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Korean group held almost 4 weeks; Taliban releases two hostages on roadside in Afghanistan; Women freed 'for the sake of good relations between the Korean people and the Taliban'

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: ASSOCIATED PRESS / A Red Cross worker greets two South Korean church volunteers after they were released yesterday in Ghazni province, west of Kabul. ; Photo: ASSOCIATED PRESS / Kim Ji-na (left) and Kim Kyung-ja seen in a group photo taken before leaving for Afghanistan on Friday, July 13, at Incheon International Airport in Korea. ; Photo: ASSOCIATED PRESS / Kim Kyung-ja ;

DATELINE: GHAZNI, AFGHANISTAN

SOURCE: Associated Press

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WORD COUNT: 659

The dark grey Toyota Corolla slowed and stopped on the desert road. Two women, one shrouding her face with a turquoise head scarf, the other hidden by a tan scarf, got out and burst into tears.

Waiting Red Cross workers bundled them into a white SUV flying the humanitarian group's banner.

A worker comforted one of the women, holding her head against his chest. Another held out a water bottle to the second woman.

The two South Koreans were tasting freedom for the first time in more than three weeks, and on the same stretch of road where the body of a male colleague was dumped earlier.

The women's release by the Taliban yesterday was the first breakthrough in a hostage drama that began when a busload of 23 South Korean church volunteers was seized July 19.

A second male captive also was shot to death in late July, meaning 14 women and five men are still being held.

The handover came after two days of face-to-face talks between the Taliban and a South Korean delegation. A spokesperson for the hardline Islamic militants said the group released the women as a show of good will during negotiations that he said were going well.

The spokesperson, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, also reiterated the militants' demand that Taliban prisoners be released in exchange for the remaining 19 hostages. The Afghan government has ruled out any prisoner swap.

A few hours later, a German engineer kidnapped last month said in a telephone conversation orchestrated by his captors that he was ill and had been threatened with death.

Korean group held almost 4 weeks; Taliban releases two hostages on roadside in Afghanistan; Women freed

The man identified himself as Rudolf Blechschmidt and spoke stiffly and with frequent pauses, as though reading from prepared remarks. The talk came about when the hostage takers phoned an Associated Press reporter and unexpectedly put Blechschmidt on the line.

In recent weeks, the Taliban have offered interviews with foreign hostages, apparently hoping to pressure the Afghan and U.S. governments into freeing Taliban prisoners. The hostages' comments are controlled by the captors and their statements are made in that context.

A Taliban spokesperson has claimed the group kidnapped Blechschmidt and a colleague July 18 and threatened to kill them unless Germany withdraws its troops from Afghanistan. Afghan officials, however, have suggested the men were taken by an unaffiliated criminal group.

The second engineer, Ruediger Diedrich, was found dead of gunshot wounds July 21.

Journalists were kept away from the freed Korean women, whom the South Korean Foreign Ministry identified as Kim Kyung-ja and Kim Ji-na. Previous media reports said they were 37 and 32 years old.

Officials from the International Red Cross waited in SUVs for the women on a stretch of desert eight kilometres south of the city of Ghazni.

When the grey Corolla stopped, the two women got out of the back seat and began crying. Wearing head scarves, khaki pants and traditional Afghan knee-length shirts, the women were driven to the site by an Afghan elder, Haji Zahir, who also got into one of the Red Cross vehicles with the freed hostages.

Inside the SUV, a worker patted one woman on the back and put her head against his chest as she cried.

A convoy carried the women to the U.S. military base in Ghazni, where American and Afghan soldiers blocked the road. U.S. soldiers searched the women and then escorted them inside.

The 23 church volunteers were captured while travelling by bus from Kabul to Kandahar.

The office of South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun said the country was "pleased" at the women's release.

"The government will spare no efforts for the quick and safe return of all our remaining people while closely co-operating with the Afghan government and the international community in the future," Roh's office said.

Ahmadi, who claims to speak for the Taliban, said the insurgent group decided to free the two Koreans "for the sake of good relations between the Korean people and the Taliban."

"We are expecting the Korean people and government to force the Kabul administration and the U.S. to take a step toward releasing Taliban prisoners," Ahmadi said by telephone from an undisclosed location.

Ghazni Gov. Marajudin Pathan, who in the past has suggested the hostage standoff could be solved with a ransom payment, ruled out a prisoner swap. "Our position is the same: We are not releasing" any Taliban prisoners, he told reporters.

The Taliban have been demanding freedom for 21 militants held by the Afghan government and the U.S. military at its base at Bagram. The government has said it won't release any prisoners out of fear that would encourage more kidnappings.

Korean group held almost 4 weeks; Taliban releases two hostages on roadside in Afghanistan; Women free

Harper expected to shift Flaherty out of finance today; Tories hope cabinet shuffle will set up a majority in next election

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Prime Minister Stephen Harper rolls out a new cabinet team today, with high-ranking ministers on the move.

Finance Minister Jim Flaherty is believed headed to another portfolio, possibly Foreign Affairs or Industry — perhaps paying the political price for missteps that prompted a backlash from Bay Street and renewed federal–provincial battles in Atlantic Canada.

Significantly, Harper is believed to have shifted the embattled Gordon O'Connor out of Defence, to move Industry Minister Maxime Bernier, a Quebecer, into his place at a time when Quebec–based troops are on the frontline in Afghanistan.

Two other significant shifts appeared likely: Jim Prentice, one of Harper's most trusted ministers now in the Indian affairs portfolio, could replace Flaherty at Finance, and Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay may be headed to Industry.

Meanwhile, other ministers appeared to be left out of the shuffle, including Immigration Minister Diane Finley, Justice Minister Rob Nicholson, Environment Minister John Baird and Health Minister Tony Clement.

The shuffle will set the stage for a fall session that senior Conservatives expect to be dominated by the environment, the war in Afghanistan and crime, which is emerging as an even bigger issue for the law–and–order party.

Parliament, due to resume Sept. 17, will likely return sometime after the Oct. 10 Ontario election with a throne speech setting out new priorities for Harper's minority government.

The changes, to come at 3.45 p.m., are expected to be the most sweeping shakeup yet of Harper's 18-month–old government – and a recognition that the current cabinet doesn't have what it takes to boost public support into majority territory.

Today's changes are a chance for Harper to do a "reassessment of people's strengths," said one Conservative insider. "A chance to see how they measure up in the remainder of a minority Parliament as he looks towards a majority," he said.

Harper expected to shift Flaherty out of finance today; Tories hope cabinet shuffle will set up a majority in ne

Cabinet ministers passed through the prime minister's residence at 24 Sussex Dr. yesterday for one-on-one meetings with Harper.

Those ferried to Harper's home included: Nicholson, Finley, Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day, Transport Minister Lawrence Cannon, Veterans Affairs Minister Greg Thompson, and government House leader Peter Van Loan.

Many cabinet ministers were tight-lipped on the day's developments, keen to avoid the wrath of Harper and his penchant to keep the cabinet picks under wraps until today.

"This is excruciating enough as it is," said one minister who refused comment.

"I'm looking forward to the fall. I'm completely re-energized, and I think you're going to see a very significant focus for the government this fall," said another.

"We had a good cup of coffee," Cannon said after his meeting at 24 Sussex Dr. "I think that whatever change comes about with the meetings the prime minister is having with his cabinet, I think Canadians are going to see this as a focused prime minister."

Indeed, not all of those seen entering and leaving 24 Sussex Dr. yesterday are on the move. Instead they may have been getting a kind of performance review by the prime minister.

"He actually operates as a very business-like fellow as he does these things," said one senior official.

But beyond that, Conservatives were saying little about the look of the new cabinet team. However, there was speculation that Harper's shake-ups will touch high-ranking ministers too, such as Flaherty, who has been bruised by department missteps in recent months.

The story of any shuffle, however, is expected to be how Harper deals with O'Connor, widely criticized for his communications mix-ups over Canada's mission in Afghanistan. And while O'Connor was spared in the last shuffle in January, Harper may finally have out of patience with the retired general.

"If the PM does a shuffle now, I'd think it would include Gordon," one official said.

"I'd be very surprised if he leaves him there." O'Connor could be shifted to Veterans Affairs, said the insider.

But the source said it would be surprising if the prime minister drops anyone from cabinet altogether. The view inside is that no one has triggered a scandal or made major gaffes even if some ministers' communications skills, with the media or within their own departments, are wanting.

Instead, the thinking goes, Harper may be interested in shuffling people into other jobs to test and broaden their skills, especially the stronger performers, as the government's lifespan stretches out.

But while the cabinet team has avoided any career-ending screw-ups, Harper is said to have carefully evaluated the performance so far of his ministers. That's why solid performers like Prentice could be in line for new responsibilities.

Still another government source dismissed suggestions any moves are prompted by concerns about polls that show the government is not breaking out of minority government territory right now. Harper and party strategists, said the source, are "narrow-casting."

Many are looking to the fall, hoping big Conservative ideas in a throne speech, or a budget next spring, will

Harper expected to shift Flaherty out of finance today; Tories hope cabinet shuffle will set up a majority in ne

broaden that base. To that end, some are urging bold moves be adopted, such as "income-splitting" for all couples, not just seniors, as the government did in the last budget.

That would allow high-income-earning spouses to "split" their income with a stay-at-home, or lower-income spouse, and reduce their overall tax bracket. It's a controversial and costly move however, but one that even some Liberals find appealing.

Harper's last shuffle in January put a new green focus on his government, with the appointment of Baird as Environment minister, along with changes at Justice, Immigration, Human Resources, Intergovernmental Affairs and the government leader's job in the Commons.

Harper expected to shift Flaherty out of finance today; Tories hope cabinet shuffle will set up a majority in ne

By dropping O'Connor, Harper could admit a mistake

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: CANADIAN PRESS / Prime Minister Stephen Harper chats with Brig.-Gen. David Fraser (right) after arriving in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in March 2006. Fraser was in charge of the Afghan mission at the time. With them are Gen. Rick Hillier, chief of the defence staff, (left) and Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor (black shirt). Harper has to decide whether to keep O'Connor as his defence minister. ;

DATELINE: OTTAWA

BYLINE: JAMES TRAVERS

SOURCE: TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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WORD COUNT: 544

Mistakes are facts of real life often fixed with a simple "sorry." In the surreal world of politics, admitting them is always a struggle.

Former prime minister Jean Chretien stonewalled attacks on cabinet ministers arguing that surrender only encourages enemies. Prime Minister Stephen Harper so dominates his government that errors are too personal to easily correct.

So while the former prime minister delegated power and this one doesn't, they share an iron reluctance to acknowledge imperfection even when it's in their interest. Chretien protected unworthy colleagues and unethical methods until Liberal and sleazy became synonymous. Harper overrode cumulative wisdom to make a retired general and arms lobbyist defence minister and then tolerated blunders that helped turn Afghanistan into an albatross.

Gordon O'Connor isn't the only example of prime ministerial fallibility. His first cabinet was tainted by the inclusion of Vancouver Liberal David Emerson and the appointment of Montreal's Michael Fortier as a senator and the unaccountable minister for the free-spending department that nurtured the sponsorship scandal. Harper's second effort unfairly hung blame for his flat-earth environment plan on Rona Ambrose.

Mistakes have consequences. Harper traded trust for urban support that hasn't materialized, while replacing Ambrose with John Baird exacerbated the impression of cabinet gender imbalance and criticism that Conservatives are more worried about climate-change politics than the planet.

Today's anticipated shuffle is about the after-effects of those and other misjudgments. A ruling party suffering from opinion poll stasis needs the new momentum that comes with changing problematic ministers and none is more problematic than O'Connor.

Harper's decision will add insight to what the last 19 months taught about this prime minister. Voters already know he's hard working and rigidly smart; now they will learn if improving Conservative prospects for a majority is seductive enough to accept blame.

Proof O'Connor was the wrong man for a pivotal job runs deeper than his loose grasp of how detainees were treated or mourning families compensated for funerals. More telling is his failure to coherently explain the mission and billions in purchases peripheral to top general Rick Hillier's blueprint for a light, fast response to 21st-century threats.

Weak communications are not entirely O'Connor's fault. The Kandahar story is constantly under revision, winding from retribution for 9/11 and the prime minister's unwise appropriation of Uncle Sam's rhetoric to current confusion over when the Afghanistan army will be ready to replace Canadians in combat, and the overarching defence strategy is unclear.

Still, clarity is only one reason why Harper needs a defence minister more compelling than crusty. The other is that Conservatives must expand support for renewed, costly armed forces beyond the party's core constituency.

They need a minister persuasive in English and French as well as one able to convince Canadians that a muscular military projects their values internationally and is under firm civilian control at home. Those are not among O'Connor's underappreciated skills.

Inevitably, a rare third opportunity for a minority prime minister to build a strong cabinet turns on what happens to the defence minister today. O'Connor will be moving by nightfall if Harper can find it within himself to even indirectly admit a mistake.

That's something voters forgive as human and only politicians resist as the necessary first step towards a fresh start.

James Travers covers national issues.

Taliban free 2 hostages; Two South Korean women among 23 kidnapped by Afghan insurgents in mid-July

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The dark grey Toyota Corolla slowed and stopped on the desert road. Two women, one shrouding her face with a turquoise head scarf, the other hidden by a tan scarf, got out and burst into tears.

Waiting Red Cross workers bundled them into a white SUV flying the humanitarian group's distinctive banner. A worker comforted one of the women, holding her head against his chest. Another held out a water bottle to the second woman.

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The women's release by the Taliban yesterday was the first breakthrough in a hostage drama that began when a busload of 23 South Korean church volunteers was seized July 19. A second male captive also was shot to death in late July, meaning 14 women and five men are still being held.

The handover came after two days of face-to-face talks between the Taliban and a South Korean delegation. A spokesman for the hardline Islamic militants said the group released the women as a show of good will during negotiations that he said were going well.

The spokesman, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, also reiterated the militants' demand that Taliban prisoners be released in exchange for the remaining 19 hostages. The Afghan government has ruled out any prisoner swap.

A few hours later, a German engineer kidnapped last month said in a telephone conversation orchestrated by his captors that he was ill and had been threatened with death.

The man identified himself as Rudolf Blechschmidt and spoke stiffly and with frequent pauses, as though reading from prepared remarks. The talk came about when the hostage takers phoned an Associated Press reporter and put Blechschmidt on the line.

In recent weeks, the Taliban have offered interviews with foreign hostages, apparently hoping to pressure the Afghan and U.S. governments into freeing Taliban prisoners. The hostages' comments are controlled by the captors and their statements are made in that context.

A Taliban spokesman has claimed the group kidnapped Blechschmidt and a colleague July 18 and threatened to kill them unless Germany withdraws its troops from Afghanistan. Afghan officials, however, have suggested the men were taken by an unaffiliated criminal group.

Taliban free 2 hostages; Two South Korean women among 23 kidnapped by Afghan insurgents in mid-July

The second engineer, Ruediger Diedrich, was found dead of gunshot wounds July 21.

Taliban free 2 hostages; Two South Korean women among 23 kidnapped by Afghan insurgents in mid-July

Moncton soldiers happy to be home; Members of 1 Engineering Support Unit return from stint in Afghanistan

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BYLINE: Stephanie Kukkonen Times & Transcript Staff
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Twelve Monctonians are back with their families after six months in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

The soldiers from 1 Engineering Support Unit (1 ESU), comprised the 2 Special Engineering Team (2 SET) and left for Kandahar in February. They went in the hopes of helping to reconstruct a bit of the war-torn country and now they're back and another team has gone to do their part.

"We're trying to help teach the local population (in Kandahar), so they can learn and start reconstructing the buildings themselves," says Capt. François Sauvé, who has been in the Canadian Forces for 12 years. "It's going to take a number of years. We sent another team to pick up where they left off."

During 2 SET's time in Kandahar they provided the project management and design support for local construction companies in the region. Their work was in support of Canadian Forces reconstruction and humanitarian work in Afghanistan.

The work conducted by 2 SET included providing electricity to rural villages, construction and renovations for police stations, highways and highway checkpoints, a dyke and a water treatment plant.

"The thing with the water treatment plant is power generation," says Sauvé. "The generators work, but they're not reliable. We're teaching them how to maintain them so that there is constant water supply."

In Canada, most construction is done with wood and technologically advanced supplies. That is not the case in Afghanistan, where many of the buildings are made of cement and brick. The materials used poses somewhat of a challenge to the Canadians who are working there, but Sauvé says it's nothing that the team can't overcome, and that Afghanistan has been using the materials for hundreds of years so the team knows it works.

"Our goal is to improve the standard of living over there," he says. "We want the local construction people to eventually be able to fix things themselves. It's based on what the local population needs, there are people there whose job it is to walk around and get opinions from the village elders and find out what they need, be it schools, power, anything."

In the next six months, the team that is there now will pick up on the projects started by the previous team. They've been there for a little over a week and will start the process soon. Sauvé says it takes a little longer for things to get going in Afghanistan because of security issues, but that the general population is pleased to see

the Canadian troops there.

Since coming home, 2 SET has been spending much-needed time with their families. Sauvé says he has heard positive comments about the team's return, they are happy to be home and happy with the work they completed in Kandahar.

"After six months away from their families, they are spending as much time as possible with them," he says. "Everything I heard, they are happy to be back and happy with what they did in Afghanistan."

Taliban frees 2 female hostages; 19 remain captive

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BYLINE: AMIR SHAH The Associated Press
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The spokesman, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, also reiterated the militants' demand that Taliban prisoners be released in exchange for the remaining 19 hostages. The Afghan government has ruled out any prisoner swap.

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The second engineer, Ruediger Diedrich, was found dead of gunshot wounds July 21.

Journalists were kept away from the freed Korean women, whom the South Korean Foreign Ministry identified as Kim Kyung-ja and Kim Ji-na. Previous media reports said they were 37 and 32 years old.

Armed Forces receives cemetery in Oromocto; Honour | Final resting place reserved for veterans and active members; will include area for cremated remains

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BYLINE: MICHAEL STAPLES staples.michael@dailygleaner.com
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Veterans or active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who pass away or lose their lives while serving their country will soon be honoured with their own special resting area in Oromocto.

The municipality has set aside more than four hectares of land off Leger Street to create the new burial ground.

The non-denominational Oromocto Pioneer Gardens Cemetery, which is expected to be ready for use by next April or May, will have three components to it: a columbarium (a storage area for cremated remains); regular burial sites; and a military field of honour.

Patrick Love, president of the Oromocto Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, supports the establishment of a field of honour.

Having such a place of final rest is particularly relevant considering the danger of missions, such as in Afghanistan, that Canadian Forces currently find themselves engaged in, he said.

"I think it is outstanding from our point of view," Love said. "The closest field of honour (elsewhere) is in Fredericton or Saint John."

The legion will have final say as to who will be allowed to be buried in their section of the cemetery.

Oromocto Mayor Tidd said the creation of a burial ground is overdue.

"For a long time we have had people say that, if they had burial sites here, they would probably have had the remains (of loved ones) buried in Oromocto rather than go back to their home areas."

Work on the site has already started with the clearance of about 1.6 hectares of land.

It's a project the town is taking seriously and one that it's prepared to invest as much as \$350,000.

The town hopes to recover the money over time through the sale of plots and spaces, said Tidd.

The municipality has already given the Oromocto Pioneer Gardens Cemetery committee \$50,000 to pay for

Armed Forces receives cemetery in Oromocto; Honour | Final resting place reserved for veterans and active

the clearing of the land.

It is also expected to add another \$200,000 to the pot in the near future, so that additional work can get underway.

Another \$100,000 will be made available next year to complete the project.

Those expenditures, however, have yet to be approved by council.

Tidd said the need for another cemetery in Oromocto came to light prior to her return to the mayor's chair in May 2004.

There are only two cemeteries in the town — one located at St. Vincent de Paul and the other at St. John's Anglican Church.

Other churches are using a cemetery near the Burton courthouse, but all are beginning to fill up.

Fred Hackett of the Town of Oromocto's technical department said not just any spot can be chosen for a cemetery.

"The requirements for a cemetery area is that the hole be easy to dig and dry," Hackett said.

"Not just any field. You could end up with some white areas, and you could end up with water flowing into the excavation zone and that's not desirable either."

The columbarium, meanwhile, will be the first of its kind for the model town.

Columbariums are structures above grade that have access doors. People can purchase a niche for the storage of cremated remains.

"It's becoming more common," Hackett said.

"In fact, in our research we found that, in the Maritimes, (up) to 50 per cent of funerals are cremations. In the larger cities across Canada, they are in the 80– to 85–per–cent (range)."

Tidd said having a columbarium in town is simply Oromocto's way of keeping up with the times.

"We are hoping that we can get the foundation in this fall for part of the columbarium," Tidd said.

"We are just about ready to say that the foundation can be put in."

The older Heritage Cemetery, situated near the new site, will be connected to the new burial ground in a manner yet to be determined.

