigation (USPI) compound in Kandahar and detonated explosives strapped to his body, blowing himself to pieces, officials and the firm said. "USPI announces a suicide bomber attacked their Kandahar operation early on Wednesday. Two Americans and three Afghans were killed and many other persons were injured," a statement issued by the company said, adding all the dead worked for the firm. It would not comment on claims that a regional USPI chief was among the dead...

Dawn, 7 December 2006

Kasuri leads delegation to Kabul today

ISLAMABAD, Dec 6: Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri will be leading a seven-member delegation to Kabul on Thursday afternoon aboard a special aircraft. He will be

accompanied by senior officials of the foreign ministry, including additional secretary (Afghanistan) Khalid Khattak, the director-general of the foreign minister's office, Khalid Mahmud, and director (Afghanistan) Aamir Shouket. A representative of the interior ministry and two senior officials from Balochistan and the NWFP provinces have also been included in the delegation...

Dawn, 7 December 2006

2 US men among 7 killed in Afghan blast

KANDAHAR, Dec 6: A suicide bomber killed two Americans and five Afghans outside a US security firm's office here on Wednesday. The bomber approached the US Protection and Investigation compound in Kandahar and detonated explosives strapped to his body, blowing himself into pieces, officials and the firm said. "The USPI announces a suicide bomber attacked their Kandahar operation early Wednesday. Two Americans and three Afghans were killed and many were injured," a statement issued by the company said, adding that all the dead worked for it. An interior ministry spokesman said two Afghan interpreters linked to the firm were also killed, bringing the death toll to seven. The local hospital confirmed that it had received the bodies of five Afghans.AFP

Dawn, 7 December 2006

US troops fighting for survival in Afghanistan

KORENGAL VALLEY (Afghanistan): If Afghanistan had a tourist industry, the postcard-pretty Korengal Valley would be a star attraction. Majestic mountains soar to the heavens. Sunlight spills over terraced fields. Gleaming snow dusts the jagged peaks. But for the American soldiers stationed there, Korengal is IED Valley, a perilous, exhausting battlefield and the heart of the US war against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. The sole route into the valley is a roller-coaster mud track that dips and curves through a high-walled canyon lined with hostile villagers and battle-hungry insurgents. Ambushes are frequent but the soldiers' greatest terror is the improvised explosive device (IED) -- a hidden roadside bomb that can rip through a Humvee or tip it over a cliff. Last October Lieutenant Richard Baranski narrowly survived a bombing that seriously wounded three others. It was the fifth time Americans had been hit at exactly the same place, he said...

Daily Times, 7 December 2006

Kasuri in Kabul today to discuss jirga framework

KABUL: Foreign Minister Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri arrives in Kabul today (Thursday) for talks on tribal councils aimed at stemming the growing Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan and putting an end to the worst fighting in that country since the regime was ousted in 2001. The foreign minister's visit comes amid accusations from senior Afghan intelligence officials that Islamabad still supports the Taliban and warnings from Kabul's western allies that the insurgents are being bolstered by the ability to shelter in Pakistan. Afghanistan and Pakistan have agreed on holding jirgas of community leaders from each country to find a solution to the ongoing violence...

The News, 8 December 2006

Karzai says terror attacks undermining Pak-Afghan ties

KABUL: Afghan President Hamid Karzai said on Thursday that attacks perpetrated by

“terrorists” infiltrating Afghanistan from Pakistan were severely undermining relations between the two countries. “The president emphasised that the Afghan people desired to have strong and friendly relations with Pakistan. However, the continuation of violence perpetrated by terrorists from across the border was a major obstacle,” Karzai’s office said in a statement. The Afghan leader made the remark on Thursday evening during a meeting in Kabul with Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri. Karzai issued a veiled warning that escalating violence in Afghanistan would harm Pakistan’s interests too...

The News, 8 December 2006

Four die in Afghan attacks

KANDAHAR: A suicide car bomb targeting a Nato convoy in Afghanistan killed two civilians on Thursday, while elsewhere a district chief and a senior policeman were killed by Taliban gunmen. The bomber struck as Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) military vehicles drove through the southern city of Kandahar. Separately, suspected Taliban militants shot dead Abdul Zahir, chief of Gulran district in western Herat province, as he drove to the provincial capital on Wednesday, the interior ministry said. Meanwhile, the top UN diplomat in Afghanistan said on Thursday the international community and Afghan government must redouble their efforts to reconstruct war-torn Afghanistan to revive public confidence hit by an intensified Taliban insurgency and graft. A report by a UN Security Council mission that visited Afghanistan last month “recognises that public confidence has been battered by the insurgency, by corruption, by the illegal drug trade and by poor or absent law-enforcement,” Tom Koenigs told a news conference in Kabul.

Daily Times, 8 December 2006

Taliban activity increased after fall of Kandahar: BBC survey

PESHAWAR: Taliban activity has increased in Afghanistan since the coalition forces took control of Kandahar city five years ago, a BBC survey said on Thursday. According to an extensive national public opinion poll in Afghanistan conducted by the BBC World Service and ABC News, more than four out of 10 Afghans reported Taliban violence in their areas, including killings, bombings, vandalism at schools and government buildings and armed conflict with government and foreign troops. One in six Afghans said that people in their areas provided food and money to the Taliban. December 7 marked the fifth anniversary of the overthrow of the Taliban regime and seven in 10 Afghans said that they were “grateful” rather than “unhappy” with the presence of British, American and Canadian soldiers in the country. A majority of Afghans preferred the present government of Hamid Karzai to its unpopular predecessor the Taliban. Eight in 10 Afghans supported the presence of British, US and other international forces on their soil compared with five percent support for Taliban fighters and 11 percent for foreign jihadi fighters...

Daily Times, 8 December 2006

US told to engage Pakistan and Iran on Afghanistan

WASHINGTON: The United States was urged by experts on Wednesday to engage Pakistan and Iran in active diplomacy to prevent deteriorating conditions in Afghanistan

from sliding towards a new crisis. Addressing a forum on Afghanistan organised by the US Institute of Peace, Barry Rubin, a former adviser to the former United Nations representative to Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi, said that the administration of George W Bush had to achieve a consensus on Afghanistan with both Pakistan and Iran if it hoped to stabilise the country and rein in a growing Taliban insurgency...

Daily Times, 8 December 2006

Pakistan to pay price for sponsoring terrorism: Karzai

KABUL: Afghan President Hamid Karzai on Thursday warned Islamabad that attacks perpetrated by “terrorists” infiltrating his country from Pakistan was severely undermining relations between the two countries. Following talks in Kabul with Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri, Karzia’s office released a statement saying: “The president emphasised that the Afghan people desired to have strong and friendly relations with Pakistan. However, the continuation of violence perpetrated by terrorists from across the border was a major obstacle.” Karzai went on to issue a veiled warning that escalating violence in Afghanistan would also harm Pakistan’s interests...

