



## Afghanistan in April 2018

### Peace

The public peace campaign in Helmand gained momentum at the beginning of this month and citizens in many other provinces supported it. New peace camps were set up in Gereshk and Nawa districts. Residents from Herat, Farah, Balkh, Jawzjan, Paktia, Khost and Kandahar provinces also organised demonstrations in support of the movement, calling on the Taliban and the Afghan government to end the war.

On the 8<sup>th</sup>, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi visited Kabul to discuss with Afghan leaders the key principles for an Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity. The seven principles include some oft-used but seldom-enforced phrases like supporting an 'Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process'; and 'taking effective action against fugitives and irreconcilable elements' posing security threats to either of the two countries. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, heavy clashes broke out between Afghan and Pakistani border forces in Khost province, resulting in the death of at least two Pakistani soldiers. This was sparked by Afghan and NATO forces coming under fire by the Pakistani soldiers during an anti-insurgent operation.

### Politics

The Independent Elections Commission (IEC) kicked off the voter registration process on 14<sup>th</sup>. In the first seven days, a low number of voters (370,699 people including 87,000 women) had registered. The IEC aims to register 12 to fifteen million voters by 12<sup>th</sup> June for the upcoming parliamentary and district council elections. Insecurity and the stamping of the national ID cards by the IEC, which could make voters easy targets of the Taliban, are key reasons for the low voter registration turnout. The Taliban have vowed to punish those who register for the elections.

### Security

Afghan and NATO forces continued to fight the Taliban and Daesh on multiple fronts, with heavy casualties on all sides and on civilians. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, the Taliban announced their spring offensive, the Al-Khandaq Operations, which indirectly dismisses the peace offer made by President Ghani.

On the 12<sup>th</sup>, the Taliban attacked Khawaja Omari district of Ghazni. They killed at least fifteen people including the district governor. Another attack on the 30<sup>th</sup> which targeted a NATO convoy in Kandahar, killed eleven children and wounded sixteen people, including five Romanian soldiers. On the 9<sup>th</sup>, an American strike in Faryab killed Qari Hekmatullah and his bodyguard. Hekmatullah was a key commander of the Islamic State in Khorasan, the Afghan and Pakistani branch of the Islamic State.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, a Daesh suicide bomber blew himself up outside a voter registration centre in a Hazara community in Kabul, killing at least 57 people and injuring more than 100. This was the most serious attack yet on preparations for the elections scheduled for October. On the same day, another explosion in a voter registration centre in Baghlan killed six people- all members of the same family. A day later, the Council of Shia Scholars called on people not to register for elections until the government ensures the safety of all voting centres across the country.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup>, Afghan military helicopters bombed a religious school in Kunduz's Taliban-controlled district of Dasht-e Archi, killing at least 70 people and wounding 30 others. Afghan authorities initially denied civilian casualties and said they targeted Taliban leaders attending an anti-government gathering, but subsequent reports showed that children and civilians were among the dead. A Government fact-finding commission is still working on their investigation.

*This report is developed based on media reports. Although BAAG has taken necessary precautions to include only credible sources, it does not take responsibility for incorrect content.*

## **Rights**

On the 12<sup>th</sup>, the UN said the number of civilians killed and wounded by suicide bombings and complex attacks in Afghanistan has more than doubled so far this year, compared to the same period last year. Such attacks have killed or maimed 751 people from January through March, one-third of the total of civilian cases.

Monday the 30<sup>th</sup>, was the worst day for journalists in Afghanistan and elsewhere since the attack on the Charlie Hebdo office in 2015. Following a Daesh attack in Shash Darak, the heavily fortified district of Kabul, Afghan journalists reporting from the scene were targeted by a Daesh attacker posing as journalist. He detonated his explosives killing nine media workers. On the same day, a BBC Pashto journalist was killed by unknown gunmen in Khost.

On the 25<sup>th</sup>, rights activists welcomed the approval of the law on prohibition and prevention of harassment against women and children. The law criminalises verbal, physical, written and visual harassment against women and children and imposes jail terms and cash fines on the perpetrators of these offences.

On the 7<sup>th</sup>, Taliban fighters closed 30 schools in Logar after their commander was killed during a night raid by the Afghan forces. Latest statistics released by the Ministry of Education shows that over one thousand schools throughout the country are closed for various reasons including insecurity. Most of these schools are located in insecure provinces of Kunduz, Helmand and Kandahar.

## **Humanitarian & Development**

On the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the UN's World Food Program said that about 40% of Afghans (around eleven million) currently have no food security, and eight million Afghans are facing a serious risk of hunger. The UN is currently underfunded to meet the challenge and called on the international community to increase financial support.

Afghan government statistics show that 21 provinces are faced with drought due to a 45% drop in rain and snowfalls this year. The Ministry of Finance has allocated \$3.55 million to provide forage to livestock owners and help residents of drought-prone provinces over the next two months.

Sales in Afghanistan's carpet-weaving industry have dropped by half in the past year because of war, poverty and transport constraints. Reliance on Pakistan and its seaports leaves Afghan sellers vulnerable to the frequent border control changes taking place as a result of the two countries' mutual accusations of failing to rein in cross-border militant attacks.

Militants deprived Kabul residents of electricity for nearly a week by destroying an electricity pylon in Baghlan. The power line imports 300 megawatts of Uzbekistan's power to Kabul and other provinces including Parwan and Kapisa.

Drivers and traders blocked the Ghazni-Paktia highway on the 29<sup>th</sup> to protest against extortion by security officials and irresponsible armed groups. A similar protest in Uruzgan lasted for three days.

## **People and Culture**

Since early April, Bagh-e Babur has been hosting an exhibition titled King Babur's Kabul: Cradle of the Mughal Empire. The exhibition displays 72 high quality reproductions of some of the masterpieces of the Timurid and Mughal periods from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, one of Central Asia's richest cultural eras.

An Afghanistan-made red and black hat known as a "Mazari hat" worn mostly in Balkh, has been in high demand in markets across Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan. This is since Manzoor Pashteen, a leader of a Pashtun Protection Movement in Pakistan, popularised it by wearing it at public rallies.

On the 5<sup>th</sup>, the Ministry of Justice announced the enforcement of a new law on organising wedding parties in an effort to curb exorbitant expenses and harmful traditions such as receiving bride prices. The law also allows the municipality to regulate foods served at the parties and monitor the number of guests, now capped at 500. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, Shaharbano Nowruzgi and Hassan Reza got married in Kabul in a very simple ceremony which cost \$770. They gave all the money saved as charity to jobless labourers.

*This report is developed based on media reports. Although BAAG has taken necessary precautions to include only credible sources, it does not take responsibility for incorrect content.*