Taliban releases hostages; Two of 23 South Korean captives freed in Afghanistan

PUBLICATION: Kingston Whig–Standard (ON)

DATE: 2007.08.14

SECTION: National/World

PAGE: B5

SOURCE: AP

BYLINE: Amir Shah

PHOTO: AP

DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan

ILLUSTRATION: Two women of the 23 South Koreans kidnapped by the Taliban in mid–July were freed yesterday on a rural Afghan roadside and then driven to a U.S. base, the first significant breakthrough in a hostage drama now more than three weeks old. Above, Sun Yeon–ja (left), the mother of one of the released hostages, speaks to the news media.

WORD COUNT: 459

Two women among the 23 South Koreans kidnapped by the Taliban in mid–July were freed yesterday on a rural Afghan roadside and then driven to a U.S. base, the first significant breakthrough in a hostage drama now more than three weeks old.

The women, who broke into tears after seeing the international Red Cross officials there to take custody of them, got out of a dark grey Toyota Corolla driven by an Afghan elder and into one of two waiting Red Cross SUVs. The women said nothing to reporters, who were alerted to the handoff location eight kilometres southeast of Ghazni city by a Taliban spokesman.

Wearing scarves on their heads, khaki trousers and traditional Afghan knee–length shirts, the women were driven to the U.S. base in Ghazni city, where American soldiers searched them and then let them enter. Both carried bags.

They were brought to the arranged meeting point on the side of a road in rural Ghazni province by an Afghan named Haji Zahir, who also got into the Red Cross vehicle with the freed hostages.

The Taliban decided to release these two "for the sake of good relations between the Korean people and the Taliban," said Qari Yousef Ahmadi, who claims to speak for the insurgent group.

"We are expecting the Korean people and government to force the Kabul administration and the U.S. to take a step toward releasing Taliban prisoners," Ahmadi said by telephone from an undisclosed location.

Ghazni Gov. Marajudin Pathan ruled out a Taliban prisoner swap.

"Our position is the same, we are not releasing [any Taliban prisoners]," Pathan told reporters.

The South Korean Foreign Ministry identified the freed hostages as Kim Kyung–ja and Kim Ji–na. Previous media reports said they were 37 and 32 years old, respectively.

Two male captives were executed by gunfire in late July. Fourteen women and five men are still being held.

The Taliban have been demanding the release of 21 militant prisoners being held by the Afghan government and U.S. military at the base at Bagram. The government has said it won't release any prisoners out of fear that kidnapping could become an industry in Afghanistan.

The South Korean government confirmed the release of the two hostages and said they were under protection in a safe location.

The women, who the Taliban have said are ill, were among a church group of volunteers kidnapped by militants on July 19.

The local governor has suggested in the past that the hostage standoff could be solved with a ransom payment.

The release comes after face-to-face talks Friday and Saturday in Ghazni between two Taliban leaders and four South Korean officials. Ahmadi said that while talks continue, the remaining hostages will be safe.

"During these negotiations, there will be no threats to the other Korean hostages. We are waiting for the result of these negotiations. After the negotiations, the Taliban leadership will make a decision about these 19 Korean hostages," he said.

Separately, a suicide bomber targeted a U.S.-led coalition convoy in eastern Afghanistan.

The blast in Khost province killed the bomber, said Gen. Mohammad Ayub, the provincial police chief. There were no immediate reports of casualties among the U.S. forces.

Cabinet shuffle afoot; PM looks to refocus his government

PUBLICATION: Kingston Whig–Standard (ON)

DATE: 2007.08.14

SECTION: National/World

PAGE: B1

SOURCE: CP

BYLINE: Alexander Panetta

DATELINE: OTTAWA

WORD COUNT: 639

Stephen Harper is set to announce a major cabinet shuffle today in an effort to refocus his government on a new list of priorities for what Conservatives call the second phase of their mandate.

Senior government officials said the prime minister is now looking at longer–term policy goals after spending his first 18 months in office on the short–term goal of fulfilling election promises.

That means headline–grabbing moves in 2006 to cut the GST by one percentage point and deliver \$1,200 child–care cheques for families will in the fall start to give way to weightier challenges such as modernizing the economy.

Today's shuffle will set the stage for that shift in emphasis as the prime minister moves around ministers to place his best performers in key portfolios.

"In our first 18 months, we focused principally on keeping promises from the last election campaign," said a senior official.

"Entering the second phase of our mandate, the government will start focusing on the longer term."

Observers doubt the shuffle itself will have an impact with voters, especially since few, if any, new faces were expected to be brought into cabinet.

But the move is seen as an attempt to retool his minority Conservative government over the coming months.

Harper has been unable to reach majority territory in the polls even while delivering the GST cut, the child–care cheques and a new ethics package.

Those promises were part of the five–point game plan from the last election and were designed to carry Harper through a short stint as a minority government.

With Parliament now appearing remarkably stable and no election in sight, insiders say he's looking at policies that are less likely to earn headlines but could have a bigger impact on the country.

"The fall–winter agenda is going to be focused very much on the economy," said one Conservative insider.

"[It will be about] changing the role of government in the economy, looking at things like inter–provincial trade barriers, labour mobility, deregulation."

A government official suggested that Harper's recent unveiling of a \$33-billion national infrastructure plan – dubbed as the biggest of its kind since the Second World War – is one example of the coming shift.

"This isn't about today and tomorrow. We know the demand for new infrastructure will be there in 10, 15 years," said the official.

"And if we don't prepare for it, economic opportunities will leave Canada for the United States."

There had been rumours that Finance Minister Jim Flaherty and Industry Minister Maxime Bernier – both key players on the economic file – would be moved to new portfolios.

But a source close to Flaherty said the minister did not expect to be shuffled.

It was a revolving door at the prime minister's residence yesterday as Harper held one-on-one meetings with his ministers.

Key players began arriving at 24 Sussex Dr. in the morning to learn their fate and continued filing in throughout the afternoon as Harper met with ministers and with top civil servant Kevin Lynch.

But no one was talking. The moves were being kept so quiet that even senior Conservative staffers didn't know what time the shuffle would be held – nor did they know what fate awaited their bosses.

"The entire government is on hold today," said one government official.

Said another Conservative insider: "Nobody's confirming anything."

One rumour, swirling for months, was that Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor would be moved to another portfolio because of his allegedly sloppy handling of the Afghanistan file.

While the details of the shuffle remained murky, the reasons behind it were no mystery.

Talk of a shuffle began months ago. Last spring, the government seemed to lose control of the parliamentary agenda as some ministers appeared clumsy under opposition attack.

The Afghan detainee issue became a particular problem as O'Connor and his colleagues appeared at one point to contradict each other almost daily.

O'Connor and the soon-to-be-retiring Revenue Minister Carol Skelton were expected to be shuffled out of their positions, and speculation was rife that Heritage Minister Bev Oda is also on the move.

A senior government official said it was "highly unlikely" that any backbencher would get a promotion into the ministry.

However, rumours continued to swirl that MP Diane Ablonczy was set for promotion. That would make sense if Skelton is dropped from cabinet because Harper would need to replace her with another woman. No cabinet is composed without care being taken to maintaining linguistic, gender, and regional balance.

The current cabinet – which includes Harper, 26 ministers, and five junior ministers – has seven women and six francophones.

There were also reports that Saskatchewan MP Gerry Ritz would be named agriculture minister. That would also be logical if Skelton – who is also from Saskatchewan – is dropped because Harper needs representation

from that province in cabinet.

NFL, union asked to get involved in Tillman probe

PUBLICATION: The
Chronicle-Herald
DATE: 2007.08.14
SECTION: Sports
PAGE: C3
WORD COUNT: 362

NEW YORK (AP) – Twenty U.S. military members who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan asked NFL commissioner Roger Goodell to help secure the release of all documents related to the death of Pat Tillman.

In a letter to Goodell and NFL Players Association executive director Gene Upshaw, the veterans urged them to ask President Bush to release the documents.

"We know that the National Football League is not in the business of partisan politics, nor should it be," the veterans wrote Monday. "However, in this case ... the House committee requests were signed by both the Democratic chairman and Republican ranking member, so this is not a partisan witch-hunt, but merely a quest to get to the truth about the death of Pat Tillman.

"The league and the players association both owe the Tillman family their full support in the family's pursuit of the truth. Mary Tillman, Pat's mother, has been quite vocal about her desire to see all materials released regarding her son's death, and the family has gone as far as expending its own money on private investigations. At a time when former players increasingly say that the league and players association have not taken care of them, there would be no better way to send a signal that the league supports its own than by demanding the complete truth be told regarding a former player's death."

The House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform has sent a bipartisan request for certain communications and documents from the White House regarding the death of Pat Tillman. The President has not granted that request, citing executive privilege.

Tillman, who left the NFL to join the military after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, was in the 75th Ranger Regiment when he was killed in Afghanistan on April 22, 2004. The military said officers knew within hours that the death was from friendly fire, but violated regulations by not telling Tillman's family or the public for five weeks.

Earlier Monday, the lawyer for the retired general being considered for demotion in the case said Lt. Gen. Philip R. Kensinger Jr. wanted to defend himself before an Army board.

Taliban free two hostages, 19 still held; Abductors want prisoner swap

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle–Herald

DATE: 2007.08.14

SECTION: World

PAGE: A4

SOURCE: The Associated Press

BYLINE: Azmir Shah

ILLUSTRATION: Two Korean hostages walk toward a Red Cross vehicle after they were released by the Taliban on Monday. (Musadeq Sadeq / AP)

WORD COUNT: 523

GHAZNI, Afghanistan – The dark grey Toyota Corolla slowed and stopped on the desert road. Two women, one shrouding her face with a turquoise head scarf, the other hidden by a tan scarf, got out and burst into tears.

Waiting Red Cross workers bundled them into a white SUV flying the humanitarian group's distinctive banner. A worker comforted one of the women, holding her head against his chest. Another held out a water bottle to the second woman.

The two South Koreans were tasting freedom for the first time in more than three weeks, and on the same stretch of road where the body of a male colleague was dumped earlier.

The women's release by the Taliban on Monday was the first breakthrough in a hostage drama that began when a busload of 23 South Korean church volunteers was seized July 19. A second male captive also was shot to death in late July, meaning 14 women and five men are still being held.

The handover came after two days of face-to-face talks between the Taliban and a South Korean delegation. A spokesman for the hardline Islamic militants said the group released the women as a show of good will during negotiations that he said were going well.

The spokesman, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, reiterated the militants' demand that Taliban prisoners be released in exchange for the remaining 19 hostages. The Afghan government has ruled out any prisoner swap.

Journalists were kept away from the freed Korean women, whom the South Korean Foreign Ministry identified as Kim Kyung-ja and Kim Ji-na. Previous media reports said they were 37 and 32 years old.

Officials from the International Red Cross waited in SUVs for the women on a stretch of desert eight kilometres south of the city of Ghazni. When the grey Corolla stopped, the two women got out of the back seat and began crying.

Wearing head scarves, khaki pants and traditional Afghan knee-length shirts, the women were driven to the site by an Afghan elder, Haji Zahir, who also got into one of the Red Cross vehicles with the freed hostages.

Inside the SUV, a worker patted one woman on the back and put her head against his chest as she cried.

A convoy carried the women to the U.S. military base in Ghazni, where American and Afghan soldiers blocked the road. U.S. soldiers searched the women and then escorted them inside.

The 23 church volunteers were captured while travelling by bus from Kabul to Kandahar.

The office of South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun said the country was "pleased" at the women's release.

"The government will spare no efforts for the quick and safe return of all our remaining people while closely co-operating with the Afghan government and the international community in the future," Roh's office said.

Ahmadi, who claims to speak for the Taliban, said the insurgent group decided to free the two Koreans "for the sake of good relations between the Korean people and the Taliban."

"We are expecting the Korean people and government to force the Kabul administration and the U.S. to take a step toward releasing Taliban prisoners," Ahmadi said by telephone from an undisclosed location.

Ghazni Gov. Marajudin Pathan, who in the past has suggested the hostage standoff could be solved with a ransom payment, ruled out a prisoner swap. "Our position is the same: We are not releasing" any Taliban prisoners, he told reporters.

The Taliban have been demanding freedom for 21 militants held by the Afghan government and the U.S. military at its base at Bagram.

Harper to mix 'em up; PM prepares for today's cabinet shuffle, MacKay may be moving

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle–Herald

DATE: 2007.08.14

SECTION: Canada

PAGE: A3

SOURCE: The Canadian Press

BYLINE: Alexander Panetta

Immigration Minister Diane Finley leaves 24 Sussex Drive, the official residence of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, after meeting briefly with him in Ottawa on Monday.

ILLUSTRATION: (FRED CHARTRAND / CP); Immigration Minister Diane Finley leaves 24 Sussex Drive, the official residence of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, after meeting briefly with him in Ottawa on Monday. (FRED CHARTRAND / CP)

WORD COUNT: 656

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Senior government officials said the prime minister is looking at longer-term policy goals after spending his first 18 months on the short-term goal of fulfilling election promises.

That means headline-grabbing moves in 2006 to cut the GST by one percentage point and deliver \$1,200 child-care cheques for families will start to give way to weightier challenges such as modernizing the economy.

The shuffle is also an attempt to reinvigorate a minority government that took a political beating in the spring and which has been unable to reach majority territory in the polls. But it's unclear how the shuffle could have any immediate impact with voters, especially since few new faces – if any – are expected to be brought into cabinet.

So far, Harper has gained little political traction since the last election despite delivering the GST cut, the child-care cheques and a new ethics package. Those promises were part of the five-point game plan from the last campaign and were designed to carry Harper through a short stint as a minority government.

With Parliament appearing remarkably stable and no election in sight, sources said he's looking at policies that are less likely to earn headlines but could have a bigger impact.

"The fall–winter agenda is going to be focused very much on the economy," said one Conservative insider. "(It will be about) changing the role of government in the economy, looking at things like inter-provincial trade barriers, labour mobility, deregulation."

A government official suggested that Harper's recent unveiling of a \$33-billion national infrastructure plan is one example of the coming shift.

"This isn't about today and tomorrow. We know the demand for new infrastructure will be there in 10, 15 years," said the official. "And if we don't prepare for it, economic opportunities will leave Canada for the United States."

It was a revolving door at the prime minister's residence Monday as Harper held one-on-one meetings with his ministers.

Key players began arriving at 24 Sussex Drive in the morning to learn their fate and continued filing in throughout the afternoon as Harper met with ministers and with top civil servant Kevin Lynch.

But not much information was leaking out. The moves were being kept so quiet that even senior Conservative staffers didn't know what time the shuffle would be held – nor did they know what fate awaited their bosses.

"The entire government is on hold today," said one government official.

Sources said the shuffle could involve a dozen ministers, including some senior posts.

There had been suggestions that Finance Minister Jim Flaherty and Transport Minister Lawrence Cannon would both be part of the shuffle, but key sources flatly denied that.

Another rumour swirling for months is that Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor will be moved to another portfolio because of his allegedly sloppy handling of the Afghanistan file.

Revenue Minister Carol Skelton has announced that she will not run in the next election and could be removed from cabinet.

A senior government official said it's "highly unlikely" that any backbencher will get into the ministry. However, speculation was rampant that MP Diane Ablonczy is set for promotion.

There were also reports that Saskatchewan MP Gerry Ritz would be named agriculture minister.

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The current cabinet, which includes Harper, 26 ministers, and five junior ministers, has seven women and six francophones.

Harper was also said to be seriously considering suspending Parliament through prorogation and recalling it for a new session that would begin with a policy-setting throne speech.

Among others rumoured to be on the move:– Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay to another top post.– Heritage Minister Bev Oda, amid complaints about a weak performance.– Indian Affairs Minister Jim Prentice to a senior portfolio.– Veterans Affairs Minister Greg Thompson, possibly to make room for O'Connor.– Junior minister Helena Guergis to be promoted.

While the details of the shuffle remained murky, the reasons behind it are no mystery.

Talk of a shuffle began months ago. Last spring, the government seemed to lose control of the parliamentary agenda as some ministers appeared clumsy under opposition attack.

The Afghan detainee issue became a particular problem as O'Connor and his colleagues appeared at one point to contradict each other almost daily.

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Harper to mix 'em up; Tory tongues silent as PM prepares for today's major cabinet shuffle

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle–Herald

DATE: 2007.08.14

SECTION: Canada

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Harper poised to shuffle cabinet, set new priorities

DATE: 2007.08.13

KEYWORDS: POLITICS

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 796

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Among others rumoured to be on the move:

- _ Heritage Minister Bev Oda, amid complaints about a weak performance.
- _ Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay to another top post.
- _ Indian Affairs Minister Jim Prentice to a senior portfolio.
- _ Veterans Affairs Minister Greg Thompson, possibly to make room for O'Connor.
- _ Junior minister Helena Guergis to be promoted.

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The Afghan detainee issue became a particular problem as O'Connor and his colleagues appeared at one point to contradict each other almost daily.

Barry Kay, a political science professor at Sir Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ont., said he doubts the shuffle will make a big splash in the polls.

Shuffles aren't as important as they used to be because of what he calls the "presidentialization" of the Canadian political system.

“The prime minister has pretty much come to predominate cabinet,” he said.

“The cabinet ministers don't matter so much anymore. They don't matter so much in policy and this is certainly true of Harper. I think he's very comfortable with the idea (that) he runs the show; he makes the big decisions. He basically presents the face and the agenda of the government.”

Kay said the trend began in the 1970s under former Liberal prime minister Pierre Trudeau and accelerated under each successor.

By Noor Khan

DATE: 2007.08.13
KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE
PUBLICATION: cpw
WORD COUNT: 244

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan (AP) _ A suicide bomber targeted a U.S.-led coalition convoy in eastern Afghanistan on Monday, while Afghan security forces clashed with the Taliban militants in southern Afghanistan, leaving nine militants dead, officials said Monday.

The blast in Khost province killed the bomber, said Gen. Mohammad Ayub, the provincial police chief. There were no immediate reports of casualties among the U.S. forces.

A spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition said they were aware of a car bomb explosion in the east but did not have further details on the incident.

In the south, Afghan police and army soldiers battled militants Sunday in Kandahar province's Shohrawak district, said provincial police chief Sayed Agha Saqib.

The joint Afghan forces thwarted a planned militant ambush at the district chief's compound, and the ensuing clash left nine militants dead, Saqib said. Authorities recovered the militants' bodies and weapons, he said.

During a cleanup operation after the battle, a roadside bomb hit a police vehicle in the same district, killing five officers and wounding two others, Saqib said.

Violence in Afghanistan has risen sharply during the last two months. More than 3,700 people, mostly militants, have been killed in insurgency-related violence this year, according to an Associated Press tally of casualty figures provided by Western and Afghan officials.

In the northeastern province of Badakhshan, police arrested a man with a suicide vest on Monday who said he was from Kazakhstan, said Shamsul Rahman, the deputy governor. The man said other suicide bombers were in Badakhshan, Rahman said, prompting police to launch a search operation.

60 years on, India and Pakistan find themselves tracking very different paths

DATE: 2007.08.13
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GURGAON, India (AP) _ Sixty years ago this week, India and Pakistan won their independence _ and saw it quickly overshadowed by one of the most violent upheavals of the 20th century as the departing British split the subcontinent.

Some 10 million people moved across borders in one of history's largest mass migrations as the princely states sewn together in 200 years of British rule were split into Muslim Pakistan and Hindu-majority India . Neighbour attacked neighbour and mobs set upon trains and lines of fleeing marchers in the sectarian riots and fighting surrounding partition.

The fasting and pleas for peace of Mohandas Gandhi, the revered independence leader, were of little avail. Estimates of the dead ranged from 200,000 to over one million, and a year after independence Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu fanatic.

The mass bloodshed was only the beginning of the South Asian neighbours' hostility. They marked 20 years of independence not long after the second of their three wars. The 50th anniversary came a year before tit-for-tat nuclear tests that many feared presaged even worse tragedies.

But with the 60th anniversary _ marked on Tuesday in Pakistan and on Wednesday in India _ a rivalry that grew into one of the world's most dangerous is finally mellowing. India and Pakistan are now grappling less with each other than with their own aspirations and problems.

Pakistan, a nation of 160 million, is embroiled in a violent struggle between moderates and Islamic extremists. At stake is the identity of the world's second-most populous Muslim state.

India is racing to become an economic powerhouse. Lightning growth has transformed the country and fuelled a consumer boom. But many of its 1.1 billion people have been left behind _ Indian children are more likely to be malnourished than African ones, and the country is home to about a third of the people across the world who live on less than US\$1 a day.

Mutual animosity lingers across the subcontinent, a territory stretching nearly 3,058 kilometres from Pakistan's mountainous North West Frontier Province to India's steamy southern tip. But attitudes are changing.

``I don't think that for my sons, Pakistan looms like it did for people like me," says Devraj Kumar, 61, an Indian army veteran who fought four decades ago against Pakistani troops in the mountains of disputed Kashmir. He was born a year before partition.