Daily Times, 8 December 2006

‘NATO will need more troops next year in Afghanistan’

LONDON: forces in Afghanistan will need more troops next year if they are to exploit successes achieved this year, the force’s commander David Richards told the BBC in an interview aired on Wednesday. Richards, the British commander of the 37-nation International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), also said that he will know that the NATO-led force will have succeeded when it persuaded the “vast majority of Afghans to stay the course.” Asked whether the 32,000-odd troops under his command were sufficient for the campaign in Afghanistan, Richards told the broadcaster: “I’ve got enough this winter to do what we need to do, to hand over to my successor in February...

Dawn, 8 December 2006

Terror affecting ties: Karzai

KABUL, Dec 7: Afghan President Hamid Karzai said on Thursday that attacks perpetrated by “terrorists” infiltrating Afghanistan from Pakistan were severely undermining relations between the two countries. “The president emphasised that the Afghan people desired to have strong and friendly relations with Pakistan. However, the continuation of violence perpetrated by terrorists from across the border was a major obstacle,” Karzai’s office said in a statement. The Afghan leader made the remark on Thursday evening during a meeting in Kabul with Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri...

Dawn, 8 December 2006

Canada’s leader wants Marshal Plan for Afghanistan

OTTAWA, Dec. 7: Canada’s main opposition leader Stéphane Dion said here on Wednesday he’ll have little patience for the rising death toll of Canadian troops in Afghanistan unless there is progress in making that country more secure. Dion, who won Liberal party’s leadership race only last week, said Canada must push its allies to build a ‘Marshall Plan’ to rebuild the economy of the strife-torn country, because the current strategy of focusing on combat against the Taliban was not achieving results. “I cannot

give a deadline, but I will not have a lot of patience if I see that we are risking the lives of our soldiers and civilians without any result for the security of the people of Afghanistan,” Dion said in an interview with the Globe and Mail newspaper. “It’s an assessment I will do day after day, but I want a result...

The News, 11 December 2006

Karzai breaks down during speech on rights day

KABUL: President Hamid Karzai became emotional during a speech on human rights on Sunday, dabbing away tears and taking long pauses as he described how Afghan children are being killed by terrorists from Pakistan and in bombing raids by Nato and the US-led coalition. Portraying a general sense of helplessness to the chaos engulfing parts of his country, Karzai said the cruelty imposed on his people “is too much” and that Afghanistan can’t stop “the coalition from killing our children”. “We can’t prevent the terrorists from coming from Pakistan, and we can’t prevent the coalition from bombing the terrorists,” he said during a speech scheduled to be shown later Sunday on state TV. “And our children are dying because of that...

Dawn, 11 December 2006

Afghan proposals on jirgas this week

ISLAMABAD, Dec 10: Pakistan hopes to receive the Afghan proposal on peace jirgas through diplomatic channels this week after which the modalities would be discussed between the two sides through political channels. Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri during his visit to Kabul on Friday handed over a two-page proposal to his Afghan counterpart Dr Rangin Dadfar Spanta on the proposed jirgas. Apparently during the formal talks the two sides also had exhaustive and intense discussions on it, diplomatic sources said. The jirga proposal was discussed at length during Mr Kasuri’s two-hour meeting with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, four-hour talks with Dr Spanta and one-hour interaction with Yunas Qanooni, it is learnt...

Daily Times, 11 December 2006

4 Afghans killed in NATO airstrike

KABUL: At least four civilians were killed in a NATO airstrike in Laghman province while six militiamen were killed in a remote-controlled explosion in Paktia province. Separately, two NATO soldiers were injured in a clash with the Taliban in Mizan district in Zabul province. The civilians were killed on Saturday in an airstrike that was part of a “mid-scale” operation against militants in Laghman province, local police chief Abdul Karim Omeryar said. In another incident, a remote-controlled bomb killed six militiamen fighting Taliban rebels in Paktia. Afp

Daily Times, 11 December 2006

Afghan poppies to be sprayed with herbicide, says US

KABUL: The top US anti-drug official said that Afghan poppies would be sprayed with herbicide to combat an opium trade that produced a record heroin haul this year, a measure likely to anger farmers and scare Afghans unfamiliar with weed killers. John Walters, the director of the US Office of National Drug Control Policy, said Saturday that Afghanistan could turn into a narco-state unless “giant steps” are made towards

eliminating poppy cultivation. "We cannot fail in this mission," he said. "Proceeds from opium production feed the insurgency and burden Afghanistan's nascent political institutions with the scourge of corruption..."

Daily Times, 11 December 2006

New Taliban rules: Target teachers, aid workers, and 'no smoking' for fighters

KABUL: The Taliban gunmen who murdered two teachers in eastern Afghanistan on Friday were only following their rules: Teachers receive a warning, then a beating, and if they continue to teach must be killed. The new list of 30 rules, decided on during a high Taliban meeting in September or October and since circulated over the Internet, span from the organisational no jihad equipment may be used for personal means to the health conscious militants are not supposed to smoke. They also contain a grave warning for aid workers and educators...

The News, 12 December 2006

Afghan girl, four Taliban killed by coalition

KABUL: Four suspected Taliban militants and a 13-year-old girl were killed Tuesday during a joint operation by the US-led coalition and the Afghan army in eastern Afghanistan, the coalition said. A girl, aged eight, was also injured when the soldiers raided a house near the village of Darnami in the restive Khost province where the alleged insurgents were hiding out, a coalition statement said...

The News, 12 December 2006

Kabul against holding of one peace Jirga

ISLAMABAD: Afghanistan has rejected the proposal of holding one Grand Peace Jirga with Pakistan, which was agreed between President Pervez Musharraf and Afghan President Hamid Karzai in September in Washington, instead it has proposed two separate Jirgas with regional composition. The Afghan proposals have been conveyed to Pakistan officially through diplomatic channels in Kabul Monday. Diplomatic sources told 'The News' that two-page Afghan proposals suggest that Pakistan establish a commission of elders on the pattern as Kabul has set up...

The News, 12 December 2006

Six killed in suicide attack on governor's house in Afghanistan

KANDAHAR: A suicide bomber blew himself up at the governor's compound in southern Helmand province on Tuesday, killing six people, including four policemen, officials said. Eight people were wounded. The governor of the Helmand province, Mohammed Daud, was not in the compound at the time of the blast which also damaged two vehicles parked inside the compound in the provincial capital Lashkar Gah, said his spokesman Ghulam Muhiddin...

