



Narcotics, Organized Crime and Security in Eurasia Weekly Digest: 19 – 25 September 2005

The following are summaries of articles related to narcotics and security in the Central Asian 5 and Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and Europe. Where possible, web addresses for the entire article are provided.

Russian minister expects Afghan drug flow to grow

Russia's defence minister said on Monday he expected the flow of drugs from Afghanistan to grow whatever the outcome of the Afghan elections held on Sunday. Russian news agencies quoted Sergei Ivanov as telling a meeting of top officials chaired by President Vladimir Putin that the export of refined heroin from Afghanistan would reach 500 tonnes this year. "It is clear that parliamentary polls will not improve the situation," he said. Ivanov said last week in Berlin after a meeting with NATO officials that heroin exports from Afghanistan were 360 tonnes in 2003 and 420 tonnes a year later. He put the price of this year's expected export of heroin at \$30 billion. Speaking in Moscow, Ivanov said he had agreed with NATO to set up a mechanism to coordinate anti-drug activities of the U.S.-led alliance and the Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty, which includes Central Asian states of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

Reuters News, 19/09/05

Turnout in parliamentary election 50 per cent

(Cheragh) – Over six million Afghans cast their votes in parliamentary elections held on September 18, chief electoral official Peter Erben said the following day. Addressing a press conference, he added that preliminary reports indicated that over 50 per cent of the electorate had voted to elect members of parliament and provincial councils, but he cautioned that this turnout figure could change. More than 12 million people were registered to vote. Counting begins on September 20.

(Cheragh is an independent daily run by the Development and Democracy Association.)

Rockets fired at Pakistan Army camp on border

(The Kabul Times) – Two rockets have been fired at a Pakistani army camp near the Afghan border, in the same area where troops last week raided a suspected al-Qaeda compound, an official said. The rockets, fired from the Afghan side of the border on September 18, caused no casualties because they landed in a nursery plantation near the military camp in North Waziristan province. Pakistani troops returned fire towards the border, said the official, adding that it was not immediately clear who had launched the rockets.

(The Kabul Times is a state-run daily published in English every other day.)

IWPR'S Afghan Press Monitor, No. 158, 20/09/05

Afghan Opium Cultivation Falls; Drug Output Still High - UN

The U.N. has recorded the first notable decline in opium cultivation in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban, but drug production remains high due to favorable weather, the head of the U.N. Drug Control Agency said Tuesday. Antonio Maria Costa, who on Tuesday presented a new U.N. report on the drug situation in Afghanistan, called the decline "the best drug-related news" since the Taliban ouster in 2001. He said that opium cultivation nonetheless had

more than tripled in some Afghan provinces governed by warlords suspected of involvement in drug trade, and called for their removal. Costa also called for greater North Atlantic Treaty Organization involvement in fighting drugs, noting that the northwestern Afghan provinces where opium cultivation has grown were places where NATO forces operate. According to the U.N. report, Afghan opium cultivation dropped by 21% in 2005 from the previous year, but production dropped only slightly from 4,200 metric tons in 2004 to 4,100 tons. Costa said Afghanistan remained the world's largest opium supplier, with 87% of the world market coming from Afghanistan. The opium economy makes up 52% of Afghanistan's gross domestic product, and 11 million drug addicts worldwide use Afghan heroin, he said. One-third of the Afghan drug traffic reaches Western markets through the so-called northern route, via the ex-Soviet Central Asia and Russia, while two-thirds arrives via Pakistan and Iran, he said.

Dow Jones International News, 20/09/05

Additional information about the UN report published by *The Independent*, 23/09/05:

Opium production [increased by] 106 per cent in the north of the country, 98 per cent in the west and 30 per cent in the south. 'The strongest increases were in the north and west where NATO is operating,' said Antonio Maria Costa, executive director of the UN office on drugs and crime. The UN document shows a 334 per cent increase in production in the region of Balkh, despite the presence of a PRT [Provincial Reconstruction Teams, established by ISAF] at Mazar-e-Sharif. The picture is similar in the west with a 348 per cent rise in Farah where ISAF is also present. Meanwhile officials are alarmed at the 162 per cent rise in Kandahar.