``We lived in a small village. The new border was so close. My father said that he saw miles and miles of trucks and cars, all kinds of vehicles. There were many more people walking. There was butchery _ but my father never wanted to talk of those things," Kumar said.

His family settled in New Delhi, India's capital, where he lived what for his generation was the Indian dream: He joined the army, went to college and took a government job _ ``not much pay but always a paycheck."

The younger generation has moved beyond wanting mere economic security.

Kumar's sons ``are focused on their business, on the rest of the world. One is living in America. All of them want money," he says, speaking over the hum of air conditioning at his eldest son's apartment.

Ten stories down, on the streets of Gurgaon, a seemingly ever-growing New Delhi suburb, the mind-set of today's India is on display.

And like nearly everything else in this teeming country, the scale is staggering.

There are brightly lit malls, glass office towers housing some of the biggest names in India and global business, and apartment blocks that offer India's version of suburban living.

The other side of India, the one that isn't being transformed, is there as well: the army of labourers constructing the dream homes that go for upward of \$100,000.

Most of the workers are migrants from eastern and southern India _ a wide swath of farmland and forests wracked by poverty and a growing communist insurgency that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has called the biggest threat to the country's stability and newfound prosperity.

``We build big houses and live in shacks," a labourer named Mohinder says as he hauls bricks through a construction site turned muddy by monsoon rains. He makes 3,000 rupees (\$75) a month to support his wife and three children.

If India's biggest battle is over giving everyone a piece of the economic pie, Pakistan's main fight is in many ways over its very identity.

Both inherited robust legal and parliamentary traditions from the British. But while India's democratic institutions have remained strong, Pakistan has lurched between corrupt civilian governments and military rule, making its people deeply cynical of politics. Internal conflicts are increasingly viewed through the prism of religion and ever more violent.

The latest symbol of the conflict is the Red Mosque in Islamabad, the Pakistani capital. There the army fought last month against pro-Taliban clerics and militant supporters waging a vigilante anti-vice campaign to impose Islamic law on secular Pakistanis.

The 10-day siege left 102 people dead. In the weeks since, militants have launched reprisal attacks, including two suicide bombings that have killed 29 people in Islamabad.

Mohammed Imran Ghauri, 29, shows the spot where a bomber struck outside his open-air restaurant July 27, targeting police sipping tea about 275 metres from the mosque.

He points to where the suicide bomber's torso landed. In all, 13 people died, including one restaurant worker. Three of his nephews remain in hospital.

``This a conflict between extreme people and the government, and we ordinary people are paying for that," says Ghauri, who narrowly escaped injury in the blast. He shook his head as he eyed dried blood spattered on the ceiling.

But many residents sympathize with the aims of radical clerics who had controlled the Red Mosque _ even if their campaign has triggered more of the violence that has tormented northwest Pakistan since al-Qaida and Taliban put down roots there after the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan.

The vigilantes ``just wanted to clean up the immorality, like prostitution. What's wrong with trying to stop it?" said Javed Kashmiri, a 45-year-old photo shop owner _ one of many who see religion as offering solutions for the failings of government.

Increasingly, frustration over Pakistan's political instability and security woes is targeted at President Gen. Pervez Musharraf, a moderate. He has won support for trying to bring peace with India, but draws contempt for failing to restore democracy after eight years in power.

``I don't feel threatened by outside forces anymore," said Malik Mehboob Elahi, who helped carry off the dead from the bombing. ``We are threatened by our own government, by the internal situation."

In years past, blame for a terrorist attack would have been cast on archenemy India. Animosity persists, but a peace process begun in 2004 has eased tensions _ and started bringing together two peoples who essentially share one broad South Asian culture.

On Monday Pakistan marked the anniversary by releasing 134 Indian prisoners, mostly fishermen or people who said they had strayed across the border by mistake. Some had been held for years. On Tuesday India was to reciprocate by releasing about 100 Pakistanis.

There have been cricket matches between India's and Pakistan's teams, border crossings have been reopened and a Pakistani starlet even played a leading role in a Bollywood film _ albeit one that was banned in Pakistan for being too racy.

The peace process has also weathered a series of bombings in India _ all of which New Delhi blames on Islamic militants based in Pakistan.

Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Singh _ the former ironically born in New Delhi and the latter in what is now Pakistan _ have even declared the peace process ``irreversible."

It's a sentiment shared by millions on either side of the border.

``The hostility between India and Pakistan must end," says I.A. Rehman, a leading Pakistani human rights activist. ``We must learn to be good neighbours. And I'm optimistic. People cannot be foolish forever."

Family of fallen soldier marks grim anniversary on Peacekeeper Day

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WORD COUNT: 296

CALGARY (CP) _ An annual memorial to remember Canadian peacekeepers took on special significance for a family Sunday as they marked the first anniversary of a young soldier's death.

Cpl. Andrew Eykelenboom, 23, was killed in Afghanistan Aug. 11, 2006 when a suicide bomber attacked the convoy he was travelling with. Eykelenboom, who was originally from Comox, B.C., was mere weeks from returning home and was the first Canadian military medic killed since the Korean War.

At Sunday's Peacekeeper Day rally in Calgary, Eykelenboom's brother, Gord Eykelenboom, said after a year of grieving, he has decided to educate his two young sons, Caeden and Neil, about the importance of honouring the sacrifices of Canadian soldiers.

“It's certainly something we're going to be doing every year,” Gord said after the hour-long ceremony.
“Making sure that our kids understand the impact our Canadian soldiers have on all our lives.”

Since Eykelenboom's death, his family started Boomer's Legacy, a humanitarian foundation that works to improve the lives of Afghani people. Eykelenboom's mother, Maureen, said the group received charitable status last month and will present a donation Sept. 9 in Courtney B.C. to the chief of Canada's defence staff, Gen. Rick Hillier.

“The end goal is to build schools for children and educate the children so they can make better choices for their lives,” Maureen said.

“But before we can educate the children, they have to have beds and clean water. They have to have safety.”

Peacekeeper Day is marked annually at ceremonies across the country on or around Aug. 9. Since 1947, 181 Canadians have died during peacekeeping operations around the world.

Aug. 9 marks the anniversary of the worst loss of life for Canadian peacekeepers in a single incident. Nine Canadians, known today as the “Buffalo Nine,” died when their Buffalo aircraft was shot down by Syrian forces near Damascus in 1974.

(Calgary Sun)

Iran–Afghanistan

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PUBLICATION: bnw
WORD COUNT: 108

TEHRAN —Iran's official news agency says President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (mahk–MOOD' ah–muh–DEE'–neh–zhahd) will make his first trip to neighbouring Afghanistan tomorrow.

The visit to Kabul comes after Afghanistan's leader recently said Iran was playing a positive role in his country.

U–S President Bush said last week in a joint news conference with Afghan President Hamid Karzai (HAH'–mihd KAHR'–zeye) that he thought Iran was playing a destabilizing role in Afghanistan, where the Taliban have staged a comeback.

Karzai said he had heard reports that Iranian weapons are flowing into his nation but that so far Tehran has been a ``helper and a solution."

Some Western and Persian Gulf governments allege the Islamic government in Tehran is secretly bolstering Taliban fighters.

(AP)

RMo

Afghanistan clash kills 9 Taliban, 5 police

DATE: 2007.08.13

KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE POLITICS

PUBLICATION: bnw

WORD COUNT: 133

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – Afghan security forces clashed with Taliban militants in southern Afghanistan, leaving nine militants dead, while a subsequent roadside blast targeting a police vehicle killed five officers.

Provincial police chief Sayed Agha Saqib says Afghan police and army soldiers battled militants yesterday in Kandahar province's Shohrawak district.

The joint Afghan forces thwarted a planned militant ambush at the district chief's compound and the ensuing clash left nine militants dead.

Authorities recovered the militants' bodies and weapons.

During a cleanup operation after the battle, a roadside bomb hit a police vehicle in the same district, killing five officers and wounding two others.

Violence in Afghanistan has risen sharply during the last two months. More than 3,700 people, mostly militants, have been killed in insurgency-related violence this year, an Associated Press tally of casualty figures provided by western and Afghan officials indicates.

(AP)

Shuffle means admitting mistakes

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COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 537

Mistakes are facts of real life often fixed with a simple "sorry." In the surreal world of politics, admitting them is always a struggle.

Jean Chretien stonewalled attacks on cabinet ministers, arguing that surrender only encourages enemies. Stephen Harper so dominates his government that errors are too personal to easily correct.

So while the former prime minister delegated power and this one doesn't, they share an iron reluctance to acknowledge imperfection even when it's in their interest. Chretien protected unworthy colleagues and unethical methods until Liberal and sleazy became synonymous. Harper overrode cumulative wisdom to make a retired general and arms lobbyist defence minister and then tolerated blunders that helped turn Afghanistan into an albatross.

Gordon O'Connor isn't the only example of prime ministerial fallibility. His first cabinet was tainted by the inclusion of Vancouver Liberal David Emerson and the appointment of Montreal's Michael Fortier as a senator and the unaccountable minister for the free-spending department that nurtured the sponsorship scandal. Harper's second effort unfairly hung blame for his flat-Earth environment plan on Rona Ambrose.

Mistakes have consequences. Harper traded trust for urban support that hasn't materialized, while the replacement of Ambrose with John Baird exacerbated the impression of cabinet gender imbalance and criticism that Conservatives are more worried about climate-change politics than the planet.

Today's anticipated shuffle is about the after-effects of those and other misjudgments. A ruling party suffering from opinion poll stasis needs the new momentum that comes with changing problematic ministers and none is more problematic than O'Connor.

Harper's decision will add insight to what the last 19 months taught about this Prime Minister. Voters already know he's hard working and rigidly smart; now they will learn if improving Conservative prospects for a majority is seductive enough to accept blame.

Proof O'Connor was the wrong man for a pivotal job runs deeper than his loose grasp of how detainees were treated or mourning families compensated for funerals. More telling is his failure to coherently explain the mission and billions in purchases peripheral to top general Rick Hillier's blueprint for a light, fast response to 21st-century threats.

Weak communications are not entirely O'Connor's fault. The Kandahar story is constantly under revision, winding from retribution for 9/11 and the Prime Minister's unwise appropriation of Uncle Sam's rhetoric to current confusion over when the Afghanistan army will be ready to replace Canadians in combat. Equally troubling, the overarching defence strategy is unclear.

Still, clarity is only one reason why Harper needs a defence minister more compelling than crusty. The other is that Conservatives must expand support for renewed, costly armed forces beyond the party's core constituency.

They need a minister persuasive in English and French as well as one able to convince Canadians that a muscular military projects their values internationally and is under firm civilian control at home. Those are not among O'Connor's underappreciated skills.

Inevitably, a rare third opportunity for a minority Prime Minister to build a strong cabinet turns on what happens to the defence minister today. O'Connor will be moving by nightfall if Harper can find it within himself to even indirectly admit a mistake.

That's something voters forgive as human and only politicians resist as the necessary first step toward a fresh start.

James Travers' national affairs column appears Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

Government's inaction on Khadr 'disturbing'; NDP's McDonough praises forceful appeal

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SECTION: News
PAGE: A13
BYLINE: Bruce Campion-Smith
SOURCE: Toronto Star
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The fact that Canadian Omar Khadr remains the sole Westerner imprisoned in a U.S. military jail in Guantanamo Bay leaves Canada as the only nation unwilling to rescue one of its citizens from a flawed American justice system, NDP MP Alexa McDonough says.

McDonough praised the forceful appeal from the Canadian Bar Association Sunday calling on Prime Minister Stephen Harper to press Washington to have Khadr released into Canadian custody and returned to face justice at home.

While Australia and Britain have taken action to repatriate their own citizens from the U.S. military jail in Cuba, Canada has done little to assist Khadr, McDonough said.

"I think it's deeply disturbing because it does completely contradict many of our existing policies," the Halifax MP said in an interview.

On Sunday, the bar association wrote Harper urging him to intervene to assist Khadr, who was captured at the age of 15 in Afghanistan in 2002 and accused of killing a U.S. soldier. The lawyers complain that in the ensuing five years, Khadr has yet to face justice.

"Khadr should be released into the custody of Canadian law enforcement officials to face due process under Canadian law," outgoing association president J. Parker MacCarthy wrote.

"It is not enough to accept assurances from the U.S. government that 'due process' is being followed. This situation demands immediate action," he wrote.

The Prime Minister's office did not respond to a message seeking comment. But an official with the foreign affairs department said the association's request was being reviewed by government lawyers.

Yet McDonough accused the federal government of hypocrisy for providing aid to rehabilitate child soldiers in Uganda yet doing nothing as Khadr, whom she called a "child soldier," awaits an uncertain fate in a U.S. military justice system widely panned by human rights groups.

McDonough, along with NDP MP Joe Comartin, wrote Harper in the spring with their own appeal for action.

MackKay, O'Connor and Prentice among those expected to be at centre of major cabinet shuffle

IDNUMBER 200708140108
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Star
DATE: 2007.08.14
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SECTION: News
PAGE: A01
ILLUSTRATION: FRED CHARTRAND CP Prime Minister Stephen Harper emerges from his residence at 24 Sussex Drive after meeting with members of his cabinet all day yesterday. ;
BYLINE: Tonda Maccharles and Bruce Campion-Smith Ottawa Bureau
SOURCE: Toronto Star
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 664

Prime Minister Stephen Harper rolls out a new cabinet team today, and some high-ranking ministers could be on the move.

Harper is believed to be shifting the embattled Gordon O'Connor out of the defence portfolio, making room for a more trusted communicator on Canada's controversial military role in Afghanistan.

Last night, sources said there could be three other significant shifts: Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay; Indian Affairs Minister Jim Prentice, one of Harper's most trusted cabinet members; and Industry Minister Maxime Bernier, a Quebecer.

Meanwhile, other ministers appeared to be left out of the shuffle, including Immigration Minister Diane Finley, Justice Minister Rob Nicholson, Environment Minister John Baird and Health Minister Tony Clement.

There were rumours throughout the day yesterday that even Finance Minister Jim Flaherty would be shifted to another portfolio, but a source said last night he would likely stay where he is.

The shuffle will set the stage for a fall session that senior Conservatives expect to be dominated by the environment, the war in Afghanistan and crime, which is emerging as an even bigger issue for the law-and-order party.

Parliament, which was due to resume Sept. 17, likely will not return until sometime after the Oct. 10 Ontario election with a throne speech.

The cabinet changes, to come at 3.45 p.m., are expected to be the most sweeping shakeup yet of Harper's 18-month-old government and are a recognition that the current cabinet doesn't have what it takes to boost public support into majority territory.

Today's changes are a chance for Harper to do a "reassessment of people's strengths," said one Conservative insider. "A chance to see how they measure up in the remainder of a minority Parliament as he looks towards a majority."

La Presse reported last night that Prentice was being shifted to defence, MacKay would assume the industry portfolio, Josee Verner, the minister for international co-operation, was moving to heritage, and O'Connor was going to veterans affairs.

None of these purported moves could be confirmed late last night.

Cabinet ministers passed through the Prime Minister's residence at 24 Sussex Drive yesterday for one-on-one meetings with Harper.

Those ferried to Harper's home included: Nicholson, Finley, Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day, Transport Minister Lawrence Cannon, Veterans Affairs Minister Greg Thompson, and government House leader Peter Van Loan.

Many cabinet ministers were tight-lipped, keen to avoid the wrath of Harper and his penchant to keep the cabinet picks under wraps until today.

"This is excruciating enough as it is," said one minister.

"I'm looking forward to the fall. I'm completely re-energized, and I think you're going to see a very significant focus for the government this fall," said another.

"We had a good cup of coffee," Cannon said after his meeting at 24 Sussex Drive. "I think that whatever change comes about with the meetings the Prime Minister is having with his cabinet, I think Canadians are going to see this as a focused prime minister."

Indeed, not all of those seen entering and leaving 24 Sussex Drive yesterday are on the move. Instead they may have been getting a kind of performance review by the Prime Minister.

"He actually operates as a very business-like fellow as he does these things, " said one senior official.

But beyond that, Conservatives were saying little about the look of the new cabinet team. However, there was speculation that Harper's shakeups will touch high-ranking ministers too, such as Flaherty, who has been bruised by department missteps in recent months.

The story of any shuffle, however, is expected to be how Harper deals with O'Connor, widely criticized for his communications mix-ups over Canada's mission in Afghanistan. While O'Connor was spared in the last shuffle in January, Harper may finally have run out of patience with the retired general.

"If the PM does a shuffle now, I'd think it would include Gordon," one official said. "I'd be very surprised if he leaves him there." O'Connor could be shifted to veterans affairs, said the insider.

But the source said it would be surprising if the Prime Minister drops anyone from cabinet altogether. The view inside is that no one has triggered a scandal or made major gaffes, even if some ministers' communications skills with the media or within their own departments, are wanting.

Instead, the thinking goes, Harper may be interested in shuffling people into other jobs to test and broaden their skills, especially the stronger performers, as the government's lifespan stretches out.

But while the cabinet team has avoided any career-ending screw-ups, Harper is said to have carefully evaluated the performance so far of his ministers.

With files from Canadian Press

Taliban release two female hostages; South Koreans weep with relief after being turned over to the Red Cross

IDNUMBER 200708140068
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Star
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Ont
SECTION: World And Comment
PAGE: AA01
ILLUSTRATION: Musadeq Sadeq ap Two South Korean women head to safety yesterday after their release by the Taliban. It was the first breakthrough in the crisis that began last month. ;
BYLINE: Amir Shah
SOURCE: Associated Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 328

GHAZNI, Afghanistan

Two South Korean women kidnapped by the Taliban burst into tears yesterday after being turned over to the Red Cross on a desert road where the body of one of the original 23 hostages was dumped.

The women's release was the first breakthrough in a drama that began more than three weeks ago when a busload of Korean church volunteers was seized. A second male captive also was shot to death in late July, meaning 14 women and five men are still being held.

The handover came after two days of face-to-face talks between the Taliban and a South Korean delegation. A spokesperson for the hardline Islamist militants said the group released the women as a show of good will during negotiations that he said were going well.

The spokesperson, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, repeated the militants' demand that Taliban prisoners be released in exchange for the remaining 19 hostages. The Afghan government has ruled out any swap.

A few hours later, a German engineer kidnapped last month said in a telephone conversation orchestrated by his captors that he was ill and had been threatened with death.

The man identified himself as Rudolf Blechschmidt and spoke stiffly and with frequent pauses, as though reading from prepared remarks. The talk came about when the hostage-takers phoned an Associated Press reporter and put Blechschmidt on the line.

A Taliban spokesperson has claimed the group kidnapped Blechschmidt and a colleague on July 18 and threatened to kill them unless Germany withdraws its troops from Afghanistan. Afghan officials, however, have said the men were taken by an unaffiliated criminal group.

The second engineer, Ruediger Diedrich, was found dead of gunshot wounds July 21.

Journalists were kept away from the freed women, whom the South Korean foreign ministry identified as Kim Kyung-ja and Kim Ji-na. Previous media reports said they were 37 and 32 years old.

Taliban release two female hostages; South Koreans weep with relief after being turned over to the Red Cross

A convoy carried the women to the U.S. military base in Ghazni, where American and Afghan soldiers blocked the road. U.S. soldiers searched the women and then escorted them inside. The office of South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun said the country was "pleased" at the women's release.

Take up Khadr's case

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PUBLICATION: The Toronto Star
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PAGE: AA06
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 469

For five years, Canada has remained silent as one of its own citizens languishes in a U.S. military prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where he has been denied fundamental legal rights and basic human dignity.

Anxious not to ruffle the feathers of its staunch U.S. ally, Ottawa no doubt has found it expedient to remain indifferent to 20-year-old Omar Khadr's indefinite detention without trial or any semblance of due process. After all, Khadr hardly makes a sympathetic victim.

Accused of throwing a grenade that killed U.S. Army medic Sgt. Christopher Speer in Afghanistan in 2002, Khadr belongs to a family with strong Al Qaeda links that makes no secret of its disdain for Western society. It is difficult to rally public support for his case, despite the clear injustices Khadr has suffered under his American captors.

That's why Prime Minister Stephen Harper has faced little pressure to do the right thing and negotiate with the U.S. government to secure Khadr's release to Canada, where he could be tried in a regular court if the facts warrant it, with all the safeguards our Constitution provides.

So it is welcome news that the Canadian Bar Association, which represents 37,000 lawyers and law students across the country, has written a letter urging Harper to do just that. In the letter, outgoing bar association president J. Parker MacCarthy rightly argues procedures the U.S. is using to jail Guantanamo detainees are "an affront to the rule of law." Drafted after Khadr's U.S. military lawyer, Lt.-Cmdr. William Kuebler, appealed to the association's annual meeting to take up Khadr's case, the letter says Khadr "should be released into the custody of Canadian law enforcement officials, to face due process under Canadian law." Coming from the country's largest legal organization, this is a message the Conservative government cannot ignore.