Daily Times, 12 December 2006

Taliban won't join talks in foreigners' presence

KABUL: The Taliban on Monday backed away from comments they might join tribal jirgas aimed at ending growing violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Senior spokesman Sayed Tayeb Agha said the rebels would never join such talks as long as foreign soldiers

remained in Afghanistan. “Such jirgas are aimed at protecting American interests only. Such jirgas are neither independent nor do they make independent decisions,” he told Reuters from a secret location. “The Taliban will not take part in any jirga in the presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan because such jirgas have no significance...

Daily Times, 12 December 2006

Taliban ban boys in private quarters

LAHORE: The Taliban have issued a list of 30 rules for new recruits, containing some curious restrictions, according to a report in British newspaper the Guardian. Rule 19 declares, “mujahideen are not allowed to take young boys with no facial hair on to the battlefield or into their private quarters.” Rule 18 urges mujahideen to quit smoking. Other rules instruct Taliban fighters to be on their best behaviour with civilians, lest they are government employees, who must be treated without mercy and killed. Schools that ignore warnings to close must be burned, while the teachers working there must first be warned, then beaten, and if they continue to teach, to be killed. The code, agreed by the Taliban shura during the recent Eid holidays, has been circulated to field commanders across Afghanistan and northern Pakistan. daily times monitor.

Daily Times, 12 December 2006

Experts to brief senators on Afghan situation

ISLAMABAD: Experts on Afghan affairs will speak about the situation in Afghanistan with special focus on its regional and international impacts in the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs meeting tomorrow (Thursday). The experts are: Rashid Ahmed, Rahimullah Yousufzai, Rustam Shah Mohmand and Saleem Shahzad. Rashid Ahmed, who has written a book on Afghanistan, will give a presentation on the regional and international effects of the current situation in Afghanistan while Yousufzai will review the Taliban resurgence and current Pakhtun resistance in Afghanistan. Mohmand, a former ambassador, will discuss the relations of Pakistan and Afghanistan and give his recommendations on improving these relations.

Dawn, 12 December 2006

12 killed in Afghanistan

HERAT, Dec 11: US-led troops and warplanes attacked a Taliban hideout in western Afghanistan, killing at least nine rebel fighters including a regional commander, police said Monday. Police also killed three Taliban fighters after the insurgents stormed their checkpost in the south of the volatile country, a police commander said. Coalition troops, acting on intelligence reports, launched the operation in the Balabuluk district of western Farah province Sunday night, police said. “We knew for a while that these Taliban had entered this district with an evil aim to sabotage the highway” linking the western city of Herat to Helmand, police said

The News, 13 December 2006

NATO troops kill Afghan civilian during presidential visit

KANDAHAR: NATO troops in Afghanistan killed a civilian motorcyclist who failed to stop at a checkpoint during a visit to Kandahar by President Hamid Karzai, the force said Wednesday. A motorcyclist traveling at high speed approached an ISAF (International

Security Assistance Force) security cordon in Kandahar city. Despite verbal warnings to stop, the motorcyclist refused to halt, the force said in a statement. ISAF forces fired a warning shot in a safe direction, which ricocheted and hit the civilian. Afghan police on the scene took the man to a local hospital where he was pronounced dead, it said.

The News, 13 December 2006

Human Rights Watch calls for Afghan truth commission

NEW YORK: Human Rights Watch (HRW) called on Tuesday for a truth and reconciliation court to deal with 30 years of war crimes and human rights abuses in Afghanistan, including by some who still hold high office. Afghan President Hamid Karzai and the international community have tried and failed to establish peace without justice ... now it is time to hold the killers accountable, HRW said. The human rights watchdog criticised Kabul and its multinational partners in reconstruction of having pursued a counter-productive policy of relying on war criminals, human rights abusers and drug traffickers instead of prosecuting them...

The News, 13 December 2006

Karzai accuses Pakistan of being Taliban's boss

KANDAHAR: Afghan President Hamid Karzai on Tuesday accused Pakistan of being "the boss" of the Taliban and said that resolving difficulties with Pakistan would put an end to terrorism in Afghanistan. Afghan and Western officials have long accused Pakistan of not doing enough to stop terrorists from training on its soil and then crossing the border to attack Afghanistan. Pakistan says it does all it can to fight the problem. But Karzai took his accusations a step further on Tuesday, in his harshest criticism yet of Afghanistan's eastern neighbour. "The problem is not Taliban. We don't see it that way. The problem is with Pakistan," Karzai said in an interview with foreign journalists. "So, talking to the Taliban Yes, we are. We are talking to Pakistan..."

The News, 13 December 2006

Eight die as Afghan governor survives attack

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan: A suicide bomber blew himself up at a governor's house in southern Afghanistan on Tuesday, killing eight people, in the latest bloodshed linked to a spiralling Taliban insurgency. Separately, US-led security forces shot dead four suspected Taliban militants and a teenage girl, while elsewhere a soldier from a Nato-led force was killed in a fire fight with insurgents. The violence came as President Hamid Karzai attended a high-level security conference with Western military and diplomatic allies on Tuesday in Kandahar to urge foreign forces to do their best to avoid civilian casualties. "People are very angry with these Nato killings," the president told a news conference in the southern city...

Dawn, 13 December 2006

Infiltration continues on Afghan border: US

WASHINGTON, Dec 12: Insurgents continue to cross the Pakistan-Afghanistan border to carry out attacks inside Afghanistan, says the US State Department while urging Islamabad and Kabul to work together to beat the insurgency. Clearly, you still do have cross-border infiltration and I know that that is a concern for the Pakistanis and the

Afghans, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told a briefing in Washington on Tuesday. For the first time in an official US briefing, the spokesman also indicated that insurgents had safe havens along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and they were using them for attacking Afghan and US-led coalition forces. Having safe havens and areas where these extremists can operate from is a real concern for us, he said...

Daily Times, 13 December 2006

US-led raid, suicide bomber kill 12 in Afghanistan

KABUL: US-led troops killed at least four people, including a teenage girl, in a raid in southeastern Afghanistan on Tuesday and a suicide bomber killed eight more in the south, residents, officials and coalition forces said. The target of the suicide bomber was the governor of Helmand, Mohammad Daud, who escaped unhurt, the officials said. Four police, two army soldiers and two civilians were killed in the attack in Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital of Helmand, a Taliban stronghold and the main drug producing region of the world's leading heroin producer. "It was a suicide attack and the target was the governor," Helmand police chief Mohammad Nabi Mullahkhail said...

