



Afghanistan in November 2015

Politics and Peace

On the 11th, protests erupted across Afghanistan after insurgents beheaded seven Hazara civilians in Zabul. Protesters demanded more responsibility on the government's part to ensure security for civilians and ethnic minorities. They also voiced their grievances against Islamic State (IS) and the Taliban. Among the thousands of protesters, women and men carried the coffins of the seven victims to the Presidential Palace in Kabul. In response, President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah held a late night meeting, televised live, with representatives of the demonstration.

On the 18th, the German government announced it would send 130 more soldiers to Afghanistan, and India said it would deliver four attack helicopters. The Russian Ambassador also announced that his country stands by Afghanistan in the fight against extremism. Last month, President Obama announced that he would not withdraw American troops in Afghanistan as previously planned, and will instead maintain about 9,800 soldiers there through most of 2016.

The Afghan government faced another conundrum after signing a contract for a business partnership with Khalilullah Frozi. Frozi is serving 15 years in prison for his role in defrauding Kabul Bank of nearly \$1 billion of depositors' money. After a public outcry, Ghani called the deal off and suspended legal advisor Abdul Ali Mohammadi. In most recent developments, Frozi was moved from Bagram Prison.

Security

In November, the security situation in the country became more unstable. On the 12th, local security officials in southern Zabul said that the Khak-e-Afghan district has become an IS stronghold. Because of IS activities in Nangarhar thousands fled their homes. Concern is also rising in Baghlan, where officials in the northern part of the province say IS is trying to recruit fighters.

New in-fighting broke out amongst rival Taliban groups in early November. The rifts began when some members questioned the legitimacy of Mullah Akhtar Mansoor, the new Taliban leader. There is increasing concern about how the internal tensions may impact peace talks between the government and the Taliban.

The government has warned that militia groups wishing to stop the IS insurgency are illegal and that to solve the problem people in all provinces must store their faith in the government's security apparatus.

Kidnapping took place across the country this month. Four school boys were abducted in Herat. A group of about 14-30 Hazaras were kidnapped while travelling on a major highway; this incident among others is raising concerns about targeted violence towards minority groups in the country. Vigils and protests were also held across Afghanistan, to demand more attention to security concerns for ethnic minorities.

According to education officials, more than 50 schools have been closed because of clashes between security forces and insurgents in the provincial capital and three nearby districts of southern Helmand province.

Rights

Concern is rising over Afghan refugees who face possible deportation back to Afghanistan. Afghan refugees protested in Berlin against Germany's fluid refugee law and sentiment. A recent confidential report by the German Foreign Ministry reportedly says that Afghanistan's population faces massive human right abuses and security issues.

On the 18th, Human Rights Watch demanded that Pakistan's government stop the mistreatment of Afghan refugees. Their report documents the rampant police harassment, threats and violence against Afghan refugees in Pakistan. In

neighbouring Iran, an Afghan mother was reportedly shot by Iranian border police whilst trying to cross the border into Turkey. Afghan refugees have faced serious struggles on their journeys to Europe in search of asylum.

On the 4th, a video emerged of a 19-year-old women being stoned to death for adultery in Ghor province. The video was met with outrage in Afghanistan, as people demanded justice. Members of the Afghan parliament's Women's Affairs Commission condemned the stoning.

The International Criminal Court has cited evidence of international forces abusing detainees in Afghanistan. UN prosecutors say there is evidence suggesting international forces in Afghanistan had used physical and psychological abuse against Afghan detainees, causing them serious harm.

Well-known political analyst Ahmad Syedi was attacked by an unknown gunman in Kabul on the 24th. He is still in the critical care unit with gunshot injuries. Syedi was a former Afghan diplomat who had served with the Afghan embassy in Pakistan.

Humanitarian and Development

In late November, the results of a US internal investigation revealed that the attack on the Doctors Without Borders' (MSF) Kunduz hospital was primarily caused by "human error." Several service members were suspended. MSF is critical of the investigation and continues calls for an independent, non-military international inquiry into the airstrike.

This month, the Asia Foundation released its annual survey. Optimism among Afghans is at a low. Only 36.7 per cent nationwide say their country is moving in the right direction, down from 54.7 per cent in 2014. The survey also found that over 80 per cent of Afghans owned one or more mobile phone in their household, up from 41.5 per cent in 2007. One-fifth of respondents nationwide report having someone in their household who has access to the internet.

Families in Northern Afghanistan face a harsh winter as they remain homeless after the 7.5-magnitude earthquake shook Afghanistan in late October. More than 6,000 homes were fully destroyed in the earthquake, and about 129,000 people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Many are still waiting for food and shelter as temperatures drop.

It was reported that 40,000 tonnes of pomegranates worth more than \$10 million have been exported to foreign countries from southern Kandahar province.

The Afghan government is aiming to set up a bourse in Kabul by mid-2016 which would be a single source for government-certified lapis lazuli. Mining Minister Daud Saba said that the international community should ban the selling of any other lapis with no certificate, as done previously with 'blood diamonds.'

Afghanistan agreed to the terms to join the World Trade Organization, paving the way for the ninth least-developed country to join the organization since 1995. President Ghani hopes that the WTO membership will 'attract investment, create jobs and improve the welfare of the people of Afghanistan.'

The High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption announced the assets belonging to President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah. The assets belonging to Ghani and his wife, Rula Ghani are reportedly worth 320 million Afghanis (nearly \$4.7 million). Abdullah's assets were put at 10 million Afghanis (over \$153,000). The Ghanis also reportedly own 7,000 books.

People and Culture

17-year-old Negin Kholwak, is Afghanistan's first female conductor. She is a student at Afghanistan National Institute of Music in Kabul. Kholwak, also a pianist, is from Kunar province. Distant relatives discouraged her desire to pursue music but her father, she said, helped her to follow her passion. Her dream is to become a musician enchanting the ears of listeners all over the world.

A new project titled Sahar Speaks launched their website this month. The program is trying to revolutionize global newsrooms in Afghanistan by bringing in Afghan female reporters. Currently, there are no Afghan female reporters working for any international outlet in Afghanistan.