If anything has become clear during Khadr's five-year detention, it is that he will never get a fair trial at Guantanamo. Charges against him have been stayed twice. Even if he is charged again and eventually acquitted under rules stacked heavily against him, the U.S. is unlikely to release him unless Canada kicks up a fuss.

There is ample reason for Harper to do just that without delay. Khadr was only 15, and acting under his late father's influence, when he allegedly committed the crime of which the U.S. has accused him.

Canada's Youth Criminal Justice Act sets a maximum sentence of six years in custody for first-degree murder. Even if he is found guilty, Khadr has already done ample time by Canadian standards.

Countries like Australia have successfully negotiated the release of their citizens from Guantanamo. Canada should do the same. It is a stain on this country that Ottawa has not spoken forcefully for Khadr.

Taliban free two female South Korean hostages

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PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Early
SECTION: News
PAGE: A12
COLUMN: World Briefing
DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan
SOURCE: Agence France–Presse
WORD COUNT: 102

GHAZNI, Afghanistan — Afghanistan's Taliban freed two South Korean female hostages yesterday in what the kidnappers called a "gesture of goodwill" toward talks to free the remaining 19 captured nearly a month ago.

Wearing Muslim headscarves and crying as they were bundled into a waiting vehicle, the pair were the first hostages freed since the Taliban captured 23 Christian aid workers on July 19. Two others were shot dead.

An official from the International Committee of the Red Cross said the two women were handed over to officials from South Korea, which identified them as Kim Gin–A, 32, and Kim Kyung–Ja, 37.

Padilla called 'star recruit' for U.S. terrorist cell

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PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Early
SECTION: News
PAGE: A12
COLUMN: World Briefing
DATELINE: MIAMI
SOURCE: Reuters
WORD COUNT: 93

MIAMI -- U.S. citizen Jose Padilla was the "star recruit" for a Florida terrorism support cell that sent the former dirty-bomb suspect to an al-Qaeda camp to learn to kill, a prosecutor told jurors in closing arguments yesterday.

The high-profile terrorism case against Padilla and two co-defendants is expected to go to the jury today.

All three face life in prison if convicted on charges that they provided material support for Islamist terrorist groups and conspired to murder, kidnap and maim people in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Bosnia and other countries from 1993 to 2001.

If you want danger, find it at home; Adventure tourists' dollars can prop up oppressive regimes

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PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Comment
PAGE: A10
COLUMN: Kate Heartfield
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Aung San Suu Kyi: No tourists, please.;
BYLINE: Kate Heartfield
SOURCE: Times Colonist
WORD COUNT: 725

As the story of the South Korean Christians taken hostage in Afghanistan shows, the decision to travel to a dangerous country can have horrific consequences, and not only for the travellers.

Anyone who goes to a war zone or an oppressed country has to make an ethical judgment: What will my family, my employer or my government have to do for me if I get into trouble? What effects could my visit have on the politics of the place I'm visiting?

I'm not talking about places with high rates of pickpocketing or malaria infection. I'm talking about war zones or severely oppressive regimes.

The more dangerous the place, the more compelling the reason to travel must be if the decision is to be ethically sound. Trained emergency aid workers have a compelling reason to go to war zones, for example. So do journalists, who report back to the world on the places tourists can't, or shouldn't, go.

Even ill-prepared aid workers or missionaries believe, at least, that they're going for the right reasons.

The people who really bug me are the danger tourists.

Tourists travel entirely for their own benefit. Bored people with disposable incomes don't need to put themselves in danger, to force their governments or families to negotiate with hostage-takers or mount search missions. They don't need to use their money to prop up corrupt or evil regimes. But some do.

Afghanistan is an interesting case: Canada is trying to support the government there, and to develop the economy. So one might argue that going as a tourist is a noble action. But it's doubtful that the economic benefits of Western tourism to Afghanistan outweigh the dangers.

What it comes down to is this: If you're convinced that going to a dangerous place is the right thing to do, then go. But at least think about it first. Don't go just to get an adrenaline rush from the danger that you and other people face.

There seems to be a fashion for nasty destinations in the book world these days. One example is *101 Places Not to Visit: Your Essential Guide to the World's Most Miserable, Ugly, Boring and Inbred Destinations* by Adam Russ.

I've been reading one by Tony Wheeler, the founder of the Lonely Planet guidebook brand, called *Bad Lands: A Tourist on the Axis of Evil*.

I've always been sympathetic to the Lonely Planet philosophy. The books aren't stuffy and they don't assume that Western tourists are as fragile as teacups. But Lonely Planet has taken some criticism for being a little too neutral about its destinations. Wheeler's attitude is neutral in the extreme, judging by his book.

If Wheeler's book were a piece of journalism, it would be ethical, according to my rules. And his book almost is journalism — but not quite. As the title indicates, it's a memoir and a guide to other tourists.

He visits several countries with governments that endanger their own citizens or other countries. He scoffs at embargos, boycotts and travel advisories, without ever addressing the ethics of tourism to "bad lands."

In Afghanistan, he meets a "feisty" Japanese tour operator. He writes that "the Japanese government, like the Australian one, contends that the whole country is a no-go zone. She's irate about this." Wheeler doesn't tell us what the tour operator's argument is. Presumably, he's on her side, since he's a tourist there himself. But he doesn't give his own argument either.

The chapter on Cuba contains a section giving Americans advice on how to get there without their government knowing.

The chapter on Myanmar contains the obligatory history of its democratic uprising and of Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Prize winner who's living under house arrest. But Wheeler doesn't mention that Aung San Suu Kyi has asked tourists not to come to her country until its people know freedom. He doesn't examine the impact of tourism on the generals in charge of the country.

He interviews a tourism operator who "switched sides from the 'boycott Myanmar' activists to her own pro-tourism activities." She's working for a better country "from within," she says, but Wheeler doesn't explain how she's doing that.

Between the lines, there's an assumption that pro-boycott activists are naïve outsiders. Many might be, but they're taking their principles from the democratic movement inside Myanmar.

Wheeler and other danger tourists either don't know or don't care that there is an observer effect in tourism: Just as a scientist can't touch a frog's innards without cutting it open, a tourist can't take a government-approved tour in North Korea without sending a little message of approval to Kim Jong-il.

Ottawa Citizen

Still neck & neck No majority for Tories: poll

SOURCETAG 0708140303
PUBLICATION: The Winnipeg Sun
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 15
ILLUSTRATION: 1. photo by Fred Chartrand, CP Stephen Harper emerges from 24 Sussex Drive in Ottawa yesterday after meeting with members of his cabinet all day. 2. graphic by Sun Media HARPER STILL FAVOURED
BYLINE: KATHLEEN HARRIS, NATIONAL BUREAU
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 388

A majority government remains out of reach for the federal Conservatives, a new poll shows, as Prime Minister Stephen Harper prepares to revamp his cabinet and build momentum before the next election.

The exclusive SES–Sun Media survey shows Tory popularity crept up four points to 36% in the last quarter, but are still virtually neck and neck with the Liberals, who are stalled at 33%. The NDP sank four points to 13%, while the Greens slipped to single-digit 8% status and the Bloc Quebecois rose just one point to 10%.

SES president Nik Nanos said since the numbers appear stuck for the Conservatives, the timing is likely right for Harper to rejig his cabinet and map out new priorities for the fall. But the static scores show that Harper might also be wise to delegate more front-line authority to his ministers to avoid wearing every unpopular issue like the war in Afghanistan.

"If I was looking at these numbers I would be saying it's important for Stephen Harper to shift gears and start focusing on the team," he said. "To elevate, from a public profile point of view, some of his senior cabinet ministers — because right now he has no buffer between himself and these issues." On the leadership front, the poll shows Harper has slipped marginally as Canadians' top pick as PM. About 31% of those polled think he'd make the nation's best leader, down slightly from 33% three months ago. Liberal Leader Stephane Dion climbed to 23% popularity from 15%, while Jack Layton dropped one point to 18%.

With an eye to gaining ground to majority territory, Harper is expected to shift underperformers and promote political prowess when he overhauls his inner circle today. Senior government officials remained tightlipped on who's going where, but all eyes are on embattled Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor. Embroiled in controversies over Afghan detainees and paying for funerals for fallen soldiers, O'Connor is the hands-on favourite for a major move.

But one Tory insider believes the shuffle is as much a chance to reward star performers as it is an opportunity to fix a perceived "problem." "Chances are much better the government has a two-year run, barring major change. So let's make some changes and get the right people in the right spots," he said.

KEYWORDS=CANADA

Taliban release 2 women Breakthrough in hostage drama

SOURCETAG: 0708140296
PUBLICATION: The Winnipeg Sun
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 10
ILLUSTRATION: 1. photo of KIM JI-NA Released 2. photo of KIM KYUNG-JA Burst into tears
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 257

Two South Korean women kidnapped by the Taliban burst into tears yesterday after being turned over to the Red Cross on a desert road where the body of one of the original 23 hostages was dumped.

The women's release was the first breakthrough in a drama that began more than three weeks ago when a busload of Korean church volunteers was seized. A second male captive also was shot to death in late July, meaning 14 women and five men are still being held.

The handover came after two days of face-to-face talks between the Taliban and a South Korean delegation. A spokesman for the hardline Islamic militants said the group released the women, identified as Kim Kyung-ja and Kim Ji-na, as a show of good will during negotiations that he said were going well.

The spokesman, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, also reiterated the militants' demand that Taliban prisoners be released in exchange for the remaining 19 hostages. The Afghan government has ruled out any prisoner swap. Ahmadi, who claims to speak for the Taliban, said the insurgent group decided to free the two Koreans "for the sake of good relations between the Korean people and the Taliban."

A few hours later, a German engineer kidnapped last month said in a telephone conversation orchestrated by his captors that he was ill and had been threatened with death.

The man identified himself as Rudolf Blechschmidt. The talk came about when the hostage-takers phoned a reporter and unexpectedly put Blechschmidt on the line. A Taliban spokesman has claimed the group kidnapped Blechschmidt and a colleague July 18. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Stars fail to align for Layton

SOURCETAG 0708140290
PUBLICATION: The Winnipeg Sun
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: 9
BYLINE: NIK NANOS
WORD COUNT: 483

Minority government should be a political gift for the Layton New Democrats. For a party like the NDP, it can't get much better.

It's an opportunity to advocate, pressure and cajole governing parties. Call it what you will, but it's a chance for smaller parties to punch above their weight.

In theory the stars should be aligning for Jack Layton and the NDP. We have a Conservative government that is quite short of majority in Parliament, the Liberal Leader Stephane Dion is trailing his party, the war in Afghanistan continues to divide Canadians and the environment is simmering as an issue.

How has the NDP under Jack Layton taken advantage of these opportunities? A look at Layton's effectiveness during the Martin Liberal minority and during the Harper Conservative minority reveals two different tales.

Under the Martin minority in 2005, Layton played election brinkmanship by propping up the government budget in exchange for \$4.6 billion in increased spending on housing and the environment and delays in a series of Liberal corporate tax cuts.

Combined with the Belinda Stronach defection, the Martin government survived.

As a result of the budget, Jack Layton and the NDP were relevant and registered "wins" they could legitimately claim.

NEW DYNAMIC

Fast forward a year to the Harper minority and a new dynamic emerges.

Where the Liberals were ready to "deal" with the NDP, the Tories seem more apt to isolate and play parties against each other.

The recent feel-good Conservative budget that included a GST cut and targeted spending left little for the opposition to pick at. Indeed, the Tories have been masterful at creating wedges and dividing the opposition parties. As a result, following the Harper budget, the opposition parties were effectively boxed in and forced to play a delicate game of "who's not going to defeat the government."

The Harper approach is marked by a reluctance to horse-trade. Compound this with the reality that the Harper Conservatives are not natural partners for the NDP on most issues and the result is a diminished opportunity for the Layton New Democrats to score significant legislative victories.

Even with the infertile ground in the House, the fact that the Liberals did not enjoy a post–leadership bounce or honeymoon should have alerted the NDP that there was a leadership void that Layton could step into.

Instead, the Tories ramped up their advertising attacking Stephane Dion and the political narrative focused on the Tories and the Liberals, leaving Layton on the sidelines.

In a way, Jack Layton and the NDP have to decide who they believe their enemy is. But even this basic political decision is fraught with dangers.

Attacking the Conservatives potentially drives nervous New Democrats to the Liberals to block the Tories (our 2004 election scenario — Liberal minority). Attacking the Liberals and driving voters away from the Liberals increases the likelihood of a Conservative victory (our 2006 election scenario — Conservative minority).

VARIABLES

The political calculus for Jack Layton includes a number of key variables. Which governing party or leader is most likely to have a receptive ear to New Democrat priorities? How can the NDP galvanize Canadians opposed to the war in Afghanistan? How can the NDP carve out a policy niche on the environment in the face of a Liberal–Green Party political accord?

All these variables point to the simple fact that this minority environment has more challenges than opportunities for Jack Layton and the NDP.

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SOURCETAG 0708140380

PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun

DATE: 2007.08.14

EDITION: Final

SECTION: Editorial/Opinion

PAGE: 18

BYLINE: NIK NANOS

WORD COUNT: 483

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Taliban release 2 women Breakthrough in hostage drama

SOURCETAG 0708140368
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 10
ILLUSTRATION: 1. photo of KIM JI-NA Released 2. photo of KIM KYUNG-JA Burst into tears
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 257

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The handover came after two days of face-to-face talks between the Taliban and a South Korean delegation. A spokesman for the hardline Islamic militants said the group released the women, identified as Kim Kyung-ja and Kim Ji-na, as a show of good will during negotiations that he said were going well.

The spokesman, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, also reiterated the militants' demand that Taliban prisoners be released in exchange for the remaining 19 hostages. The Afghan government has ruled out any prisoner swap. Ahmadi, who claims to speak for the Taliban, said the insurgent group decided to free the two Koreans "for the sake of good relations between the Korean people and the Taliban."

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The man identified himself as Rudolf Blechschmidt. The talk came about when the hostage-takers phoned a reporter and unexpectedly put Blechschmidt on the line. A Taliban spokesman has claimed the group kidnapped Blechschmidt and a colleague July 18. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Stalled PM shifts gears Harper shuffles cabinet as SES–Sun Media survey shows majority government remains beyond his grasp

SOURCETAG: 0708140358

PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun

DATE: 2007.08.14

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 7

ILLUSTRATION: 1. photo by CP Prime Minister Stephen Harper reveals his new cabinet line-up at a swearing in ceremony today at Rideau Hall. 2. photo of GORDON O'CONNOR Losing defence? 3. graphics

BYLINE: KATHLEEN HARRIS, NATIONAL BUREAU

DATELINE: OTTAWA

WORD COUNT: 512

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SES president Nik Nanos said since the numbers appear stuck for the Conservatives, the timing is likely right for Harper to rejig his cabinet and map out new priorities for the fall. But the static scores show Harper might also be wise to delegate more front-line authority to his ministers to avoid wearing every unpopular issue like the war in Afghanistan.

"If I was looking at these numbers I would be saying it's important for Stephen Harper to shift gears and start focusing on the team," he said. "To elevate, from a public profile point of view, some of his senior cabinet ministers — because right now he has no buffer between himself and these issues."

On the leadership front, the poll shows Harper has slipped marginally as Canadians' top pick for PM. About 31% of those polled think he'd make the best leader, down slightly from 33% three months ago. Liberal Leader Stephane Dion climbed to 23% from 15%, while Jack Layton dropped one point to 18%.

With an eye to gaining ground to majority territory, Harper is expected to shift under-performers and promote political prowess when he overhauls his inner circle today. Senior government officials remained tight-lipped on who's going where, but all eyes are on embattled Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor. Embroiled in controversies over Afghan detainees and paying for funerals for fallen soldiers, O'Connor is the favourite for a major move.

But one Tory insider believes the shuffle, which could affect a dozen or more ministers, is as much a chance to reward star performers as it is an opportunity to fix a perceived "problem."

Junior ministers, including secretaries of state Jason Kenney and Helena Guergis, could be in line for greater roles. Revenue Minister Carol Skelton of Saskatchewan will likely be dropped from cabinet after announcing she won't seek re-election, but Harper is not expected to bring in new blood from the back benches to fill the spot.

The cabinet-making routine must achieve regional and gender balance, but another senior government source said Harper aims to raise the profile of ministers with strong communication skills. If O'Connor is pulled from the key defence file, possible replacements are Jason Kenney, Indian Affairs Minister Jim Prentice, Industry Minister Maxime Bernier and Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day.

With law and order a top priority in the fall, Rob Nicholson could move out of Justice. Treasury Board President Vic Toews has also been rumoured to take up the public safety file when the new line-up is sworn in at a Rideau Hall ceremony this afternoon.

The SES-Sun Media telephone poll of 1,001 Canadians was conducted from July 28 to Aug. 4.
KEYWORDS=CANADA

A soldier's story To know Afghanistan, a Canadian soldier must break through a wall of misconceptions

SOURCETAG: 0708110580

PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun

DATE: 2007.08.11

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 24

ILLUSTRATION: 4 photos by Master Cpl. Martin Forgues 1. The bleak Afghan landscape provides no refuge from the searing heat — "like standing in front of an open oven door" — and only a little more from an unseen enemy. 2. A machine gun manned by Cpl. Pierre-Luc Fountain keeps Kandahar's Camp Nathan Smith safe. The sound of firefights in the distance is a daily occurrence. Montreal Regiment, affected with the safety of the Nathan Camp Smith with Kandahar. 3. Cpl. Pierre-Luc Fountain, Cpl. Daniel Cloutier, Sgt. Jonathan Desmarais and Cpl. Tyler Patnode stand in front of their light armoured vehicle. 4. Afghan children smile as a Canadian patrol passes by.

BYLINE: MASTER CPL. MARTIN FORGUES political science student at Concordia University, and serving member of the Canadian Army Reserve since 1999 at the Montreal-based Regiment de Maisonneuve, holding the rank of Master Corporal. Having previously served in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2002, he's currently in Afghanistan as a member of the Provincial Reconstruction Team, based at Camp Nathan Smith in Kandahar City. An infantry soldier, he is part of the Force Protection Company, charged with the PRT's security, and will do so until returning home in March 2008.

WORD COUNT: 548

A month has already elapsed since my arrival in Kandahar, yet I feel that I have not yet arrived.

Nothing we learned during our 10-month training period prior to deployment could have prepared this cliché-ridden mind for such a violent culture shock.

Of course, all this has a prelude. First, having to leave my beloved Montreal, my beloved Quebec. An impromptu radio interview. One last Friday night out in town, with good drinks and great company. Then, the perfect conclusion to a perfect night, the details of which I'll leave to myself.

One last Saturday night in Valcartier, going through the excruciating logistical and administrative process our deployment requires. Knowing the camp will be dry, I enjoyed a few last drinks until last call and went to bed, without going to sleep.

One last Sunday. Deployment Day, spent with friends and family. The scene happens in 3rd Battalion, Royal 22nd Regiment's garage. Two hundred hyped soldiers, ready to take on the challenge bestowed upon them by their country. The atmosphere is tense, though, as if there had been a violent clash between mixed feelings.

Excitement — mine and that of my comrades — and sadness, that of our loved ones, having to painstakingly let us go do our job. But chief among this emotional maelstrom was a keen sense of pride which overwhelms everything else as we were finally on our way to the airport.

The first three weeks were, in essence, a difficult adaptation period. It is during this period that all we take for granted becomes suddenly fragile.

A soldier's story To know Afghanistan, a Canadian soldier must break through a wall of misconceptions

Be it the water, undrinkable everywhere except in bottles imported from the United Arab Emirates.

Be it food, which is abundant and various for us, but limited to mostly bread, rice and tea for the Afghan workers we see every day. Be it the heat, comparable to standing all day long in front of an open stove door. Be it this somewhat phantom menace, forcing us to wear protective gear and confirmed by the too-frequent firefights we hear almost every day in the distance.

The first contact with the Afghans, whose culture and social rites are the complete opposite of ours, have been very courteous. A lot of cliches and preconceived ideas have fallen as time went by. Instead of the somewhat backwards, angst-ridden people I had been led to expect, I discovered a generous, welcoming people with a strong moral code.

An example of this is this old carpenter who, while visibly poor and obviously aware of our relative wealth and well-being, doesn't shy away from sharing a loaf of bread with us every morning. This daily scene has become for me a symbol of a mutual will to get closer, to sincerely befriend a country which, after too many years of often-fratricide wars, deserves a chance.

Coming to Kandahar, and hence becoming a part of it, comes to breaking a wall. A wall constructed with cliches and wrong ideas, but torn apart by discovering otherwise.