Daily Times, 13 December 2006

Canada government survival in play over Afghanistan

OTTAWA: The opposition Bloc Quebecois party raised the possibility on Monday of trying to topple the minority Conservative government early next year over Canada's mission in Afghanistan. The Bloc, the third largest party in Parliament, said it might try to get the House of Commons to declare non-confidence in the government unless it puts more emphasis on reconstruction in Afghanistan and less on security. "Maybe if the government refuses to change its mind on that, it is possible that the Bloc will use a confidence motion against the government," Michel Gauthier, the Bloc's House leader, told reporters...

Daily Times, 16 December 2006

Rice wants check on Afghan border

WASHINGTON: A "more concerted effort" will have to be made to prevent the Pak-Afghan border from becoming a "safe haven" for terrorists, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has said. In an interview with the editorial board to the Washington Post, Rice said in answer to a question about Afghanistan, "The other problem that they face is that area between Pakistan and Afghanistan is just very rough. It's been ungoverned forever and we are going to have to make - they are going to have to make and we are going to have to make a more concerted effort to prevent safe haven there." Rice said, "When Musharraf and Karzai were here, they had a discussion with the president. They're trying to get the tribals on both sides together. They're trying a lot of things. But I think that probably - those problems, you know, the lack of an economy, the lack of an infrastructure and the ungoverned areas, are the real challenges."

Dawn, 16 December 2006

Militancy an Afghan problem: Musharraf

ISLAMABAD, Dec 15: President Gen Pervez Musharraf declared on Friday that militancy was essentially an Afghan problem and underscored that border security was a

collective responsibility of Pakistan, Afghanistan and ISAF/NATO. He conveyed this to the visiting EU Special Representative on Afghanistan, Mr Francesc Venderell, who called on him at his Camp Office in Rawalpindi on Friday. The insurgency in Afghanistan and President Hamid Karzai's latest tirade against Pakistan remained the focus of the meeting during which the president emphasised the absolute necessity for all parties to understand the prevailing environment. In this context, he also underlined the need for the international community to do more to facilitate repatriation of Afghan refugees back to their homeland. "Views were exchanged extensively on the situation in Afghanistan, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and the government's strategy in tribal areas," a Foreign Office statement said. Mr Venderell expressed understanding of Pakistan's position, noting that the Western world was very supportive of what the president was doing for stabilising situation in the region.

The News, 16 December 2006

Two dead in Afghan suicide bombing

KABUL: A suicide car bomber rammed into a military convoy on Friday, killing an Afghan soldier and a civilian, while a second suicide bomber disguised in a Burqa wounded two Afghan soldiers in a nearby province, officials said. The car bomb attack in the eastern province of Paktia also wounded three people, including two US-led coalition soldiers, a Nato statement said. The two soldiers, who work alongside Afghan security forces, received minor injuries, the statement said. The Afghan authorities initially reported that one Afghan soldier died and five other people were wounded in the blast, including a US soldier. The reason for the discrepancy in numbers of dead and wounded was not immediately clear...

Daily Times, 17 December 2006

We're living on Afghans' support, not Pakistan's: Taliban

SPIN BOLDAK: The Taliban on Saturday denied accusations by Afghan leaders the group was being sponsored by Pakistan, an issue souring relations between the two nations. A senior rebel commander, Hayat Khan, said Afghan President Hamid Karzai was trying to hide his own failure and the Taliban movement lived only on the support of ordinary people. "Karzai's allegations are baseless. We neither have any links with Pakistan nor is the country helping the Taliban," Khan told Reuters by satellite phone from a secret location. "The Taliban movement is continuing only with the support of the Afghan people..."

Daily Times, 17 December 2006

Hamid Karzai's outbursts strengthen Taliban, say analysts

ISLAMABAD: Afghan President Hamid Karzai's incendiary claims that the Pakistani government is backing the Taliban have harmed ties between the key US allies and could boost the Islamist militia, analysts say. After dropping hints for months about Islamabad's role in the violence that has claimed 4,000 lives this year, Karzai directly accused the neighbouring Islamic republic on two separate occasions in the past week. In his strongest language to date, an emotional Karzai alleged on Wednesday that Pakistan was trying to turn the Afghan people into "slaves", and vowed that they would never succeed. His words have angered Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf. "To hurl blame

at each other is really counterproductive and strengthens the hand of the Taliban,” Pakistani analyst and retired general Talat Masood told AFP, adding, “Pakistan and Afghanistan must jointly resolve the threat of Talibanisation...”

Daily Times, 17 December 2006

Afghan and coalition forces asked to match Pakistan’s effort

WASHINGTON: Afghanistan and international forces should share Pakistan’s burden of policing the Pak-Afghan tribal belt from their side, Munir Akram, Pakistan’s permanent representative at the United Nations, urged in the Washington Post on Saturday. In a letter published in the capital’s principal daily, Akram took issue with an article published by the newspaper on December 4, whose author Fareed Zakaria, the Pakistani diplomat pointed out, had “succumbed to the convenient explanations that week to shift the blame for failure to bring stability to Afghanistan on to Pakistan”. Referring to a UN report, Akram noted that the insurgency was being conducted by Afghans inside Afghanistan with five distinct leadership centres, “all within Afghanistan”. The UN report identified the interlinked sources of instability in Afghanistan as an absence of good governance, pervasive corruption, Pashtun political alienation, the drug economy, the failure to deliver economic and social development, and Taliban. He noted that a recent multinational Security Council mission to Afghanistan had confirmed these findings...

Daily Times, 17 December 2006

‘US to send more troops to Afghanistan if needed’

KABUL: Washington will send more troops to Afghanistan “if it’s necessary,” US Senator John McCain said Saturday, while urging European allies to send their troops to the country’s restive south. McCain praised Afghan, US, Canadian, British and Dutch forces for bearing “a great deal of the combat responsibilities in recent months”, but pushed for more from other key allies of the United States. Other NATO countries with troops in Afghanistan should remove their “national caveats,” which make it “extremely difficult for our NATO commanders to call on them for assistance when needed in combat zones, particularly in the southern part of the country,” McCain, a 2008 presidential hopeful, said during a two-day visit in Afghanistan with three other US Congress members...

Dawn, 17 December 2006

Taliban ‘havens’ along border: US

WASHINGTON, Dec 16: Key members of the US establishment from Secretary of State to the national intelligence chief are now backing claims that the Taliban have set up safe havens along the Pakistan-Afghan border. Secretary Condoleezza Rice acknowledged the existence of Taliban’s ‘safe havens’ in an interview she gave to the Washington Post earlier this week, urging Pakistan and Afghanistan to work with the coalition forces to destroy them. The State Department released full text of the interview, containing her comments on the situation along the Pakistan-Afghan border, on Friday evening. This is the first time that such a senior US official has mentioned the so-called Taliban safe havens in the area. Her statement follows the publication of a series of research papers, newspaper articles and statements by other officials, all blaming Pakistan for allowing

these safe havens to function...