Vote count begins

(Anis) – The Joint Electoral Management Body, JEMB, has announced the official start to the counting of votes in the parliamentary and provincial elections. Addressing a news conference, JEMB operations director Peter Erben said counting in Herat, Kunduz, and Bamian provinces started early on the morning of September 20, and would get under way in other provinces later the same day. Eighty per cent of ballot boxes have been shifted to the counting centres located across the country. Erben said the count should be finished in 16 days, before the start of the holy month of Ramadan.

(Anis is state-run daily mostly in Dari.)

IWPR'S Afghan Press Monitor, No. 159, 21/09/05

Junbesh commander accused of exploiting children

(Cheragh) – A militia commander with the Junbesh-e-Milli movement loyal to General Abdul Rashid Dostam has been accused of using forced child labour. According to locals in the Pashtunkot area of the northern province of Faryab, over 40 children and old people have been forced to work on land belonging to commander Ghulam Qadir Rahmani. One man, Haqbiridi, 55, said the commander not only forced people to work for nothing, but also made villagers pay him a heavy tax - one tenth of their harvest. Rahmani countered the accusation by saying he had defended local people for the past 25 years, so he had the right to get them to work for him for no pay. The commander has refused to join the nationwide disarmament and demobilisation process, says he will not lay down his weapons unless his opponents, General Malik and Gul Pahlawan, do the same.

(Cheragh is an independent daily run by the Development and Democracy Association.)

IWPR'S Afghan Press Monitor, No. 160, 22/09/05

Editorial: 'Pakistani hand' looms over Kabul vote

(Cheragh, September 19, 2005) The question that tantalised Afghanistan on the eve of elections was Islamabad's role in the UN sponsored vote. In the fray were around 5,800 election hopefuls, all registered as independents. But Afghans are as politically turbo-charged as Indians or Pakistanis, and voters are well aware of the party or warlord associations of most candidates. A key issue was whether a candidate has foreign backing—usually from Pakistan, Iran or the US. The Pakistani hand appears to be in the forefront of election rhetoric. "Pakistan destroyed our country and made Muslim fight Muslim in the name of Jihad," said former communist Suraya Parluka, 60, at an election meeting in Kabul. "Now it wants its agents inside the national assembly, so that it can destroy it from within." Afghan President Hamid Karzai said last month that he had information about people in government with links to a foreign intelligence agency—which,

though unnamed, was believed to be Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence (ISI). Candidates under suspicion are those from either the Taleban or Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami, two groups with deep links to the ISI.

(Cheragh is an independent daily run by the Development and Democracy Association.)

Editorial: Disarmament failure one factor in low turnout

(Erada, September 21, 2005) Instability and the failure of the disarmament process are important contributors to a lower-than-expected turnout in the landmark legislative polls on September 18. Many local commanders were left armed, while the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programme finished months ago. Some electoral officials, expressing great delight, say that parliamentary elections are over and people used their votes. They do not, however, want to talk about why a huge number of eligible voters turned their backs and didn't cast their votes. Indeed some local and international politicians consider the establishment of a parliament and other legislative institutions as a major success. But they have overlooked the failure in fulfilling Afghans' main hope, that of achieving peace and stability. Threats from the Taleban and other opposition groups were inevitable. If we look quickly at the number of victims among the Afghan National Army, police, candidates and electoral workers, we can easily realise the failure.

(Erada is an independent daily run by the Afghan Media Resource Center.)

IWPR'S Afghan Press Monitor, No. 160, 22/09/05

Troops lift Russian-Uzbek ties

(By Ian MacWilliam, BBC News, Tashkent): Russia and Uzbekistan are holding their first joint military exercises in hills 100 km north of the Uzbek city of Samarkand. With 200 soldiers from each side taking part, the three-day drills will also involve paratroopers and an elite Russian commando unit. The exercises are being seen as a sign of closer relations between Moscow and Tashkent. They come just two months after the Uzbeks issued an ultimatum to US forces to leave a base in southern Uzbekistan. Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov and his Uzbek counterpart, Kadyr Gulomov, were due to inspect the proceedings on Friday. Mr Ivanov said the drills were aimed at countering the increasing flow of illegal drugs from nearby Afghanistan. The exercises are the latest sign of a significant warming of relations between Moscow and ex-Soviet Uzbekistan (...).

BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4275398.stm>, 23/09/05

Afghanistan urged to fast-track legalisation of opium crop

Afghanistan urgently needs to legalise its massive opium crop, which supplies most of the world's heroin, to avoid becoming a narco-state and to fund reconstruction, a think-tank said on Monday. The recommendations were part of a study released by The Senlis Council at a conference in Kabul to push for the destitute nation to legalise opium production and channel the crop into the manufacture of legal painkillers. The council, a Paris-based body of politicians, experts and academics, said the current policy of trying to eradicate the fields of poppies that yield opium, which makes up about half of Afghanistan's income, was a costly failure. The policy had little impact while demonising Afghan farmers and destroying "a valuable natural resource rather than turning it into a powerful driver for economic development," the study said. "The illegal heroin trade is the largest and fastest growing business sector in Afghanistan, accounting for a 2.7 billion US dollars' profit a year," it said. But while it provided jobs for thousands of Afghans, it was only enriching a few while possibly feeding militant and terror networks that could be involved in the drugs industry, it said. And as the illegal opium exports were untaxed, the public sector was deprived of income that could be used to build much-needed infrastructure. However a "system of licenced opium production can form the basis for an open-minded and above all realistic debate on how to remove Afghanistan from its immediate development crisis and its imminent descent into a narco-state," it said. The council recommended the government fast-track the establishment of a national authority to licence opium producers and research an amnesty that would "integrate illegal actors into the opium licencing system". It said new varieties of poppies could be developed that would prevent the production of heroin but be suitable for the painkillers codeine and morphine. Poppy blooms in licenced fields could also be colour-coded to distinguish them from illegal crops, assisting policing. The council's proposals have met with some scepticism, with the Afghan government this year ruling out legalising opium production because of its links to crime and terrorism. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime said here Sunday that legalisation would only undermine Afghanistan's battle against drugs.

Agence France Press, 26/09/05

Seizures and Arrests

Tajik police operations net nearly 35 kg of heroin

The Tajik law-enforcement agencies have seized over 40 kg of drugs over the past weekend, according to the country's Interior Ministry. It said a 27-year-old Afghan national and resident of Takhar Province, Husayn Valadi Azizullo, had been detained in Khatlon Region's Farkhor District [southern Tajikistan]. During a search, 15.67 kg of heroin and 5.45 kg of cannabis were found and seized from him. In a separate development, officers from the Tajik Interior Ministry department for combating the illicit drugs trade detained a 33-year-old Dushanbe resident, Rahmonali Abdulloev, in the city. A total of 14.15 kg of heroin was found and seized from him when he was searched. Staff from the counter-terrorism unit of the Tajik Interior Ministry department for combating organized crime foiled another case of drug trafficking. A resident of Muminobod District [southern Tajikistan], Daler Mirov, 37, was detained in the course of operational and search measures. Nearly 5 kg of heroin was seized from him. Criminal cases have been launched into all the incidents, and investigations are under way.

BBC Monitoring Central Asia (Text of report by Tajik Avesta), 19/09/05

“Brotherhood Operation” leads to seizure of over 160 kilograms of drugs at Tajik-Afghan border

The “Brotherhood 2005” Operation carried out by border services of Tajikistan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan has led to seizure of more than 160 kilograms of drugs at the Tajik-Afghan border, according to information from Tajikistan's Border Protection Committee (BPC). Mr. Mahmadscho Iskandarov, the head of the BPC operation department, has told Asia-Plus the operation was carried out between September 12-17 for the purpose of curbing illegal migration and discovering channels through which Afghan heroin, marijuana and opium as well as weapons are being smuggled from the Central Asian countries. According to Iskandarov, over six days of the operation, which was carried out in cooperation with all power-wielding structures of Tajikistan (Ministry of Security, Interior Ministry and the Drug Control Agency), more than 87 kilograms of heroin, 40 kilograms of Afghan “chars”, 17 kilograms of marijuana, five kilograms of raw opium, 3.5 kilograms of cannabis and 8.5 kilograms of wide Indian hemp have been intercepted at the Tajik-Afghan border. The operation has also led to detention of 15 drug traffickers.

Asia Plus, 20/09/05