OUR MAN AT THE FRONT

Martin Forgues is a 26 year-old journalism and political science student at Concordia University, and serving member of the Canadian Army Reserve since 1999 at the Montreal-based Regiment de Maisonneuve, holding the rank of Master Corporal. Having previously served in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2002, he's currently in Afghanistan as a member of the Provincial Reconstruction Team, based at Camp Nathan Smith in Kandahar City. An infantry soldier, he is part of the Force Protection Company, charged with the PRT's security, and will do so until returning home in March 2008. KEYWORDS=OTHER NEWS

Taliban release 2 women Breakthrough in hostage drama

SOURCETAG 0708131680
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 7
ILLUSTRATION: 1. photo of KIM JI-NA Released 2. photo of KIM KYUNG-JA Burst into tears
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 257

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The women's release was the first breakthrough in a drama that began more than three weeks ago when a busload of Korean church volunteers was seized. A second male captive also was shot to death in late July, meaning 14 women and five men are still being held.

The handover came after two days of face-to-face talks between the Taliban and a South Korean delegation. A spokesman for the hardline Islamic militants said the group released the women, identified as Kim Kyung-ja and Kim Ji-na, as a show of good will during negotiations that he said were going well.

The spokesman, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, also reiterated the militants' demand that Taliban prisoners be released in exchange for the remaining 19 hostages. The Afghan government has ruled out any prisoner swap. Ahmadi, who claims to speak for the Taliban, said the insurgent group decided to free the two Koreans "for the sake of good relations between the Korean people and the Taliban."

A few hours later, a German engineer kidnapped last month said in a telephone conversation orchestrated by his captors that he was ill and had been threatened with death.

The man identified himself as Rudolf Blechschmidt. The talk came about when the hostage-takers phoned a reporter and unexpectedly put Blechschmidt on the line. A Taliban spokesman has claimed the group kidnapped Blechschmidt and a colleague July 18. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Tories clinging to lead Poll gives Conservatives edge over Liberals on eve of today's cabinet shuffle

SOURCETAG: 0708131667

PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun

DATE: 2007.08.14

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 3

ILLUSTRATION: 2 photos by Fred Chartrand, CP Transport Minister Lawrence Cannon and Vic Toews, president of the Treasury Board, leave 24 Sussex Drive after meeting briefly with Prime Minister Stephen Harper yesterday.

BYLINE: KATHLEEN HARRIS, NATIONAL BUREAU

WORD COUNT: 581

A majority government remains out of reach for the federal Conservatives, a new poll shows, as Prime Minister Stephen Harper prepares to revamp his cabinet and build momentum before the next election.

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SES president Nik Nanos said since the numbers appear stuck for the Conservatives, the timing is likely right for Harper to rejig his cabinet and map out new priorities for the fall. The static scores show that Harper might also be wise to delegate more front–line authority to his ministers to avoid wearing every unpopular issue like the war in Afghanistan.

SHIFT GEARS

"If I was looking at these numbers I would be saying it's important for Stephen Harper to shift gears and start focusing on the team," he said. "To elevate, from a public profile point of view, some of his senior cabinet ministers — because right now he has no buffer between himself and these issues."

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One Tory insider believes the shuffle, which could affect a dozen or more ministers, is as much a chance to reward star performers as it is an opportunity to fix a perceived "problem."

"Chances are much better the government has a two-year run, barring major change. So let's make some changes and get the right people in the right spots," he said.

Junior ministers, including secretaries of state Jason Kenney and Helena Guergis, could be in line for greater roles. Revenue Minister Carol Skelton of Saskatchewan will likely be dropped from cabinet after announcing she won't seek re-election, but Harper is not expected to bring in new blood from the back benches to fill the open spot.

The cabinet-making routine must achieve regional and gender balance, but another senior government source said Harper aims to raise the profile of ministers with strong communications skills.

POSSIBLE REPLACEMENTS

If O'Connor is pulled from the key defence file, possible replacements are Jason Kenney, Indian Affairs Minister Jim Prentice, Industry Minister Maxime Bernier and Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day.

With law and order touted as a top priority in the fall agenda, Rob Nicholson could move out of Justice. Treasury Board president Vic Toews has also been rumoured to take up the public safety file when the new lineup is sworn in at a Rideau Hall ceremony this afternoon.

University of Toronto political scientist Nelson Wiseman doesn't expect a major shuffle will make a big difference to operations.

"The Liberals and the NDP are going to say you're just shuffling the chairs on the Titanic, and the Conservatives are going to say 'We're refurbished, we're renovated,' he said. But in terms of the functioning of government, I don't know if it will change much."

The SES Research poll of 1,001 Canadians was conducted by telephone between July 28 and Aug. 4, 2007 and is considered accurate within +/- 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

Gordon O'Connor leaving defence?

SOURCETAG 0708140467

PUBLICATION: The London Free Press

DATE: 2007.08.14

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: A5

ILLUSTRATION: photo by Reuters DEFENCE: Prime Minister Stephen Harper makes an announcement, joined by Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor, in Resolute Bay last week. Harper announced the opening and funding of a new Canadian Forces Training Centre in the Arctic. O'Connor is not expected to hold on to the defence portfolio in today's cabinet shuffle.

BYLINE: CP

DATELINE: OTTAWA

WORD COUNT: 168

The biggest rumour about the federal cabinet shuffle — and it has been swirling for months — is that Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor will be moved to another portfolio due to sloppy handling of the Afghanistan file.

There was also speculation that the shuffle by Prime Minister Stephen Harper would involve a dozen ministers, including top posts such as finance and foreign affairs.

While the details of the shuffle remained murky, the reasons behind it were no mystery.

Few people expected the current minority Parliament to be this stable when Harper took office 18 months ago and — with no election in sight — the PM hopes to do some retooling for the longer term.

A senior official said the government spent the first 18 months of its mandate focusing on implementing short-term priorities from its last election platform. Those priorities included cutting the GST by one per cent, sending \$1,200 cheques to families with young children, and introducing a new ethics package.

The senior official said the government now wants to turn to longer-term priorities such as economic productivity, combatting crime, and strengthening national unity. KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

Taliban frees 2 Koreans But 16 South Korean women and three men are still being held in captivity.

SOURCETAG: 0708140466

PUBLICATION: The London Free Press

DATE: 2007.08.14

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: A5

ILLUSTRATION: 3 photos 1. photo by AP FREE AT LAST: Red Cross foreign staff call ahead on mobile phones after receiving two released South Korean hostages following their release by the Taliban in Ghazni province, west of Kabul, Afghanistan yesterday. Two women among the 23 South Koreans kidnapped by the Taliban in mid-July were freed on a rural Afghan roadside and then driven to a U.S. base, the first significant breakthrough in a hostage drama now more than three weeks old. 2. photo of KIM JI-NA 3. photo of KIM KYUNG-JA

BYLINE: AP

DATELINE: GHAZNI, AFGHANISTAN

WORD COUNT: 306

The dark grey Toyota Corolla slowed and stopped on the desert road. Two women, one shrouding her face with a turquoise head scarf, the other hidden by a tan scarf, got out and burst into tears.

Waiting Red Cross workers bundled them into a white SUV flying the humanitarian group's distinctive banner. A worker comforted one of the women, holding her head against his chest. Another held out a water bottle to the second woman.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry identified the released hostages as Kim Kyung-ja and Kim Ji-na.

The Taliban are still holding 19 Korean hostages, 16 of them women.

The two South Koreans were tasting freedom for the first time in more than three weeks, and on the same stretch of road where the body of a male colleague was dumped earlier.

The women's release by the Taliban was the first breakthrough in a hostage drama that began when a busload of 23 South Korean church volunteers was seized July 19. A second male captive also was shot to death in late July, meaning 16 women and three men are still being held.

The handover came after two days of face-to-face talks between the Taliban and a South Korean delegation. A spokesperson for the hardline Islamic militants said the group released the women as a show of good will during negotiations that he said were going well.

The spokesperson, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, reiterated the militants' demand that Taliban prisoners be released in exchange for the remaining 19 hostages. The Afghan government has ruled out any prisoner swap.

A few hours later, a German engineer kidnapped last month said in a telephone conversation orchestrated by his captors that he was ill and had been threatened with death.

The man identified himself as Rudolf Blechschmidt and spoke stiffly and with frequent pauses, as though reading from prepared remarks. The talk came about when the hostage takers phoned an Associated Press reporter and unexpectedly put Blechschmidt on the line.

Recently, the Taliban have offered interviews with foreign hostages, apparently to pressure the Afghan and U.S. governments into freeing Taliban prisoners. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Harper not in majority territory

SOURCETAG 0708140448
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A1
BYLINE: KATHLEEN HARRIS, NATIONAL BUREAU
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 511

A majority government remains out of reach for the federal Conservatives, a new poll shows as Stephen Harper prepares to revamp his cabinet and build momentum before the next election.

The SES–Sun Media survey shows Tory popularity rose four points to 36 per cent in the last quarter.

Meanwhile, the Liberals are stalled at 33 per cent.

SES president Nik Nanos said since the numbers appear stuck for the Tories, the timing is likely right for Harper, the prime minister, to rejig his cabinet and map out new priorities.

But the static scores show Harper might also be wise to delegate more front–line authority to his ministers to avoid wearing unpopular issues such as Afghanistan.

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"To elevate, from a public profile point of view, some of his senior cabinet ministers — because right now he has no buffer between himself and these issues."

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Senior government officials remained tightlipped on who's going where, but all eyes are on embattled Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor.

Embroided in controversies over Afghan detainees and paying for funerals for fallen soldiers, O'Connor is the favourite for a major move.

But one Tory insider believes the shuffle, which could affect a dozen or more ministers, is as much a chance to reward star performers as it is an opportunity to fix a perceived problem.

"Chances are much better the government has a two-year run, barring major change. So let's make some changes and get the right people in the right spots," he said.

Junior ministers, including secretaries of state Jason Kenney and Helena Guergis, could be in line for greater roles. Revenue Minister Carol Skelton of Saskatchewan will likely be dropped from cabinet after announcing she won't seek re-election, but Harper is not expected to bring in new blood from the back benches to fill the open spot.

The cabinet-making routine must achieve regional and gender balance, but another senior government source said Harper aims to raise the profile of ministers with strong communications skills.

If O'Connor is pulled from the key defence file, possible replacements are Jason Kenney, Indian Affairs Minister Jim Prentice, Industry Minister Maxime Bernier and Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day.

With law and order touted as a top priority in the fall agenda, Rob Nicholson could move out of Justice. Treasury Board president Vic Toews has also been rumoured to take up the public safety file when the new lineup is sworn in at a Rideau Hall ceremony.

But University of Toronto political scientist Nelson Wiseman doesn't expect a major shuffle will make a big difference to operations.

"The Liberals and the NDP are going to say you're just shuffling the chairs on the Titanic, and the Conservatives are going to say, 'We're refurbished, we're renovated,' " he said. "But in terms of the functioning of government, I don't know if it will change much."

The SES Research poll of 1,001 Canadians was conducted by telephone July 28 and Aug. 4. It's considered accurate within +/- 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

HARPER STILL FAVOURED

Of the following individuals, who do you think would make the best prime minister?

Canada Atlantic Quebec Ontario West

May Aug May Aug May Aug May Aug May Aug

Stephen Harper 33 31 28 31 26 24 35 24 38 41

Stephane Dion 15 23 14 19 13 15 15 33 18 20

Jack Layton 19 18 26 23 19 19 19 17 16 16

Gilles Duceppe 5 6 1 – 19 22 1 – 1 –

Elizabeth May 8 5 5 3 9 1 10 7 7 5

None/unsure 19 19 25 24 15 19 20 19 20 18 KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

Bomber targets convoy

SOURCETAG 0708140600
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 31
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 183

A suicide bomber targeted a U.S.-led coalition convoy in eastern Afghanistan yesterday, while Afghan security forces clashed with the Taliban militants in southern Afghanistan, leaving nine militants dead.

The blast in Khost province killed the bomber, said Gen. Mohammad Ayub, the provincial police chief. There were no immediate reports of casualties among the U.S. forces.

In the south, Afghan police and army soldiers battled militants Sunday in Kandahar province's Shohrawak district, said provincial police chief Sayed Agha Saqib.

The joint Afghan forces thwarted a planned militant ambush at the district chief's compound, and the ensuing clash left nine militants dead, Saqib said. Authorities recovered the militants' bodies and weapons, he said.

During a cleanup operation after the battle, a roadside bomb hit a police vehicle in the same district, killing five officers and wounding two others, Saqib said.

Violence in Afghanistan has risen sharply during the last two months.

More than 3,700 people, mostly militants, have been killed in insurgency-related violence this year, according to an Associated Press tally of casualty figures provided by Western and Afghan officials.

In the northeastern province of Badakhshan yesterday, police arrested a man wearing a suicide vest who said he was from Kazakhstan, said Shamsul Rahman, the deputy governor.

The man said other suicide bombers were in Badakhshan, Rahman said, prompting police to launch a search operation. **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

Taliban release 2 women Breakthrough in hostage drama

SOURCETAG: 0708140584
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 17
ILLUSTRATION: 2 photos 1. photo of KIM JI-NA Released 2. photo of KIM KYUNG-JA Burst into tears
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 257

Two South Korean women kidnapped by the Taliban burst into tears yesterday after being turned over to the Red Cross on a desert road where the body of one of the original 23 hostages was dumped.

The women's release was the first breakthrough in a drama that began more than three weeks ago when a busload of Korean church volunteers was seized. A second male captive also was shot to death in late July, meaning 14 women and five men are still being held.

The handover came after two days of face-to-face talks between the Taliban and a South Korean delegation. A spokesman for the hardline Islamic militants said the group released the women, identified as Kim Kyung-ja and Kim Ji-na, as a show of good will during negotiations that he said were going well.

The spokesman, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, also reiterated the militants' demand that Taliban prisoners be released in exchange for the remaining 19 hostages. The Afghan government has ruled out any prisoner swap. Ahmadi, who claims to speak for the Taliban, said the insurgent group decided to free the two Koreans "for the sake of good relations between the Korean people and the Taliban."

A few hours later, a German engineer kidnapped last month said in a telephone conversation orchestrated by his captors that he was ill and had been threatened with death.

The man identified himself as Rudolf Blechschmidt. The talk came about when the hostage-takers phoned a reporter and unexpectedly put Blechschmidt on the line. A Taliban spokesman has claimed the group kidnapped Blechschmidt and a colleague July 18. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Tories fall short Poll numbers up – but still shy of that elusive majority

SOURCETAG: 0708140568
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 7
BYLINE: KATHLEEN HARRIS, NATIONAL BUREAU
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 469

A majority government remains out of reach for the federal Conservatives, a new poll shows, as Prime Minister Stephen Harper prepares to revamp his cabinet and build momentum before the next election.

The exclusive SES–Sun Media survey shows the Tories' popularity crept up four percentage points to 36% in the last quarter, but they are still virtually neck-in-neck with the Liberals, who are stalled at 33%. The NDP sank four points to 13%, while the Greens slipped to single-digit status at 8% and the Bloc Quebecois rose just one point to 10%.

SES president Nik Nanos said since the numbers appear stuck for the Conservatives, the timing is likely right for Harper to rejig his cabinet and map out new priorities for the fall. But the static scores show Harper might also be wise to delegate more front-line authority to his ministers to avoid wearing every unpopular issue like the war in Afghanistan.

"If I was looking at these numbers I would be saying it's important for Stephen Harper to shift gears and start focusing on the team," he said. "To elevate, from a public profile point of view, some of his senior cabinet ministers – because right now he has no buffer between himself and these issues."

On the leadership front, the poll shows Harper has slipped marginally as Canadians' top pick for PM. About 31% of those polled think he'd make the best leader, down slightly from 33% three months ago. Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion climbed to 23% from 15%, while Jack Layton dropped one point to 18%.

With an eye to gaining ground for majority territory, Harper is expected to shift underperformers and promote political prowess when he overhauls his inner circle today. All eyes are on embattled Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor, embroiled in controversies over his handling of Afghanistan.

But one Tory insider believes the shuffle, which could affect a dozen or more ministers, is as much a chance to reward star performers as it is an opportunity to fix a perceived "problem."

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Taliban release 2 women Breakthrough in hostage drama

SOURCETAG: 0708140674
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 10
ILLUSTRATION: 2 photos 1. photo of KIM JI-NA Released 2. photo of KIM KYUNG-JA Burst into tears
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 257

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Lawyers seek Khadr's return

SOURCETAG 0708140670

PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun

DATE: 2007.08.14

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 7

BYLINE: CP

WORD COUNT: 75

The Canadian Bar Association is calling for a Canadian detainee held at a U.S. military prison to be released and turned over to Canada.

The Association is urging Prime Minister Stephen Harper to call on the U.S. to turn Omar Khadr, 20, over to Canadian law enforcement officials to be dealt with under Canadian law.

CBA President J. Parker MacCarthy says holding Khadr in Guantanamo Bay is an affront to the rule of law.

Khadr is accused of tossing a grenade that killed a U.S. soldier in Afghanistan in 2002.

KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

Majority elusive for Tories Poll shows Conservatives still neck-and-neck with Grits, Ablonczy pegged for cabinet post

SOURCETAG: 0708140669
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 7
ILLUSTRATION: 2 photos 1. photo by Fred Chartrand, CP Vic Toews, president of the Treasury Board, leaves 24 Sussex Drive, official residence of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, after meeting briefly with him yesterday. 2. photo of CAROL SKELTON Will not run
BYLINE: KATHLEEN HARRIS, NATIONAL BUREAU
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 355

A majority government remains out of reach for the federal Conservatives, a new poll shows, as Prime Minister Stephen Harper prepares to revamp his cabinet and build momentum before the next election.

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Revenue Minister Carol Skelton has announced that she will not run in the next election and could be removed from cabinet.

A senior government official said it's "highly unlikely" any backbencher will get into the ministry. However, speculation was rampant MP Diane Ablonczy is set for promotion. That would make sense if Skelton is dropped because Harper would likely want to replace her with another woman.

SES president Nik Nanos said since the numbers appear stuck for the Conservatives, the timing is likely right for Harper to rejig his cabinet and map out new priorities for the fall.

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Welcome home, soldier Calgary celebrates return of one of its own

SOURCETAG: 0708140665

PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun

DATE: 2007.08.14

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 5

ILLUSTRATION: photo by Stuart Dryden, Sun Media Cpl. Jeffrey Taylor hugs mom Jennifer upon arriving yesterday at Calgary International Airport. Taylor, returning from a six-month tour in Afghanistan, was greeted by friends and family.

BYLINE: PABLO FERNANDEZ, SUN MEDIA

WORD COUNT: 341

It was a hero's welcome for a Calgary soldier who returned home yesterday after serving a six-month tour in Afghanistan.

Cpl. Jeffrey Taylor walked through the arrivals gate at the Calgary International Airport and found dozens of friends, family and members of the city's military community applauding and cheering.

Jeffrey's wife Shawna burst into tears when she saw her husband come into view, while the soldier's two young children Kenedee, 9, and Nathan, 8, rushed for an embrace.

"It's very good to be home ... I'm nervous and excited to be with my family," said Jeffrey, as those around him cried and cheered.

"It's awesome, amazing ... just overwhelming."

Jeffrey returned from an operation that has claimed the lives of 66 Canadian soldiers since its inception in October 2001.

The mission was tough, and being away from his family took its toll, but seeing progress being made in the region was worth the heart-ache, said Jeffrey.

"It's a rough go and it's tough to be away for so long, but from the moment that I arrived there to the time I stepped off, the change has been amazing," he said.

Support Our Troops signs, people wearing red and holding giant yellow ribbons awaited Jeffrey, making for a welcome he'd never have imagined, said his wife Shawna.

"It's overwhelming to see the amount of people that came out today," she said. "He left without any hoopla ... and now he's coming home to this."

But the Calgary reserve military police officer, who works for the City of Calgary when not in uniform, came home at a time when his civilian employer is in a political storm after council decided not to put Support Our Troops stickers on city vehicles.

Through tears, Shawna said the issue is not a political one but one of supporting those who answer when Canada calls.

"It's not about the mission, this mission or any other mission — it's about supporting the people who wear the uniform and risk their lives for us," she said.

Jeffrey's dad Gary said he hopes council will change its ruling when it discusses the issue again in September.

"I don't harbour any ill will towards the mayor or the aldermen because they just did what they thought was right and that's democracy," he said.

"But now that they've had feedback from their constituents, I hope they will vote with their conscience."

Ald. Ric McIver, who proposed to have all city vehicles sport a yellow ribbon, was there to welcome Jeffrey home.

Showing the yellow ribbons is important to the city's military community, said McIver.

"This is a big, emotional issue for them and they want to see the visual support from the city they love on the vehicles," he said.

Jeffrey said he'd like to see the stickers on city vehicles but said it's the city's prerogative to show its support the way it sees fit. KEYWORDS=ALBERTA

FRONTPAGE HERO'S WELCOME Local soldier returns from Afghanistan to a ...