Dawn, 17 December 2006

Karzai's charges rejected

KABUL, Dec 16: The Taliban on Saturday rejected accusations made by Afghan President Hamid Karzai that Pakistan was supporting them in their insurgency in Afghanistan. After dropping hints for months about Islamabad's role in the violence that has claimed thousands of lives this year, Mr Karzai directly accused its eastern neighbour on two separate occasions in the past week. But the Taliban denied the allegations, saying Pakistan was also their enemy as it was a key US ally. "I strongly dismiss Karzai's claims that Taliban are being supported by Pakistan," Taliban spokesman Mohammad Hanif told AFP by telephone from an undisclosed location. "Pakistan itself is our enemy, because it is America's friend and helped topple Taliban government..."

The News, 17 December 2006

Taliban ordered to leave Afghan districts

KANDAHAR: Nato-led forces in Afghanistan have ordered Taliban fighters to leave two southern districts or be forced out, the alliance said on Saturday. The orders, printed on leaflets, were dropped by air on the guerrillas' positions in the Panjwayi and Zahre districts of southern Kandahar province on Friday, Nato spokesman Major Dominic Whyte said. The move was part of a major new anti-Taliban offensive launched on Thursday.

The News, 17 December 2006

Afghans angry over Nato shootings

KANDAHAR: As British troops sped away from a suicide bomb attack that wounded three of their own, witnesses in this southern Afghan city say the soldiers opened fire, sending residents scurrying in fear of their lives. Within minutes of the Dec 3 bombing, one civilian lay dead and six wounded from the gunfire one of seven times in the last month that Nato forces shot Afghan citizens. Seven people have been killed and 11 injured, eroding public support for the battle against resurgent Taliban. Nato says in all the shootings, the soldiers acted in self-defence. Commanders call the deaths regrettable and label the run of incidents as "coincidence." Both new and experienced troops of different nationalities operating in various regions of Afghanistan have been involved in the shootings. Foreign troop convoys are coming under increasing attack. Taliban militants exploded more than 100 suicide bombs in the country this year, a more than fivefold increase from 2005, often targeting Nato forces in armoured personnel carriers and jeeps...

The News, 18 December 2006

US-Afghan forces kill four insurgents, capture 10

KANDAHAR: US-led coalition and Afghan troops killed four Taliban militants and arrested 10 suspected terrorists in separate raids in insurgency-hit Afghanistan, the US military said Monday. The forces seized an enemy weapons cache containing mines and explosives in an operation near Sperwan Ghar in the troubled southern province of Kandahar, it said in a statement. During the raid late on Sunday four insurgents were

killed and three coalition force soldiers wounded, it said...

The News, 18 December 2006

'Ex-Taliban minister killed in Afghan raid'

KANDAHAR: The former religious police minister in the ousted Taliban government has been killed in a Nato air strike in southern Afghanistan, a senior provincial official said. The Taliban sources confirmed the raid but said the man, Abdul Wali, the radical movement's one-time minister for the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice, was not killed. Wali along with 30 other militants, was killed three days ago in the Nato raid in Panjwai district of Kandahar, Governor Assadullah Khalid said. "We have credible information that Abdul Wali has been killed in the operation," Khalid told a news conference in Kandahar. Authorities have not recovered Wali's body, he added. Several Taliban sources in Kandahar said 13 militants died in the attack, but added Wali was not one...

Dawn, 18 December 2006

France cuts troops in Afghanistan

KABUL, Dec 17: French Defence Minister Michele Alliot-Marie announced on Sunday that France would withdraw hundreds of its special forces from Afghanistan within the next few weeks. "We'll pull our special forces out of Afghanistan in the coming weeks," Alliot-Marie told reporters during her visit to Kabul. She was referring to some 200 French special forces stationed in eastern Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom, aimed at hunting down Taliban fighters. France has deployed a total of 2,000 troops in Afghanistan, with the remainder serving in the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)...

Daily Times, 18 December 2006

Anti-Pakistan statements hurting Karzai's popularity: Durrani

PESHAWAR: Federal Information Minister Mohammad Ali Durrani said on Sunday that the government of President Hamid Karzai was losing its popularity in Afghanistan due to its anti-Pakistan statements. "Pakistanis and Afghans are one people, and their leadership can win public support provided they begin efforts to bring the citizens of both countries closer," Durrani said at a 'Meet the Press' programme at the Peshawar Press Club. The minister said Pakistan did not want to hurt the sentiments of Afghans by responding to Karzai's statements in the same language. He said the two countries were linked via social, cultural and religious bonds, and anybody who tried to break those bonds would face a public backlash. "Like in the past, we will remain friends in the future," Durrani said. The minister said there were no disputes between Pakistan and Afghanistan, merely misunderstandings. He said he was planning a visit to Afghanistan with a team of journalists to remove these misunderstandings. He said the freedom of the press in Pakistan had strengthened the government. The government respects democratic institutions and the media, he added...

Daily Times, 18 December 2006

Taliban neither Pakistan's nor Afghanistan's future: Akram

WASHINGTON: Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations,

Ambassador Munir Akram, said on Saturday that Islamabad had a vital interest in peace in Afghanistan and has deployed a large number of troops to prevent illegal cross-border movements, while pointing to internal reasons that recent international reports say have led to insurgency by Afghans in their country. In a letter to the editor of the Washington Post, in response to a recent article written by renowned political commentator Fareed Zakaria (The Afghan Key: Musharraf), Ambassador Akram wrote: "Pakistan has a vital strategic interest in peace in Afghanistan. The Taliban are not the future for Pakistan or Afghanistan." Pakistan, he said, had deployed 80,000 troops to prevent illegal cross-border movements and in 80 operations conducted against terrorists has lost 600 soldiers. "Preventing cross-border movement is a responsibility of Afghanistan and international forces share. They should match our deployments on the other side..."

Daily Times, 18 December 2006

30 Taliban killed in NATO raid

KANDAHAR: A NATO-led airstrike in southern Afghanistan this week killed up to 30 Taliban fighters including two commanders, the governor of the troubled Kandahar province said on Sunday. Warplanes from the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) bombed a compound serving as a Taliban command post in the Panjwayi district of the volatile Kandahar province on Wednesday. The alliance at the time did not provide information on casualties, saying that toll was being assessed...