SOURCETAG 0708140655

PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun

DATE: 2007.08.14

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 1

ILLUSTRATION: 3 photos photo by Stuart Dryden, Sun Media 1. Calgarian Cpl. Jeffrey Taylor is greeted by wife Shawna and daughter Kenedee at the Calgary International Airport yesterday. 2. Zoo mourns Another gorilla 3. FAST AND FURIOUS Cops in hot pursuit of supercar race ring

WORD COUNT: 0

Taliban frees two S. Korean hostages

IDNUMBER 200708140071
PUBLICATION: The StarPhoenix (Saskatoon)
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: B8
DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan
SOURCE: Agence France–Presse
WORD COUNT: 416

GHAZNI, Afghanistan (AFP) — Afghanistan's Taliban freed two South Korean female hostages Monday in what the militants called a "gesture of goodwill" towards talk to free the remaining 19 captured nearly a month ago.

Wearing Muslim headscarves and crying as they were bundled into a waiting vehicle, the pair were the first hostages freed since the militants captured 23 Christian aid workers on July 19. Two others were shot dead.

An official from the International Committee of the Red Cross said the two women were handed over to officials from South Korea, which named them as Kim Gin–A, 32, and Kim Kyung–Ja, 37.

"We feel fortunate that at least some of the hostages have been released," South Korean foreign ministry spokesperson Cho Hee–Yong said in Seoul, where tearful family members welcomed the release.

"But we again urge the kidnappers to immediately release all our citizens they hold hostage," Cho told reporters.

A woman who identified herself as one of the two released hostages told AFP by telephone before the handover that she was "OK."

Asked if she was one of the South Koreans, she said, "Yes, Korean. We are two, we are OK."

The women were to be taken for a medical checkup at a South Korean military unit at Bagram military base north of Kabul before being flown home, said a South Korean foreign ministry official who asked not to be identified.

The release of the two women came on the fourth day of negotiations at the office of the Afghan Red Crescent Society in the town of Ghazni, 140 kilometres south of Kabul.

Washington welcomed their release and expressed hope the other hostages would also be freed.

"We're very pleased that these two individuals are going to be reunited safely with their families," State Department spokesperson Sean McCormack said.

"We would hope that all of these individuals would be released immediately, unharmed. That's what everybody would like to see," he told reporters.

Taliban spokesperson Yousuf Ahmadi said talks would continue on the fate of the remaining hostages. But he

reiterated the militant group's demand for Taliban prisoners in Afghan jails to be released in return for the remaining captives.

"As we freed two sick female hostages as a gesture of goodwill, we hope that the Afghan government will also free our prisoners," Ahmadi told AFP.

The government of President Hamid Karzai has rejected any deal for the release of the hostages.

Ghazni province governor Mirajuddin Pattan demanded the Taliban "immediately and unconditionally free the rest of the hostages."

He said there had been no pay-off for the two freed Monday and there would none for the others.

"We call upon the Taliban to immediately and unconditionally free the rest of the hostages," Pattan said. The holding of women was against the tenets of Islam, he said, referring to the 14 female captives.

The Taliban abducted 23 South Koreans in volatile Ghazni on July 19. Two male hostages have been shot dead, and the insurgents have threatened to kill more if jailed Taliban prisoners are not released.

Unearthing anguish in a troubled country; Scores of mass graves -- some decades old -- have been discovered across Afghanistan

IDNUMBER 200708140090
PUBLICATION: The Hamilton Spectator
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Canada/World
PAGE: A5
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Pamela Constable, Washington Post / Afghan women joined in a small protest last week in Kabul calling for justice in the disappearance of their relatives. ;
DATELINE: Cham Tala, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Pamela Constable
SOURCE: The Washington Post
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 1636

A dusty track winds through acres of used-car lots, a vast municipal garbage dump and a cluster of abandoned Russian bunkers just north of Kabul, the capital. Eventually it stops at a steep sandy slope, marked off with police tape. At the bottom are three caves, freshly sealed by bulldozers.

Ten weeks ago, acting on a citizen's tip, police excavated the caves, where they found eight human skeletons and signs of others buried more deeply. It was the latest of 88 mass grave sites across Afghanistan charted in the last year by local and international human rights groups, which believe they contain many thousands of victims.

Some of the mass graves are connected with infamous massacres in rural provinces or prison executions in Kabul, and their locations have been rumoured for years. A few have been partly excavated, with several hundred remains identified. In most cases, though, there is no way of knowing who the victims are or when they were killed.

But the grisly discovery at Cham Tala, shown repeatedly on national TV, has suddenly unearthed the long-repressed anger and hopes of Afghans whose relatives disappeared between 1978 and 2001, while the country veered from communist revolution and Soviet occupation to chaotic civil war and religious dictatorship.

For the first time ever, victims' families are beginning to come forward with their stories. They are also demanding justice, despite the fear of reprisal from former militia bosses, a broad amnesty for war crimes passed by parliament, and numerous obstacles to identifying the remains and prosecuting the killers.

"This is my brother. This is my cousin. This is my uncle," said Wida, a slight, grim-faced woman, taking several framed photographs out of a plastic bag. One was an air force engineer arrested in his office, one a long-haired college student dragged from his classroom, one a retired military officer seized while plowing his field. All vanished without a trace, more than 20 years ago.

Last week, Wida and about 150 other people staged a brief protest, holding up photos of the missing as they walked to the UN mission headquarters in Kabul. Some victims had vanished into prisons during the repression and factional power struggles of communist rule in the 1980s. Others were captured by Islamic insurgent groups, who turned against one another in a frenzy of bloodletting that destroyed Kabul in the 1990s.

"Thousands of families are missing people. Every time we hear there is a new mass grave, we all think our relatives might be inside," said Wida, 42, who asked that her full name not be used. "We hoped the state would take action, but the government is filled with criminals. Now our only hope is with the international community. If they help us, we will find more families and form a great movement and make our voices heard."

According to Afghan and UN human rights officials in Kabul, however, the painstaking work that has been done to locate and preserve the mass grave sites, and the evidence that is being gathered from witnesses and victims' families, will essentially be useless unless the authorities are willing to endorse forensic investigations and legal prosecutions.

Until now, the post-Taliban government headed by President Hamid Karzai has shied away from the sensitive issue. He has neither signed nor rejected the amnesty passed last year by parliament that would protect militias and other groups from war crimes prosecutions, though he submitted a revised bill that would allow individuals to be prosecuted if victims or relatives come forward. Human rights groups say dozens of legislators and appointed officials are either former Islamic commanders or communist officials with records of abuse.

"There were 60,000 civilians killed in Kabul alone during the civil war, and some of those responsible are sitting in parliament," said Nader Nadery, an official of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. "If we don't see the minimum political will to deal with the issue of justice, people will just become more frustrated. These graves are stirring up terrible memories, and we cannot afford to ignore them."

Yet both the United Nations and the Western governments that back Karzai have stopped short of calling for prosecutions of wartime abuses and investigations of mass graves, suggesting that preserving political stability is a more urgent priority. In recent weeks, a team of UN experts has been visiting some of the grave sites, but their mandate is only to teach Afghan police how to preserve the contents for any future investigation.

"The common wisdom is that if we touch these graves, it will destabilize the country, but I am not sure that is right," said Javier Leon Diaz, chief human rights officer at the UN political assistance mission in Kabul. "There may be hundreds of mass graves in Afghanistan, but without proper forensic investigations, we will never know the truth. The people want justice, and if they see there is no rule of law and the perpetrators are in positions of power, is that not more destabilizing?"

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission has tried to determine whether each site was a product of the communist, civil war or Taliban era. In several notorious cases, the perpetrating forces and burial sites are widely known, such as the Taliban massacres in the late 1990s of hundreds of ethnic Hazara villagers at Yakowlang District in Bamian province, and the communist government's systematic executions during the 1980s of thousands of prisoners, whose bodies were dumped near Pul-i-Charki prison east of Kabul.

But many of the graves remain shrouded in historical fog and present-day political obfuscation. Some were used as dumping grounds by both the communists and the Islamic commanders who fought them. Some alleged perpetrators are still too powerful to touch, and no one has dared disturb the explosive evidence underground.

Unearthing anguish in a troubled country; Scores of mass graves — some decades old — have been disco

In 2002, for example, rumours spread that a northern warlord, General Abdurrashid Dostum, had suffocated hundreds of Taliban prisoners inside unventilated shipping containers in November 2001 and buried them in Jowzjan province. Journalists found witnesses, and there were calls for an international investigation. But Dostum was still a powerful militia commander, and the Karzai government was seen as too fragile to challenge him, so UN officials advised against an exhumation. The site has never been touched.

In many other cases, witnesses or victims fled the area long ago or were too intimidated to come forward. In several locations where graves have been opened, evidence has been unintentionally damaged by police or journalists. At Cham Tala, for example, police trampled through the freshly opened caves, moved bones and allowed TV cameras inside, rendering the contents virtually useless to investigators, Diaz said.

With the facts so hard to pin down, political factions can easily use the latest grave site discovery to tar their adversaries and keep old wounds alive. At one site found and partly inspected this spring in remote Badakhshan province, a museum of communist-era atrocities is already being built, even though no forensic examination of the remains there has been done.

"We are trying to chart the locations according to phases of time and patterns of violence, but it is very challenging work," said Nadery, the rights commission official. With help from the U.S. group Physicians for Human Rights, commission teams have interviewed more than 5,000 people in 20 provinces, including bulldozer drivers who were ordered to cover the graves. But Nadery said they have not had the means to examine the contents and have documented only "a small part of the overall picture of atrocities."

Ultimately, it may be up to the citizens of Afghanistan to force their government and its international allies to dig up the evidence that others are trying hard to keep buried. Last week's demonstration was a small start, but it was a daring, unprecedented act in Afghanistan. Afterward, the grief and rage that welled up as several protesters told their stories seemed a potentially powerful force for change.

One greying man, Ahmad Ayub, 52, said he stumbled on the protesters by chance and decided to walk along. He trembled with anger as he recounted how his cousin had been murdered along with hundreds of other prisoners at Pul-i-Charki during communist rule.

"I was in that jail, too. It was a horrible place," he said. "Every day they took away a few more people to be killed. Their crime was being too educated or too religious." During the civil war and the Taliban era that followed, he said, people fled the country or had no chance to seek justice. "We thought there would be a decent democracy now, but instead we see the same assassins, talking on TV and passing a law to forgive themselves," he added bitterly. "They are still playing with the blood of the people."

Sarwar Ehsan, 42, listened quietly until Ayub finished, then carefully unrolled a high school portrait of his younger brother. One night in about 1983, he said, a band of Islamic militiamen swept through their neighbourhood, grabbing students and accusing them of belonging to communist youth groups. Ignoring his mother's pleas, they dragged off the brother without even letting him put on his shoes.

"I tried to find him everywhere, but there was never a trace," Ehsan said, his eyes reddening. "Then we had to run away to Pakistan, and there was nothing we could do."

"But all of us have this compulsion to keep searching. I would at least like to find out where my brother is, to see him buried with some respect for human dignity. That does not seem too much to ask."

India, Pakistan inch toward peace; Sixty years after independence, countries focus on internal struggles rather than partition bloodshed

IDNUMBER 200708140089
PUBLICATION: The Hamilton Spectator
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Canada/World
PAGE: A6
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: B. Mathur, Reuters / Indian troops stand guard at the New Delhi parliament. From Kashmir to the troubled towns of its remote northeast, troops are preparing for Independence Day. ; Photo: Khalid Tanveer, the Associated Press / Pakistani students show their hands painted with traditional heena and national flags for today's Independence Day. ;
DATELINE: GURGAON, India
SOURCE: The Associated Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 1032

Sixty years ago this week, India and Pakistan won their independence, and saw it quickly overshadowed by one of the most violent 20th century upheavals as the departing British split the subcontinent.

Some 10 million people moved across borders in one of history's largest mass migrations as the princely states sewn together in 200 years of British rule were split into Muslim Pakistan and Hindu-majority India. Neighbour attacked neighbour and mobs set upon trains and lines of fleeing marchers in the sectarian riots and fighting surrounding partition.

The fasting and pleas for peace of Mohandas Gandhi, the revered independence leader, were of little avail. Estimates of the dead ranged from 200,000 to over one million, and a year after independence Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu fanatic.

The mass bloodshed was only the beginning of the South Asian neighbours' hostility. They marked 20 years of independence not long after the second of their three wars. The 50th anniversary came a year before tit-for-tat nuclear tests that many feared presaged even worse tragedies. But with the 60th anniversary — marked today in Pakistan and tomorrow in India — a rivalry that grew into one of the world's most dangerous is finally mellowing. India and Pakistan are now grappling less with each other than with their own aspirations and problems.

Pakistan, a nation of 160 million, is embroiled in a violent struggle between moderates and Islamic extremists. At stake the identity of the world's second-most populous Muslim state.

India is racing to become an economic powerhouse. Lightning growth has transformed the country and fuelled a consumer boom. But many of its 1.1 billion people have been left behind — Indian children are more likely to be malnourished than African ones, and the country is home to about a third of the people across the world who live on less than \$1 US a day.

Mutual animosity lingers across the subcontinent, a territory stretching nearly 3,058 kilometres from Pakistan's mountainous North West Frontier Province to India's steamy southern tip. But attitudes are changing.

"I don't think that for my sons, Pakistan looms like it did for people like me," says Devraj Kumar, 61, an Indian army veteran who fought four decades ago against Pakistani troops in the mountains of disputed Kashmir. He was born a year before partition.

His family settled in New Delhi, India's capital, where he lived what for his generation was the Indian dream: He joined the army, went to college and took a government job — "not much pay but always a paycheck."

The younger generation has moved beyond mere economic security.

Kumar's sons "are focused on their business, on the rest of the world. One is living in America. All of them want money," he says in his son's apartment.

Ten storeys down, on the streets of Gurgaon, a seemingly ever-growing New Delhi suburb, the mindset of today's India is on display. And like nearly everything else in this teeming country, the scale is staggering.

There are brightly lit malls, glass office towers housing some of the biggest names in India and global business, and apartment blocks that offer India's version of suburban living.

The other side of India, the one that isn't being transformed, is there as well: the army of labourers constructing the dream homes that go for upward of \$100,000 US.

Most of the workers are migrants from eastern and southern India — a wide swath of farmland and forests wracked by poverty and a growing communist insurgency that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has called the biggest threat to the country's stability and new-found prosperity.

"We build big houses and live in shacks," a labourer named Mohinder says as he hauls bricks through a construction site turned muddy by monsoon rains. He makes 3,000 rupees (\$75) a month to support his wife and three children.

Both inherited robust legal and parliamentary traditions from the British. But while India's democratic institutions remain strong, Pakistan has lurched between corrupt civilian governments and military rule, making its people deeply cynical of politics. Internal conflicts are increasingly viewed through the prism of religion and ever more violent.

The latest symbol of the conflict is the Red Mosque in Islamabad, the Pakistani capital. There the army fought last month against pro-Taliban clerics and militant supporters waging a vigilante anti-vice campaign to impose Islamic law on secular Pakistanis. The 10-day siege left 102 people dead. In the weeks since, militants have launched reprisal attacks, including two suicide bombings that have killed 29 people in Islamabad.

Mohammed Imran Ghauri, 29, shows the spot where a bomber struck outside his open-air restaurant July 27, targeting police sipping tea about 275 metres from the mosque. He points to where the suicide bomber's torso landed. In all, 13 people died. Three of his nephews remain in hospital.

"This a conflict between extreme people and the government, and we ordinary people are paying for that," says Ghauri, who narrowly escaped injury in the blast. He shook his head as he eyed dried blood on the ceiling.

But many residents sympathize with the aims of radical clerics who had controlled the Red Mosque – even if their campaign has triggered more of the violence that has tormented northwest Pakistan since al-Qaeda and Taliban put down roots there after the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan.

The vigilantes "just wanted to clean up the immorality, like prostitution. What's wrong with trying to stop it?" said Javed Kashmiri, a 45-year-old photo shop owner – one of many who see religion as offering solutions for the failings of government.

Frustration over Pakistan's political instability and security woes is targeted at President General Pervez Musharraf, a moderate. He has won support for trying to bring peace with India, but draws contempt for failing to restore democracy in eight years of rule.

"I don't feel threatened by outside forces anymore," said Malik Mehboob Elahi, who helped carry off the dead from the bombing. "We are threatened by our own government, by the internal situation."

Yesterday, Pakistan marked the anniversary by releasing 134 Indian prisoners, mostly fishermen or people who said they had strayed across the border by mistake. Some had been held for years. Today India was to reciprocate by releasing about 100 Pakistanis.

Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Singh — the former ironically born in New Delhi and the latter in what is now Pakistan — have even declared the peace process "irreversible."

It's a sentiment shared by millions on either side of the border.

Harper can't stifle initiative

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BYLINE:	Robert Howard
SOURCE:	The Hamilton Spectator
COPYRIGHT:	© 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT:	182

A cabinet shuffle is rarely, in itself, significant change.

Voters will not much change their opinions on Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government because of his anticipated cabinet shuffle today. They will decide, likely in 2009, whether to keep the Conservatives in power based on what they accomplished.

There is a sense of drift in this government now, not in ideology, which remains an essentially pragmatic conservatism, but in terms of results. Minority governments often do find it difficult to effect major change, but Harper's government seems to have lost its initial momentum.

Shuffles can spark new thinking and action. But Harper must also be aware that his one-man leadership style appears to stifle initiative.

Harper and his cabinet need to show action on several key issues, including a frank and generous public discussion of Canada's role (or lack of it) in Afghanistan after next winter; next-step action on the Conservatives' environment plan; ending destructive hostility between Ottawa and several provinces; significant movement on native claims and grievances; and how this government has dealt with the U.S. on trade, security and, yes, Arctic sovereignty issues.

Results, not a "new look," will decide if the PM gets to keep his office.

Cabinet shuffle would put life into Tories

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Spectator
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SECTION: Opinion
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COLUMN: James Travers
DATELINE: Ottawa
BYLINE: James Travers
SOURCE: Toronto Star
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar
Corporation
WORD COUNT: 516

Mistakes are facts of real life often fixed with a simple "sorry". In the surreal world of politics, admitting them is always a struggle.

Jean Chretien stonewalled attacks on cabinet ministers arguing that surrender only encourages enemies. Stephen Harper so dominates his government that errors are too personal to easily correct.

So while the former prime minister delegated power and this one doesn't, they share an iron reluctance to acknowledge imperfection even when it's in their interest. Chretien protected unworthy colleagues and unethical methods until Liberal and sleazy became synonymous. Harper overrode cumulative wisdom to make a retired general and arms lobbyist defence minister and then tolerated blunders that helped turn Afghanistan into an albatross.

Gordon O'Connor isn't the only example of prime ministerial fallibility. His first cabinet was tainted by the inclusion of Vancouver Liberal David Emerson and the appointment of Montreal's Michael Fortier as a senator and the unaccountable minister for the free-spending department that nurtured the sponsorship scandal. Harper's second effort unfairly hung blame for his flat-earth environment plan on Rona Ambrose.

Mistakes have consequences. Harper traded trust for urban support that hasn't materialized while replacing Ambrose with John Baird exacerbated the impression of cabinet gender imbalance and criticism that Conservatives are more worried about climate change politics than the planet.

Today's anticipated cabinet shuffle is about the after-effects of those and other apparent misjudgments. A ruling party suffering from opinion poll stasis needs the new momentum that comes with changing problematic ministers and none is more problematic than O'Connor.

Harper's decision will add insight to what the last 19 months taught about this prime minister. Voters already know he's hard working and rigidly smart, now they will learn if improving Conservative prospects for a majority is seductive enough to accept blame.

Proof O'Connor was the wrong man for a pivotal job runs deeper than his loose grasp of how detainees were treated or mourning families compensated for funerals. More telling is his failure to coherently explain the mission and billions in purchases peripheral to top General Rick Hillier's blueprint for a light, fast response to

21st century threats.

Weak communications are not entirely O'Connor's fault. The Kandahar story is constantly under revision, winding from retribution for 9/11 and the prime minister's unwise appropriation of Uncle Sam's rhetoric to current confusion over when the Afghanistan army will be ready to replace Canadians in combat, and the overarching defence strategy is unclear.

Still, clarity is only one reason why Harper needs a defence minister more compelling than crusty. The other is that Conservatives must expand support for renewed, costly armed forces beyond the party's core constituency.

They need a minister persuasive in English and French, as well as one able to convince Canadians that a muscular military projects their values internationally.

Those are not among O'Connor's underappreciated skills.

Inevitably, a rare third opportunity for a minority prime minister to build a strong cabinet turns on what happens to the defence minister today.

O'Connor will be moving by nightfall if Harper can find it within himself to even indirectly admit a mistake.

That's something voters forgive as human and only politicians resist as the necessary first step toward a fresh start.

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Taliban free two hostages; Hope 'gesture of goodwill' will lead to release of militants in Afghan jails

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SECTION: News

PAGE: C2

Colour Photo: Massoud Hossaini, Agence France–Presse; Getty Images / NO

ILLUSTRATION: PICTURES: A man from the International Committee of the Red Cross puts his hand in front of the cameras as the two South Korean hostages freed by the Taliban arrive. ;

DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan

SOURCE: Agence–France Presse

WORD COUNT: 414

GHAZNI, Afghanistan – Afghanistan's Taliban freed two South Korean female hostages Monday in what the militants called a "gesture of goodwill" toward talks to free the remaining 19 captured nearly a month ago.

Wearing Muslim headscarves and crying as they were bundled into a waiting vehicle, the pair were the first hostages freed since the militants captured 23 Christian aid workers on July 19. Two others were shot dead.

An official from the International Committee of the Red Cross said the two women were handed over to officials from South Korea, which named them as Kim Gin–A, 32, and Kim Kyung–Ja, 37.

"We feel fortunate that at least some of the hostages have been released," South Korean foreign ministry spokesman Cho Hee–Yong said in Seoul, where tearful family members welcomed the release.

"But we again urge the kidnappers to immediately release all our citizens they hold hostage," Cho told reporters.

A woman who identified herself as one of the two released hostages told AFP by telephone before the handover that she was "OK."

Asked if she was one of the South Koreans, she said, "Yes, Korean. We are two, we are OK."

The women were to be taken for a medical check–up at a South Korean military unit at Bagram military base north of Kabul before being flown home, said a South Korean foreign ministry official who asked not to be identified.

The release of the two women came on the fourth day of negotiations at the office of the Afghan Red Crescent Society in the town of Ghazni, 140 kilometres south of Kabul.

Washington welcomed their release and expressed hope the other hostages would also be freed.

"We're very pleased that these two individuals are going to be reunited safely with their families," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said.

"We would hope that all of these individuals would be released immediately, unharmed. That's what everybody would like to see," he told reporters.

Taliban spokesman Yousuf Ahmadi said talks would continue on the fate of the remaining hostages. But he said the militant group demands Taliban prisoners in Afghan jails be released in return for the remaining captives.

"As we freed two sick female hostages as a gesture of goodwill, we hope that the Afghan government will also free our prisoners," Ahmadi said.

The government of President Hamid Karzai has rejected any deal for the release of the hostages.

Ghazni province governor Mirajuddin Pattan demanded the Taliban "immediately and unconditionally free the rest of the hostages."

NO PAY-OFF

He said there had been no pay-off for the two freed Monday and there would be none for the others.

"We call upon the Taliban to immediately and unconditionally free the rest of the hostages," Pattan said. The holding of women was against the tenets of Islam, he said, referring to the 14 female captives.

The Taliban abducted 23 South Koreans in volatile Ghazni on July 19.

Meanwhile, a man who identified himself as a German national who was abducted a day before the South Koreans told AFP on Monday that his captors want to kill him.

AFGHANISTAN: SOUTH KOREAN CAPTIVES Taliban release two hostages Women freed as 'gesture of goodwill' after two days of talks with insurgents

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DATE: 2007.08.14

PAGE: A9 (ILLUS)

BYLINE: TIM ALBONE

SECTION: International News

SOURCE: SPCL AP NYT

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: Kabul AFGHANISTAN

WORDS: 612

WORD COUNT: 568

TIM ALBONE Special to The Globe and Mail, with files from Associated Press and New York Times News Service KABUL Two South Korean women, part of a group of 23 kidnapped nearly a month ago in Afghanistan's volatile south, were released by their Taliban captors yesterday as a "gesture of goodwill." The women – Kim Kyung-ja, 37 and Kim Ji-na, 32 – were freed after two days of face-to-face talks between South Korean officials and Taliban insurgents over the weekend.

The handover to Red Cross officials took place on an isolated road about eight kilometres south of the city of Ghazni, not far from where the body of a male hostage was dumped about two weeks ago.

Wearing head scarves, khaki pants and traditional Afghan knee-length shirts, the women were driven to the site by an Afghan elder, Haji Zahir, who also got into one of the Red Cross vehicles with the freed hostages.

Inside the SUV, a worker patted one woman on the back and put her head against his chest as she cried.

A convoy carried the women to the U.S. military base in Ghazni, where American and Afghan soldiers blocked the road.

Ustad Merajuddin Pathan, governor of Ghazni province, said no Taliban prisoners were released in exchange for the pair and no ransom was paid. "There was no payoff for their release," he said.

Mr. Pathan – who at one point in the hostage crisis suggested paying a ransom was a possible solution – said no ransom would be paid "for the rest of the hostages." Qari Yousef Ahmadi, who claims to speak for the outlawed insurgent group, told the Associated Press that the two were freed "for the sake of good relations between the Korean people and the Taliban." The Taliban had previously suggested that both women were ill.

"We are expecting the Korean people and government to force the Kabul administration and the U.S. to take a step to releasing Taliban prisoners," he added by telephone from a secret location.

The government of Afghanistan has repeatedly denied that it will heed Taliban demands to exchange prisoners for the hostages.

"Our position is the same; we are not releasing [any Taliban prisoners]," Mr. Pathan said.

AFGHANISTAN: SOUTH KOREAN CAPTIVES Taliban release two hostages Women freed as 'gesture of goodwill' after two days of talks with insurgents

In March, Hamid Karzai, the Afghan President, drew widespread condemnation when he released five Taliban commanders in exchange for Daniele Mastrogiacomo, an Italian journalist held hostage by insurgents in Helmand province. After the release, which was criticized by Britain and America, Mr. Karzai promised not to repeat the deal.

The latest release is the first positive development in the three-week-old drama. Two male hostages have been executed by rebels, leaving 19 remaining – 14 women and five men.

The freed women are said to be staying in the American base in Ghazni. While there, they will be debriefed by Afghan, American and South Korean officials.

"We will be talking to them shortly to find as much information as we can," Mr. Pathan said.

The South Korean government welcomed the news, although it urged the Taliban to release the remaining captives.

"We urge the kidnappers to release our people and we will make efforts for the safety and release of South Koreans," Cho Hee-young, a Foreign Ministry spokesman, said.

The two women travelled to Afghanistan on an aid mission to provide relief at hospitals and kindergartens, according to officials at Bundan Saemmul Presbyterian Church south of Seoul, to which both women belonged.

Since the two male hostages were killed last month, the South Korean government has been under intense pressure to rescue the remaining South Koreans.

President Roh Moo-hyun welcomed the news of the release and told his government to "exert all efforts for the early return of the other hostages," said his spokesman, Cheon Ho-seon.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM: strife; terrorism; kidnapping; hostages; south koreans

PERSONAL NAME: Kim Kyung-ja; Kim Ji-na

ORGANIZATION NAME: Taliban

German pleads for help

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PAGE: A9

BYLINE: NASRAT SHOIAB

SECTION: International News

SOURCE: AFP

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: Kandhar

WORDS: 229

WORD COUNT: 207

Nasrat Shoiab AFP Kandhar A man who identified himself as a German held hostage in Afghanistan for more than three weeks said yesterday his Taliban captors want to kill him.

The man, who gave his name as Rudolph Blechschmidt, said he was ill and appealed to the German government to help free him.

"The Taliban want to kill me ... I am in danger also, and I am very sick," he told Agence France–Presse by telephone in an interview arranged by the hard–line militants.

The man, whose identity was not possible to independently confirm, said he had heart problems but did not have the medicine he needed.

Speaking in broken English, the man said his captors wanted to speak directly with the Afghan government and the German embassy, and appealed for help to arrange contact with them.

"I am very sorry because the Kabul government and the German embassy did not hear my voice and my crying from this mountain," he said.

"The German embassy, they don't call. The last call with the embassy was one week [ago]," he said. "I don't hear anything from them." The man – identified in the media as a 62–year–old engineer– was captured July 18 with a German colleague in the Afghan province of Wardak.

The other German suffered circulatory failure a few days later and was then shot dead by his captors.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM: strife; terrorism; hostages; kidnapping; germans

PERSONAL NAME: Rudolph Blechschmidt

ORGANIZATION NAME: Taliban

WORLD Protectionists feast on anti-China backlash

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BYLINE: BARRIE MCKENNA

SECTION: Report on Business

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: Washington DC

WORDS: 749

WORD COUNT: 720

BARRIE MCKENNA WASHINGTON Wise investors should regularly take note of things that could come up and bite the global economy. Wars, global warming or oil prices come to mind.

It's probably too late to get all bent out of shape about the U.S. subprime mess.

Risk factors rise and fall as a focus of attention, buffeting financial markets along the way. Three months ago, few ordinary Canadians could tell you what a subprime mortgage was. Now, central banks around the world are flushing the financial system with cash to thwart a global banking crisis that began with bad mortgage loans in a single country.

That's why it's important to track emerging threats. Here's one item you might want to add to your list: the growing angst about the safety of Chinese products.

Polls show people are growing increasingly wary of the ubiquitous made-in-China label. In the past few months, we have learned about toxic pet food additives, toys made with dangerously high levels of lead paint, toothpaste laced with antifreeze and shoddy tires.

Not surprisingly, more than eight in 10 Americans now say they are worried about Chinese products, according to a recent Zogby International poll. Two-thirds say they would support a boycott of all Chinese products.

North Americans should be concerned about the quality and safety of the products they consume – especially if they have the potential to kill. But a growing backlash, focused almost exclusively on China, could also unleash a cascade of unanticipated effects in foreign markets that have grown highly dependent on Chinese imports.

The greatest threat is that product safety becomes a pretext for much broader protectionism.

There is already some evidence this is happening. Politics is often a crime of opportunity. And the anti-China lobby, which has been looking at the same polls, is all revved up for a busy fall in Washington.

The same actors, who for more than a year now have tried to punish China for manipulating the value of the yuan, are now invoking dead cats and sick kids to push for sweeping trade sanctions. New York Democratic Senator Charles Schumer is getting much more traction for his bill now than he was before anyone had heard of melamine, the toxic protein booster found in pet food.

Likewise, U.S. Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards, who has long been a hardliner on trade, has invoked the food scare to push for a renegotiation of the North American free-trade deal and other trade agreements. He's also called for tougher inspections of food imports and mandatory country-of-origin labelling.

The tough talk on trade from Mr. Edwards, who is heavily backed by organized labour, isn't new. What is new is his rhetoric about "smarter, safer trade." Organized labour has also seized on the food safety scare to attack long-time foe Wal-Mart, which remains staunchly non-union. In early July, the union-funded group, WakeUpWalMart.com, ran TV ads that attacked the retailer for buying too many goods from a country that "ships weapons to terrorists in Afghanistan." Likewise, U.S. producers of farm-raised catfish ended years of frustration by recently convincing the U.S. government to crack down on imports of farm-raised fish from China and Vietnam. Before the food safety scare, their warnings about potential carcinogens in imported fish went unheeded.

North Americans could happily do without Chinese-made Thomas the Tank Engine toys or artificially enhanced pet food. But China has become a leading source of many other products the global economy can't easily do without.

Growing demand in the United States for electronic products, minerals and metals accounted for nearly two-thirds of the 18-per-cent rise in Chinese imports in 2006, according to a report released yesterday by the U.S. International Trade Commission. Imports of computer and telecom equipment rose 16 and 26 per cent respectively in 2006, establishing China as a key cog in the U.S. Internet and broadband explosion.

If trade in any of these products is impeded, the U.S. economy would suffer more than most people imagine. Worse still, if the United States takes steps to curtail Chinese imports, it's not far-fetched to imagine that other major exporters, such as Canada, could be caught up in the crackdown.

So when you're fretting about the next big risk to the global economy, don't overlook the trade climate in Washington.

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ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: China; United States

SUBJECT TERM: trade; policy; food safety; public health; political; legislation; economy

High-profile switches expected in shuffle

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PAGE: A1 (ILLUS)

BYLINE: BRIAN LAGHI, JANE TABER, CAMPBELL CLARK, DANIEL LEBLANC

SECTION: National News

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: Ottawa ONT

WORDS: 1058

WORD COUNT: 1131

BRIAN LAGHI, JANE TABER, CAMPBELL CLARK, DANIEL LEBLANC OTTAWA BUREAU CHIEF
SENIOR POLITICAL WRITER OTTAWA Prime Minister Stephen Harper will refresh the top tier of his cabinet today by moving some of his most high-profile cabinet ministers, including an expected move of Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay to the sensitive Defence portfolio.

Maxime Bernier, a rising Quebec presence in the government, is expected to move to Foreign Affairs, while sources said Indian Affairs Minister Jim Prentice will head to Industry. A high-level source said last night that Agriculture Minister Chuck Strahl will likely be moved to Indian Affairs.

The Prime Minister is issuing a new to-do list for the fall, handing out new mandate letters to each member of his cabinet. The changes will address vulnerabilities in the handling of the Afghanistan mission and stress economic productivity. Mr. Harper met individually yesterday and on the weekend with most of his cabinet ministers at his official residence, 24 Sussex Dr., where he handed out the new assignments. He had also been scheduled to meet with Mr. MacKay and Mr. Prentice on the weekend.

Sources said the cabinet shuffle will be a substantial revamp that is expected to include at least nine ministers. Mr. Prentice, a trusted lieutenant to Mr. Harper, is expected to become the Industry minister, taking the portfolio to be vacated by Mr. Bernier. Sources also said that Mr. Bernier and his staff have been plumping for the Foreign Affairs job.

Mr. Bernier has earned the trust of the Prime Minister as a skilled communicator, acting as the main French-language spokesman when the government released its budget. He also had a key role in outlining the new softwood lumber agreement with the United States, and helped launch new Conservative attack ads against the Liberals.

It was still unclear last night what Mr. Harper would do with Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor, who has had a difficult time in the portfolio. Insiders predicted last night he will be moved. Mr.

MacKay would be a convenient fit in the role for a number of reasons.

He, too, is seen as a good communicator in a portfolio where Mr.

O'Connor has been accident-prone in handling issues such as the alleged torture of Afghan detainees.

Mr. MacKay is also the minister for Atlantic Canada, home to a large chunk of the Armed Forces. The region has become difficult for the Tories in the wake of accusations that they have broken their pledges for

enriching the equalization system.

Some sources said Mr. Harper has left himself some room as late as this morning to make adjustments to the revamp. The swearing-in doesn't take place until late this afternoon.

Other ministers rumoured for transfer include Heritage's Bev Oda and Josee Verner, the Minister for International Co-operation. Sources said Ms. Verner is expected to take the Heritage portfolio.

University of Calgary professor David Bercuson, the director of the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, said the government needs to develop a clearer message for the Canadian role in Afghanistan – and make sure the Prime Minister and all his ministers are communicating aspects of the same theme.

He said there has been an appearance of government figures heading in different directions, and that has to change. "You're running a war here. People are being killed," he said.

Mr. Bercuson said it now appears a new defence minister is needed to communicate Canada's role in Afghanistan to the public, and also to draw a clear line about civilian command, because apparent divisions between Mr. O'Connor and the Chief of Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier, may have blurred the lines for the military.

The redesign of the cabinet team will be Mr. Harper's second substantial cabinet shuffle this year in preparation for what may be a longer tenure than many expected for his minority government.

The makeover is intended to prepare the Conservative government to take the political initiative after a spring session on the defensive, and during which their electoral platform appeared to lose steam.

The present cabinet On the eve of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's latest cabinet shuffle, the following is the makeup of the present cabinet, last changed Jan. 4, 2007: % DIFFERENCE BETWEEN VOTES MINISTER TITLE FOR THE ELECTED, FIRST RUNNER-UP Stephen Harper Prime Minister 61% Robert Nicholson Minister of Justice and Attorney-General of Canada 5.8% David Emerson (as a Liberal) Minister for International Trade 9.9% Jean-Pierre Blackburn Minister of Labour 12.8% Gregory Thompson Minister of Veterans Affairs 28% Marjory LeBreton (Senator) Leader of the Government in the Senate Monte Solberg Minister of Human Resources and Social Development 74.1% Chuck Strahl Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food 35.1% Gary Lunn Minister of Natural Resources 10.6% Peter MacKay Minister of Foreign Affairs 7.8% Loyola Hearn Minister of Fisheries and Oceans 11.7% Stockwell Day Minister of Public Safety 27.2% Carol Skelton Minister of National Revenue 6.6% Vic Toews President of the Treasury Board 49.8% Rona Ambrose Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs 5% Diane Finley Minister of Citizenship and Immigration 14% Gordon O'Connor Minister of National Defence 32.6% Bev Oda Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women 17% Jim Prentice Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development 39.2% John Baird Minister of the Environment 9% Maxime Bernier Minister of Industry 47.1% Lawrence Cannon Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities 5% Tony Clement Minister of Health 0.1% Jim Flaherty Minister of Finance 5.1% Josee Verner Minister for International Co-operation 33.5% Michael Fortier (Senator) Minister of Public Works and Government Services Peter Van Loan Leader of the Government in the House of Commons 17.2% Jay Hill Secretary of State 42.8% Jason Kenney Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity) 64.8% Gerry Ritz Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism) 38.2% Helena Guergis Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) 18.9% Christian Paradis Secretary of State (Agriculture) 17.2% CABINET MINISTERS BY SEX Female: 7 Male: 25 CABINET MINISTERS BY PROVINCE, SEX B.C.: 5 Male Alta.: 4 Male, 1 Female Sask.: 1 Male, 1 Female Man.: 1 Male Ont.: 6 Male, 4 Female Que.: 5 Male, 1 Female N.B.: 1 Male N.S.: 1 Male Nfld.: 1 Male EDITORIAL RESEARCH, MIKE FAILLE/THE GLOBE AND MAIL:

SOURCE:

ELECTIONS CANADA |ADDED SEARCH TERMS: |GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada
|SUBJECT TERM:government; political; members; men; women; statistics; list |PERSONAL
NAME: Stephen Harper |ORGANIZATION NAME: Conservative Party of Canada; Cabinet

Taliban free two Korean hostages

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DATE: 2007.08.14

PAGE: A14

SECTION: World Wire

WORD COUNT: 336

CP Wire GHAZNI, Afghanistan — The grey Toyota Corolla slowed and stopped on the desert road. Two women, one shrouding her face with a turquoise head scarf, the other hidden by a tan scarf, got out and burst into tears.

Waiting Red Cross workers bundled them into a white SUV flying the humanitarian group's distinctive banner. A worker comforted one of the women, holding her head against his chest. Another held out a water bottle to the second woman.

The two South Koreans were tasting freedom for the first time in more than three weeks, and on the same stretch of road where the body of a male colleague was dumped earlier.

The women's release by the Taliban on Monday was the first breakthrough in a hostage drama that began when a busload of 23 South Korean church volunteers was seized July 19. A second male captive also was shot to death in late July, meaning 14 women and five men are still being held.

The handover came after two days of face-to-face talks between the Taliban and a South Korean delegation. Qari Yousef Ahmadi, a spokesman for the hardline Islamic militants, said the group released the women as a show of goodwill during negotiations that he said were going well.

Ahmadi also reiterated the militants' demand that Taliban prisoners be released in exchange for the remaining 19 hostages. The Afghan government has ruled out any prisoner swap.

A few hours later, a German engineer kidnapped last month said in a telephone conversation orchestrated by his captors that he was ill and had been threatened with death.

The man identified himself as Rudolf Blechschmidt and spoke stiffly and with frequent pauses, as though reading from prepared remarks.

The talk came about when the hostage takers phoned an Associated Press reporter and unexpectedly put Blechschmidt on the line.

In recent weeks, the Taliban have offered interviews with foreign hostages, apparently hoping to pressure the Afghan and U.S. governments into freeing Taliban prisoners.

A Taliban spokesman has claimed the group kidnapped Blechschmidt and a colleague July 18 and threatened to kill them unless Germany withdraws its troops from Afghanistan.

The second engineer, Ruediger Diedrich, was found dead July 21.

— Associated Press

Use a Canadian symbol to support our troops

IDNUMBER 200708140030
PUBLICATION: Vancouver Sun
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial
PAGE: A14
KEYWORDS: 0
BYLINE: Catriona Simpson
SOURCE: Vancouver Sun
WORD COUNT: 119

Re: Police cars to show troop support, Aug. 11

I strongly disagree with the Vancouver Police Department's decision to put yellow ribbons on police vehicles and am surprised it did not have to get city council's approval for this.

To my mind, the yellow ribbon shows support for the war in Iraq rather than for soldiers, and not even the other wars and peacekeeping missions. Even more important, this symbol is an American affectation. Should the VPD officers feel the need to show their support for the Canadians fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq and on peacekeeping missions, the Canadian symbol for support and remembrance of our men and women in the services is the poppy.

Catriona Simpson

Vancouver

The U.S. is caught between Iran and a hard place

IDNUMBER 200708140029
PUBLICATION: Vancouver Sun
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial
PAGE: A14
KEYWORDS: WAR; IRAQ; ARMED FORCES; UNITED STATES
SOURCE: The Los Angeles Times
WORD COUNT: 549

The Iranians are riding high these days. While the United States is hemorrhaging \$5 billion a month in Iraq trying to stabilize Iran's flattened former enemy, Tehran is hauling in \$5 billion a month in oil revenues. Iran is making life miserable for the U.S. in Iraq by allowing weapons to flow to Shiite fighters who are attacking U.S. troops there, if it isn't arming and training the insurgents itself.