Daily Times, 18 December 2006

Afghanistan to spray chemicals to curb poppy crop

KABUL: Afghanistan's government Sunday warned farmers that it would spray chemicals to destroy poppy fields if the illegal crops are not eradicated in other ways. "Yes, we've accepted in principle to use ground spray when it's needed," Habibullah Qaderi, the minister for counter narcotics, told a news conference in Kabul. The minister did not say when the spraying will begin. However, he made it clear that the government had rejected an aerial spray of poppy crops. "We however oppose aerial spray," he said. Afghanistan this year produced 6,100 tons of opium - the raw ingredient for making heroin - which is enough for more than 90 percent of the world's illegal drugs. Qaderi, along with interior minister Zarar Ahmad Muqbel, chaired a conference attended by the governors of 11 provinces where poppy cultivation is high. The conference was convened to discuss plans for poppy eradication in 2007.

Daily Times, 18 December 2006

Afghan army takes fight to Taliban's heartland

LAHORE: The Taliban were out there, somewhere in the darkness to the north of the jagged peaks of Masum Gar, just the other side of the Arghandab river. They had fired one rocket. Now they were ready to fire again. The light had faded about an hour earlier. Inside the compound only a few tiny chinks of light, spilling through the gaps in the doorway leading into the warren of vaulted underground cellars, betrayed the presence of the Afghan soldiers and their Canadian counterparts. Suddenly, two huge explosions shook the night. And on the other side of the river to the north, where a moment earlier two men had been crouching down preparing the rocket, there was nothing left but the craters where the shells fired by the Leopard tank had detonated, says a report in the

British newspaper The Telegraph...

Daily Times, 19 December 2006

Musharraf needs JUI: I hold key to Afghan peace

LAHORE: Maulana Fazlur Rehman, secretary general of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal Maulana, has warned President Gen Pervez Musharraf that he will need the help of religious parties for peace in the Pak-Afghan border region, and so should avoid alienating religious leaders. "We have been helping create agreements throughout the tribal areas and what do we get in return Musharraf calls us dangerous," Maulana Fazl said in an interview with The Daily Telegraph. Gen Musharraf has repeatedly urged Pakistanis not to vote for "hypocrites" and "extremists" in the next general elections. "With his poisonous propaganda against the religious parties, General Musharraf is trying to widen the gap between the religious circles and the liberals in the country," Maulana Fazl said...

Daily Times, 19 December 2006

9 Taliban, Afghan soldier killed in fresh clashes

KHOST: Nine Taliban and an Afghan soldier were killed and 14 insurgents were captured in fresh fighting across insurgency-hit Afghanistan, officials said on Monday. A major firefight broke out early on Monday after nearly 200 militants allegedly crossed the border from Pakistan and attacked a border checkpoint in Khost, police said. Five Taliban fighters and an Afghan militia soldier died in the hour-long exchange of fire, provincial police official Gul Dad said, adding that four Afghan nationals were arrested. Pakistani militants "were also with them fighting our troops", Dad told AFP, citing documents found on the bodies of the dead rebels. "It was a heavy battle." Self-confessed Taliban spokesman Mohammad Hanif claimed responsibility for the attack on behalf of the ousted Islamists but said only one rebel was killed. Meanwhile, four Taliban insurgents were killed in a separate clash late on Sunday in Kandahar which also left three US-led coalition soldiers injured, the US military said in a statement...

Dawn, 19 December 2006

Blast hits Nato convoy in Afghanistan

KANDAHAR, Dec 18: An explosion struck a convoy of Nato troops in southern Afghanistan on Monday, damaging a vehicle but there was no immediate word on casualties, witnesses and a Nato official said. The blast occurred in a district of the Kandahar province, a bastion of support for the Taliban when the group emerged in the 1990s and the focus of militant attacks since they were driven from power in 2001. Initial reports indicated one vehicle was damaged in the blast, a spokesman for Afghanistan's Nato force said. In a separate incident in the southern province, the Taliban said they killed two men they accused of spying for Nato.

The News, 19 December 2006

Afghan Gen arrested for spying

KABUL: Afghan intelligence agents have arrested an army general on charges of spying for Pakistan, officials said on Monday, fuelling a row over Islamabad's alleged attempts to destabilise its western neighbour. General Khair Mohammad was detained within the

past week after he was found to be selling information to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the press office of the Afghan national intelligence agency said. "We've arrested Khair Mohammad over an act of treason against his country and working for Pakistan's ISI," an intelligence agency spokesman said on condition of anonymity. "Khair Mohammad has confessed to working for ISI and has met ISI officers in Peshawar three times," the official added. The spokesman said the general who worked in the Afghan Defence Ministry provided Pakistani agents with information about the ministry's formation, a list of high-ranking officials and their contact numbers. He was also tasked to give details of Western military bases and headquarters in the capital Kabul, the unnamed spokesman said.

The News, 20 December 2006

Nato air strikes kill several Taliban

KANDAHAR: Nato-led warplanes bombed a Taliban command post and a militant leader's vehicle in separate air strikes, killing a number of insurgents, the alliance said on Tuesday. The two raids by International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) jets came amid a fresh anti-insurgent operation in a Taliban-dominated pocket of southern Kandahar province which was launched last week. In the first attack overnight Isaf forces launched a precision air strike against a known insurgent command and logistics post in an isolated area of the Panjwayi district, the force said in a statement. It did not give details of casualties, but an Isaf military official speaking on condition of anonymity told AFP that a number of Taliban were killed in the air raid...

Daily Times, 20 December 2006

Pakistani 'spy' arrested in Afghanistan

KABUL: Afghan security forces arrested a Pakistani intelligence officer in the east of the country, a presidential spokesman said Tuesday, a day after an army general was arrested for alleged espionage. The man's arrest on Monday in troubled Kunar province bordering Pakistan comes amid a row between the two countries over Islamabad's alleged efforts to destabilise Afghanistan. "A Pakistani national currently working as an officer for a Pakistan intelligence agency was arrested with convincing documents," Mohammad Karim Rahimi, spokesman for President Hamid Karzai, told a weekly briefing...

Daily Times, 20 December 2006

It's Afghan Army, NATO's job to restore peace: Kasuri

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is not responsible for the deteriorating law and order situation in Afghanistan, Foreign Minister Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri said on Tuesday. Talking to Francesc Vengal, a special envoy from the European Union, at the Foreign Office, Kasuri said that maintaining law and order in Afghanistan was the responsibility of the Afghan Army and NATO forces. According to a Foreign Office statement, Kasuri discussed with Vengal the overall security situation in the region, restoration of peace in Afghanistan, Pak-Afghan border issues and Pakistan's strategy to improve the situation in its tribal areas. Kasuri said that it was unfortunate that some elements were blaming Pakistan for the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. In fact, Pakistan is playing a vital role in the restoration of peace in Afghanistan, he added...

Dawn, 20 December 2006

Afghan charge fabricated, says FO

ISLAMABAD, Dec 19: The Foreign Office on Tuesday rubbished as 'fabricated' a claim by President Hamid Karzai's spokesman that Afghan security forces had apprehended a Pakistani intelligence officer for espionage.

"This is all fabricated. They could have used coercive measures to make him say things which have no relevance to reality," was the Foreign Office spokesperson Tasnim Aslam's reaction to the latest Afghan allegation. Discarding the pervasive paranoid of the Afghan government, the spokesperson stated: "There is no Pakistani spy in Afghanistan..."

The News, 21 December 2006

Nato claims killing 50 Taliban fighters

KABUL: Several suspected Taliban leaders and about 50 fighters have been killed in Afghanistan in an ongoing operation launched last week to clear militants from the country's violence-plagued south, officials said on Wednesday. Early indications are that Taliban fighters "are not fighting particularly hard, don't know what to do, but are leaving the area," said Brig Richard E Nugee, the chief spokesman for Nato's international Security Assistance Force. Nato forces and Afghan army and police last week launched Operation Baaz Tsuka in Kandahar's Panjwayi and Zhari districts, where Nato's biggest ground battle in its history, Operation Medusa was fought in September...

Dawn, 21 December 2006

Afghanistan frees 10 Pakistanis

QUETTA, Dec 20: Afghan authorities released 10 Pakistanis, including five levies men, on Wednesday, a day after detaining them for crossing into Afghanistan by mistake. Qila Saifullah district administration sources said Afghan officials in Badini border area had responded positively to Pakistani officials' request for the men's release as they had mistakenly crossed the border. AP adds: Tribal elders and government officials received the men from Afghan officials at Badini border crossing, said an official. The men were arrested late on Tuesday in a mountainous region where the border was not demarcated, said Abdul Raziq Bugti, spokesman for the Balochistan government.

Dawn, 21 December 2006

Afghanistan heading for the worst

LONDON: President Hamid Karzai's lined, care-worn face is as good a record as any of five years of terror and counter-terror in Afghanistan. The strain is plain for all to see. Speaking in Kabul last week, George Bush's favourite Muslim democrat was in tears as he talked about Afghan children killed in the west's latest campaign against the Taliban. "We're not as strong as the foreigners ... We can't prevent the terrorists coming from Pakistan. We can't prevent the (Nato) coalition from bombing terrorists. And our children are dying because of that," Mr Karzai said. "Cruelty at the highest level. The cruelty is too much ..." Western countries should be thanked for aiding his country, he added. But "still they can't rescue Afghanistan and its children from the cruelty and the suicide attackers and the hand of the enemy"...

Daily Times, 21 December 2006

'French troops saw Osama twice'

PARIS: A documentary says French special forces had Osama bin Laden in their sights twice about three years ago but their US superiors never ordered them to fire. The French military, however, said that the incidents never happened and the report was "erroneous information". The documentary, due to air next year, says the troops could have killed the Al Qaeda leader in Afghanistan but the order to shoot never came, possibly because it took too long to request it. "In 2003 and 2004 we had bin Laden in our sights. The sniper said 'I have bin Laden'," an anonymous French soldier is quoted as saying. The documentary 'Bin Laden, the failings of a manhunt' is by journalists Emmanuel Razavi and Eric de Lavarene, who have worked for several major French media outlets in Afghanistan. A cable television channel plans to air the documentary in March.

Daily Times, 21 December 2006

Pakistan wants end to criticism from Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Khurshid M Kasuri on Wednesday called for an end to criticism of the country from Afghanistan, and urged greater cooperation, coordination and intelligence sharing between Pakistan and Afghanistan to end illegal cross-border movement. In an interview with Al-Arabiya news channel, Kasuri said, "We admit that the situation is difficult in Afghanistan and on the Pak-Afghan border, but this calls for greater cooperation, coordination and trust, not public insults and accusations," he said. "It is essential that we maintain a level of trust and do not trade allegations publicly because that is a very important ingredient in trust building ... it is very simple if somebody attacks verbally a response is very easy all we have to do is wag our tongues, but it causes damage. Pakistan attaches too much importance to its relations with Afghanistan to indulge in verbal vitriol," he added. Kasuri said Pakistan had maintained its cool, and "I don't think any purpose will be served by our retaliating in a similar manner. The Pakistani government has shown a lot of patience..."

Daily Times, 21 December 2006

Defence Dept wants \$99.7b more for Iraq, Afghan wars

WASHINGTON: The Defence Department wants the White House to seek another \$99.7 billion to fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to information provided to AP. The military's request, if embraced by President George W Bush and approved by Congress, would boost this year's budget for the wars to about \$170 billion. Military planners put the proposal together at a time when Bush is considering new strategies for the conflict in Iraq. Pentagon planners assembled the blueprint before Bush said he was considering that option. Overall, the war in Iraq has so far cost about \$350 billion.

Daily Times, 22 December 2006

British aide in Afghanistan accused of spying for Iran

LONDON: A close aide to the British commander of NATO troops in Afghanistan has been accused of passing secrets about activities there to Iran, press reports said Thursday. The reports come as British-led forces struggle against fiercer than expected Taliban insurgents in the south of the country, invaded by US-led forces following the September 11, 2001 terror attacks. Corporal Daniel James, an interpreter to Lieutenant General

David Richards, the head of NATO's more than 30,000-strong force in Afghanistan, has been charged under the Official Secrets Act with "prejudicing the safety of the state."

The Hindu, 23 December 2006

Top Taliban leader killed in U.S. air strike

KABUL: A top Taliban military commander described as a close associate of Osama bin Laden and Taliban leader Mullah Omar was killed in an air strike this week close to the border with Pakistan, the U.S. military said on Saturday. A Taliban spokesman denied the claim. Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Osmani was killed on Tuesday by a U.S. air strike while travelling by vehicle in a deserted area in the southern province of Helmand, the U.S. military said. Two associates also were killed, it said. There was no immediate confirmation from Afghan officials or visual proof offered to support the claim. A U.S. spokesman said "various sources" were used to confirm Osmani's identity. Osmani, regarded as one of three top associates of Omar, is the highest-ranking Taliban leader the coalition has claimed to have killed or captured since U.S. forces invaded Afghanistan to oust the Taliban regime in late 2001 for hosting Osama.

Daily Times, 25 December 2006

Editorial - Incredible line on Afghanistan

Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan is strategically too important for stability and peace within Pakistan and in the region to be left to the private groups or be subject to any ambiguity or ambivalence on Pakistan's part.

Daily Times, 26 December 2006

Kabul's Flower Street prepares for Christmas

KABUL: In a devoutly Muslim Afghanistan, Christmas is like any other day - people go to work, there are no blinking lights lining the streets and pine trees remain unadorned - except on Flower Street, where local tree vendors are making an extra buck from the foreigners' holiday. Located in the heart of Kabul, Flower Street is different at Christmas from any other time of year, transformed into a festive place full of trees decked with multicolored tinsel garlands and lights. "After the Taliban, we started to make Christmas trees because lots of foreigners are around, and they are asking for them," said Eidy Mohammad as he decorated a tree at his shop, the Morsal Flower Store. "Business is growing - we had only the wedding season before, but now we have Christmas as well."

The Hindu, 27 December 2006

Pakistan to fence, mine border with Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD: Amid rising tensions between Kabul and Islamabad over allegations of cross-border militancy in Afghanistan, Pakistan on Tuesday announced that in response to an extraordinary situation, it decided to fence and mine parts of the Durand Line that separates the two countries. In keeping with our policy to prevent any militant activity from Pakistan inside Afghanistan, the Pakistan Army has been tasked to work out modalities for selectively fencing and mining the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, Foreign Secretary Riaz Muhammed Khan said at a briefing here. Mr. Khan also announced a decision to expand the paramilitary Frontier Constabulary for deployment, alongside the army, on the border. The Dawn reported that President Pervez Musharraf chaired a high-

level inter-agency meeting on Pakistan-Afghanistan relations on Saturday. Other reports over the weekend said the Bush administration demanded fresh military operations against suspected pro-Taliban militants in North and South Waziristan, tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, where the Pakistan Government has concluded peace agreements with the local people.

Pak Tribune, 27 December 2006

No more troops for Afghanistan, says Belgian minister

KUNDUZ CITY: Belgian Defence Minister Andre Flahaut has said his country will not send more troops to Afghanistan. Flahaut said this during a visit to the northern Kunduz province to meet his country's troops stationed under the command of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The minister said Belgium was eager to play its role in bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan but could not send more troops to that country due to its limited resources.

The Times of India, 28 December 2006

Afghanistan slams Pak's decision to fence border

KABUL: The Hamid Karzai-led Afghan government has strongly protested Pakistan's plan to fence and mine parts of the border between the two countries. Expressing hope that Pakistan would reconsider its decision, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Sultan Ahmad Baheen said that if it failed to do so, Kabul will call on the international community to pressurise Islamabad and to destroy terrorist centres inside Pakistan. Earlier on Tuesday, Pakistan had said that it would build a fence and plant land mines on parts of its 2,430 km frontier with Afghanistan.

Reuters, 28 December 2006

NATO soldier killed in Afghanistan

KABUL (Reuters) - A NATO soldier was killed and three injured, one seriously, after a blast caused their vehicle to crash during a reconnaissance mission in southern Afghanistan, the alliance said on Thursday. It did not give the nationalities of the soldiers, nor more details of Wednesday's incident in Helmand province, a Taliban stronghold. NATO said in a statement it was investigating. Most troops deployed in Helmand as part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force are British. More than 160 foreign soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan this year, a year which has seen the worst fighting since the Taliban were ousted by U.S.-led forces in 2001.

The Times, 29 December 2006

Escalating conflict in Afghanistan claims 22nd British victim

A British soldier killed in an explosion on patrol in Helmand province was the 22nd serviceman to die in southern Afghanistan in the past seven months on combat operations. The increasing violence has caused British casualties to rise at an alarming rate with, on average, a soldier dying every eight days. The vast majority of fatalities have occurred after attacks on patrols where British forces are still without the armoured vehicles they need. Senior commanders on the ground have given warning that they expect the resurgent Taleban to intensify their attacks on British and other foreign forces and that the casualty figure is likely to rise.

The Hindu, 29 December 2006

Afghanistan slams Pak's decision to fence parts of border

Kabul, Dec. 29 (PTI): The Afghan government has strongly protested Pakistan's plan to fence and mine parts of the border between the two countries. Expressing hope that Pakistan would reconsider its decision, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Sultan Ahmad Baheen said that if it failed to do so, Kabul would call on the international community to pressure Islamabad to destroy terrorist centres inside Pakistan. Pakistan had said it would build a fence and plant land mines on parts of its 2,430 km frontier with Afghanistan.

BBC News, 29 December 2006

Karzai lambasts border mine plan

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has criticised Pakistan's plans to fence and lay landmines along sections of its border with Afghanistan. President Karzai said that the plans would only separate tribes and families, not prevent terrorism. Pashtun tribes people live on either side of the Pakistan-Afghan border. Afghanistan has long said the Taleban carry out cross-border attacks from Pakistan. Pakistan denies involvement in the attacks. On Thursday, Mr Karzai said that removing the sanctuaries of terrorists would be more effective than fencing or laying mines along the border.

The News, 30 December 2006

Mulla Omar vows to drive out aggressors from Afghanistan

KABUL: Foreign troops will be forced out of Afghanistan in the face of Taliban attacks, the Islamic group's leader, Mulla Mohammad Omar, was reported as saying in a rare message on Friday. More than 4,000 people have been killed in Afghanistan this year, the bloodiest since US-led forces ousted the Taliban government in 2001. In the purported message from Omar, sent to the Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) news agency to mark the festival of Eid-ul-Azha, Omar said aggressor forces in Afghanistan and Iraq were facing defeat. 'The enemy will have to quit the region with humiliation and disgrace. The authenticity of the message could not be independently verified. Statements from the Taliban leader -- whose whereabouts are a mystery -- are periodically issued through Hanif, who claims to speak for the hardline militia. 'Afghans have always expelled their enemies by force and no enemy or aggressive force has left Afghanistan at its own will, Omar said.

BBC News, 31 December 2006

Taleban 'say no' to tribal plan

Fugitive Taleban leader Mullah Omar has dismissed a proposal to hold cross border tribal councils as a trap, in a message attributed to him. No Muslim will participate in something... created by the aggressors and puppets, he said. The Pakistan and Afghan governments have discussed holding a cross-border council to end Taleban violence. Mullah Omar's message, released to a number of news agencies, urged the Taleban never to accept defeat. Afghanistan accuses Pakistan of allowing the Taleban to operate from its soil. Pakistan claims it is doing all it can to stop militant activity across the border. The idea of holding a tribal councils - or jirgas - among Pashtuns living on either side of the Pakistan-Afghan border was discussed in Kabul in December during a visit by Pakistani

Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri. But there have been no signs of progress towards convening such councils since then.