Meanwhile, Iran's centrifuges are probably spinning away, enriching uranium that could be used for nuclear weapons. Although Russia has taken the welcome step of refusing to deliver fuel to Iran's Bushehr civilian nuclear reactor, countries with commercial interests in Iran continue to balk at imposing United Nations Security Council economic sanctions with teeth. People who have met unofficially with senior Iranians recently describe them as self-confident, even cocky, and uninterested in bettering relations with the U.S.

In response, the Bush administration has been ratcheting up its rhetoric. Last Thursday, the president warned that "there will be consequences" for those delivering the sophisticated explosives that have been killing and maiming U.S. troops. On Friday, McClatchy newspapers reported that Vice President Dick Cheney has advocated U.S. airstrikes on suspected training camps for Iraqi insurgents in Iran.

Whether this was a deliberate administration leak aimed at warning Tehran that it is going too far, or a leak by Cheney foes who fear that the vice president is willing to go too far, the possibility of a U.S. strike cannot be ruled out. But resorting to force while 160,000 U.S. troops are stationed in Iraq would invite disaster. Tehran could easily retaliate, and a U.S. strike might be the only thing that would rally the Iranian people around their increasingly unpopular president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and distract them from his ruinous policies.

The U.S. must push back against Iranian provocations. But it must also be mindful of the unintended consequences of escalation. Battling Iranian operatives inside Iraq is necessary, but could lead to clashes on the Iranian-Iraqi border or in the Persian Gulf.

U.S. presidential candidates in both parties have seized on Iran to show how tough they'll be on foreign policy. Sen. John McCain has already sung "bomb Iran" as a pop ditty. What the candidates probably won't tell the American people is how little leverage the U.S. has. It is faring badly in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Iranians know it. There is much talk about "containing" Iran, but U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states address only Iran's conventional military threat. Its ability to deploy Hezbollah and other proxies to destabilize its neighbours is undiminished.

The most powerful weapon against Iranian adventurism is economic. To avoid making an anti-American hero of Ahmadinejad and further alienating allies, U.S. politicians should stop talking about bombing Iran. Instead, they should set about repairing America's international standing and figure out what diplomatic deals could induce other nations to sign up for the serious financial penalties that offer the best chance of stopping

Tehran's nuclear breakout.

S. Koreans freed in 'goodwill' gesture; Two female hostages released by Taliban as governor demands 19 remaining be allowed to go

IDNUMBER 200708140019

PUBLICATION: Vancouver Sun

DATE: 2007.08.14

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: A8

ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Omar Sobhani, Reuters / Two South Korean female Christian aid workers are handed over to the Red Crescent in Arzoo, Ghazni province, south of Kabul, on Monday. Nineteen people remain hostage. ;

KEYWORDS: HOSTAGES; WAR; TERRORISM

DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan

BYLINE: Mohammad Yaqob

SOURCE: Agence France–Presse

WORD COUNT: 573

GHAZNI, Afghanistan — The Taliban freed two South Korean female hostages Monday in what they called a "gesture of goodwill" toward talks to free the remaining 19 captured nearly a month ago.

Wearing Muslim headscarves and crying as they were bundled into a waiting vehicle, the pair were the first hostages freed since the militants captured 23 Christian aid workers on July 19. Two others were shot dead.

An official from the International Committee of the Red Cross said the two women were handed over to officials from South Korea, which named them as Kim Gin–A, 32, and Kim Kyung–Ja, 37.

"We feel fortunate that at least some of the hostages have been released," South Korean foreign ministry spokesman Cho Hee–Yong said in Seoul, where tearful family members welcomed the release.

"But we again urge the kidnappers to immediately release all our citizens they hold hostage," Cho told reporters.

A woman who identified herself as one of the two released hostages told Agence France–Presse (AFP) by telephone before the handover that she was "okay."

Asked if she was one of the South Koreans, she said, "Yes, Korean. We are two, we are okay."

The women were to be taken for a medical checkup at a South Korean military unit at Bagram military base north of Kabul before being flown home, said a South Korean foreign ministry official who asked not to be identified.

The release of the two women came on the fourth day of negotiations at the office of the Afghan Red Crescent Society in the town of Ghazni, 140 km south of Kabul.

Washington welcomed the release and expressed hope the other hostages would also be freed. "We're very pleased that these two individuals are going to be reunited safely with their families," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters.

"We would hope that all of these individuals would be released immediately, unharmed. That's what everybody would like to see."

Taliban spokesman Yousuf Ahmadi said talks would continue on the fate of the remaining hostages.

But he reiterated the demand for Taliban prisoners in Afghan jails to be released in return for the remaining captives.

"As we freed two sick female hostages as a gesture of goodwill, we hope that the Afghan government will also free our prisoners," Ahmadi told AFP.

The government of President Hamid Karzai has rejected any deal for the release of the hostages.

Ghazni province governor Mirajuddin Pattan demanded the Taliban "immediately and unconditionally free the rest of the hostages."

He said there had been no pay-off for the two freed Monday and there would be none for the others.

"We call upon the Taliban to immediately and unconditionally free the rest of the hostages," Pattan said. The holding of women was against the tenets of Islam, he said, referring to the 14 female captives.

The Taliban abducted 23 South Koreans in volatile Ghazni on July 19.

Two male hostages have been shot dead, and the insurgents have threatened to kill more if jailed Taliban prisoners are not released.

Meanwhile, a man who identified himself as a German national who was abducted a day before the South Koreans told AFP in a telephone interview arranged by the Taliban on Monday that his captors want to kill him.

The man, who gave his name as Rudolph Blechschmidt, said he was ill and appealed to the German government to help secure his freedom. "The Taliban want to kill me," he said, speaking in broken English.

"I live with Taliban in the mountains. I am in danger also, and I am very sick."

It was not possible to independently confirm his identity.

A German identified in the media as 62-year-old engineer Rudolph Blechschmidt was captured July 18 with a German colleague in the province of Wardak, adjacent to Kabul.

The other German suffered circulatory failure a few days later and was then shot dead by his captors. Four Afghans captured with the engineers are also believed to be held by Taliban militants, who have issued demands for the release of prisoners in exchange for the German's life. The German embassy said its officials had been in contact with the hostage's captors and confirmed demands had been made, but would give no further details.

A police service for all

IDNUMBER 200708140095
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: City
PAGE: C4
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 238

One of the great issues confronting our society as it faces a future of declining birthrates and increased immigration is the ability of our community to speak to new Canadians in their own languages. The skill is especially valuable in the various security services upon which our communities depend for safekeeping.

Which brings us to the very welcome hiring of Ahmad Hafizi by the Ottawa police service. Const. Hafizi is originally from Afghanistan. As a young boy, his family fled the war between the Islamic fighters and Russian soldiers during the 1980s and made its way to Canada.

His hiring is important because he gives the police a chance to speak directly to communities that are often distrustful and fearful of authority. In Afghanistan, for example, many police officers are corrupt bullies and the people shun them. Const. Hafizi, who speaks Pashtu, Urdu and Persian can break down any misconceptions about police officers who are often very professional in this country.

More importantly for all concerned, as a devout Muslim, the constable can be an important role model for Muslim youth who, sadly, have occasionally become disaffected by our society and become recruits for radical Islamists who wish to harm it. The constable can show these young people that it is possible to be a positive part of this society without compromising a strong belief in Islam.

He can't start on the job soon enough.

To recognize a problem will help Pakistan reach a solution

IDNUMBER 200708140042
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A9
BYLINE: Ron Santana
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 235

Re: Pakistan admits presence of Taliban, Aug. 13.

I welcome the declaration from the recent meeting between Afghan and Pakistani leaders recognizing the terrorism threat to both countries. Terrorism also endangers Canadian troops and other NATO forces in the Kandahar region and other parts of Afghanistan.

Recognizing the existence of the problem is the first step toward a solution, and it is reassuring to hear it coming from Pakistan's military leader. After some Pakistani journalists had found and interviewed senior Taliban and al-Qaeda operatives in Pakistan, President Pervez Musharraf shouldn't have too much difficulty finding extremist hideouts and training facilities alleged to be in his country, in which most activities are believed to occur either with the support or knowledge of the military.

In the past Gen. Musharraf had suggested in television interviews that al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden may have died of kidney failure. His claim of lack of knowledge of terrorist activities in his country should be taken lightly.

While Afghanistan wants to rebuild after years of warfare, its neighbour Pakistan, which produces recruits for the Taliban from its religious schools, seems to be dragging its feet in fighting terrorism. That fight is further complicated by the autonomy enjoyed by the fierce Pathan tribesmen straddling the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

I hope that Pakistan's resolve to fight terrorism is sincere this time, and that Pakistan should follow it up with action.

Ron Santana,

Ottawa

S. Korea begs for time on hostages; Afghan Taliban free two of 21 remaining captives

IDNUMBER 200708140023
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A6
DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan
SOURCE: Agence France–Presse; with files from Bloomberg News
WORD COUNT: 263

GHAZNI, Afghanistan – South Korea's government, facing pressure from the families of the remaining 19 hostages being held by Afghanistan's Taliban, promised it will focus its efforts on freeing the Christian aid workers.

"Give us some time," South Korean Foreign Minister Song Min Soon said in Seoul late yesterday, after the Taliban freed two female hostages in what the militants called a "gesture of goodwill."

Wearing Muslim headscarves and crying as they were bundled into a waiting vehicle, the pair were the first hostages freed since the militants captured 23 Christian aid workers on July 19. Two others were shot dead.

An official from the International Committee of the Red Cross said the two women were handed over to officials from South Korea, which named them as Kim Jina, 32, and Kim Kyung–Ja, 37.

The families of the released hostages wept as they thanked the government and the negotiators. They held a news conference late yesterday with family members of the remaining hostages.

"We are very relieved at Jina's release, but my heart can't help but feel heavy at the thought of the remaining hostages and their families," said her brother, Kim Ji Ung, at a televised news conference in Bundang, south of Seoul.

"We will stay with the families until all the remaining members return."

The release of the two women came on the fourth day of negotiations at the office of the Afghan Red Crescent Society in the town of Ghazni, 140 kilometres south of Kabul.

Taliban spokesman Yousuf Ahmadi said talks would continue on the fate of the remaining hostages. But he reiterated the group's demand for Taliban prisoners in Afghan jails to be released in return for the remaining captives.

The government of President Hamid Karzai has rejected any deal for the release of the hostages.

No matter who gets what, there will be some bitter MPs; Having so many veteran Tories from the West means many of them must take a back seat

IDNUMBER 200708140013

PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen

DATE: 2007.08.14

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: A4

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Chris Wattie, Reuters / Stephen Harper glances over at Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor during an event in Petawawa in May. Many expect someone else to be defence minister by tonight. ; Photo: Stockwell Day ; Photo: Helena Guergis ; Photo: Jason Kenney ; Photo: Rob Nicholson ; Photo: Gordon O'Connor ; Photo: Jim Prentice ;

BYLINE: Richard Foot, with files from Mia Rabson

SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen; with files from The Winnipeg Free Press

WORD COUNT: 1493

The doorman at 24 Sussex Drive was one of the busiest people in Ottawa Monday, as members of the federal cabinet trooped into the prime minister's official residence to receive their new assignments from Stephen Harper.

Mr. Harper's private chats with many of his 31 ministers are believed to be the prelude to a cabinet shuffle as he tunes up his government and recalibrates its priorities before the onset of a new parliamentary season in the fall.

What those priorities might be, and which ministers will quarterback them in the coming months should start to become clear today as ministers gather at Rideau Hall, to be sworn in to their new portfolios by Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean.

Among the people to be re-assigned are junior ministers of state Jason Kenney and Helena Guergis, plus Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor, Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay, Industry Minister Maxime Bernier, Veterans Affairs Minister Greg Thompson and Indian Affairs Minister Jim Prentice. Revenue Minister Carol Skelton has said she is retiring before the next election.

Mr. Harper's officials have for weeks been telling reporters that no new cabinet members will be appointed to the country's most exclusive club this time.

This means another round of hard feelings and disappointment for the 95 Conservative MPs left on the back benches since Mr. Harper came to power in 2006.

One former Tory MP who knows life both inside the cabinet and on the back bench, says today's shuffle will leave several Conservatives profoundly unhappy.

"There are a few members who are very, very desirous of being in cabinet and were fairly crushed the last two times they were left out," says Garth Turner, a Mulroney-era cabinet minister who now sits as a Liberal MP after being ejected from the Tory caucus last year.

No matter who gets what, there will be some bitter MPs; Having so many veteran Tories from the West means many of them must take a back seat

"Some Tories truly expected to be in cabinet, but were not invited in," Mr. Turner says. "They will be quite dismayed, after a third time, that this has not happened."

Mr. Turner says Alberta MPs Diane Ablonczy and Lee Richardson, British Columbia MP James Moore, and Manitoba MP Steven Fletcher are among the backbenchers who had expected to join Mr. Harper's cabinet.

Geography plays a huge part in federal cabinet-making in Canada. With so many Alberta MPs in his caucus, Mr. Harper was bound to exclude some to allow space for MPs from other regions.

But Mr. Turner says there's another factor in determining who gets a seat.

"Harper is a different kind of prime minister, and he's running a different kind of ship. Being a talented person in caucus isn't necessarily the most important qualification for being in cabinet; he's also looking for people who are malleable and who are fairly controllable."

Liberal leader Stéphane Dion agreed that Mr. Harper is governing Canada as an autocrat, so it makes no difference what he does to his cabinet. Mr. Harper is learning from U.S. President George W. Bush in both the substance and style of his government, Mr. Dion said, adding Mr. Harper keeps his ministers on a very short leash and gives them little room to act on their own.

"I think the prime minister we have thinks he is a president and Mr. Bush is his American idol," said Mr. Dion.

"He doesn't have confidence or faith in his ministers or his caucus, to the point he is preventing journalists from being too close to his caucus and using the police to keep (journalists) out."

Mr. Dion was referring to an incident in Charlottetown recently in which Mr. Harper's office instructed the RCMP not to allow the media inside the hotel where the Tories were holding a caucus meeting. The prime minister's office said it was for security reasons, but the RCMP at the site said the intent was to manage the government's message.

Mr. Harper has dismissed criticism that he controls his cabinet like an autocrat who surrounds himself with people who lack the courage to speak their minds. Instead, he passionately described his cabinet as a collegial, consensus-driven body.

"I have a great group of people, all highly ethical people, who, while they bring individual, regional and personal perspectives to issues, broadly share a vision of Canada. And on all but a very small number of issues, there's been a very, very broad consensus in our cabinet."

Whatever the dynamics of power inside the cabinet, today's makeover is certain to be a tough pill to swallow for some backbenchers.

On Parliament Hill, success is often defined by one's proximity to power, the title of one's office, and the perks it brings.

Mr. Turner, who has tasted both sides of that lifestyle, urges backbenchers not to lose heart simply for being left out of the cabinet.

"In Ottawa, cabinet ministers walk around like little gods," he says. "But there's nothing stopping MPs from travelling the country and talking about their points of view, as I'm doing on a speaking tour this summer."

"And there's nothing stopping MPs from taking the initiative in the House, with private members bills and

No matter who gets what, there will be some bitter MPs; Having so many veteran Tories from the West mea

motions. The highest reason for MPs to come to Ottawa is to represent their constituents. If that's not good enough, then where the hell does that leave the voters?"

To view a video report on the cabinet shuffle, go to Today's Videos at ottawacitizen.com

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On Deck for a Shuffle

Stockwell Day

Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day, 56, has been touted as a possible successor to embattled Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor. Considering his flamboyant past, the man who once jet-skied to a press conference in a wetsuit has kept a relatively low profile in cabinet. For the most part, he has pushed the government's tough-on-crime agenda, although he recently rejected Ontario's call for a ban on handguns in favour of a stronger police presence on Canada's urban streets. Mr. Day, a former Alberta cabinet minister and voice for the party's Christian conservative right, was first elected to Parliament in 2000 as a Canadian Alliance MP for Okanagan-Coquihalla.

Helena Guergis

Helena Guergis has been moving through the ranks fairly quickly since arriving at Parliament in 2004 as the MP for Simcoe-Grey. She was given the nod as parliamentary secretary to International Trade Minister David Emerson when the Conservatives took power in January 2006. One year later, during Mr. Harper's first cabinet shuffle, the 38-year-old was promoted to secretary of state for foreign affairs and international trade and also was made secretary of state for sport. Before entering federal politics, Ms. Guergis spent eight years working as a policy adviser for Ontario's provincial government.

Jason Kenney

Jason Kenney, now secretary of state for multiculturalism and Canadian identity, could scramble up the cabinet hierarchy through sheer determination. Just 39, the 10-year veteran of parliamentary politics is a frequent media commentator, defending government politics with partisan vigour. The MP for Calgary Southeast represents the Conservative party's original Reform roots, with a focus on the rights and concerns of taxpayers. In fact, Mr. Kenney headed the Canadian Taxpayers Federation before turning to politics. Mr. Kenney also chairs the Commons subcommittee on international human rights, which has studied the human rights situations in China, Cuba and Iran.

Rob Nicholson

Justice Minister Rob Nicholson is considered to be one of Mr. Harper's trusted stalwarts and could be due for a promotion. The 55-year-old lawyer, who represents Niagara Falls, has been shepherding a number of the government's anti-crime bills through Parliament, including one that would clamp down on access to bail for people who commit serious firearms offences. He's also been forced to defend the federal anti-terrorism laws after the Supreme Court of Canada struck down two key provisions as unconstitutional. Mr. Nicholson, first elected in 1984 but defeated in 1993 and 1997, represents the progressive wing of the Tory party.

Gordon O'Connor

Gordon O'Connor has had a rough ride as defence minister with critics and opposition MPs calling for his resignation more than once. His stint as defence minister has been controversial from the beginning due to his background as a lobbyist who acted on behalf of military firms from 1996 to 2004. Mr. O'Connor has had to

No matter who gets what, there will be some bitter MPs; Having so many veteran Tories from the West means

navigate through several controversies related to the war in Afghanistan, including delivering an apology for misleading the Commons over how Afghan detainees are handled by Afghan authorities. Mr. O'Connor was in the military for more than 30 years and retired with the rank of brigadier general.

Jim Prentice

Jim Prentice was handed one of the more sensitive portfolios when he was appointed to cabinet in February 2006 as minister of Indian affairs and northern development. The MP for Calgary Centre–North, who was first elected in 2004, had a suitable background for the post, having served as commissioner of the Indian Claims Commission of Canada for 10 years. The 51–year–old is a lawyer by trade and has lived in Calgary for more than 20 years with his wife and three daughters. Mr. Prentice took a shot at the leadership of the Progressive Conservative party in 2003. He is considered one of Mr. Harper's "most trusted cabinet ministers," according to his own website.

Taliban Free Two Korean Hostages; 'Goodwill Gesture'; Talks Continue On The Fate Of 19 Remaining Captives

IDNUMBER 200708140102

PUBLICATION: National Post

DATE: 2007.08.14

EDITION: National

SECTION: World

PAGE: A10

ILLUSTRATION: Color Photo: / Cho Hee-Yong, South Korean Foreign Ministry official. ; Color Photo: Omar Sobhani, Reuters / Two South Korean hostages are seen after their release in Arzoo, southwest of Kabul, yesterday. The women were the first hostages freed since the Taliban captured 23 Christian aid workers on July 19. ;

DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan

BYLINE: Mohammad Yaqob

SOURCE: Agence France-Presse

WORD COUNT: 542

GHAZNI, Afghanistan – Afghanistan's Taliban freed two South Korean female hostages yesterday in what it called a "gesture of goodwill" toward talks to free the remaining 19 captured nearly a month ago.

Wearing Muslim headscarves and crying as they were bundled into a waiting vehicle, the pair were the first hostages freed since the Taliban captured 23 Christian aid workers on July 19. Two others were shot dead.

An official from the International Committee of the Red Cross said the two women were handed over to officials from South Korea, which named them as Kim Ji-na, 32, and Kim Kyungja, 37.

"We feel fortunate that at least some of the hostages have been released," South Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman Cho Hee-Yong said in Seoul, where tearful family members welcomed the release.

"But we again urge the kidnappers to immediately release all our citizens they hold hostage," Mr. Cho told reporters.

A woman who identified herself as one of the two released hostages told Agence France-Presse by telephone before the handover that she was "OK."

Asked if she was one of the South Koreans, she said, "Yes, Korean. We are two, we are OK."

The women were to be taken for a medical checkup at a South Korean military unit at Bagram military base north of Kabul before being flown home, said a South Korean Foreign Ministry official who asked not to be identified.

A spokesman for the South Korean embassy in Kabul could not say when they would leave the country. "They are staying at a safe place under our protection," he said on condition of anonymity.

The release of the two women came on the fourth day of negotiations at the office of the Afghan Red Crescent Society in the town of Ghazni, 140 kilometres south of Kabul.

Taliban Free Two Korean Hostages; 'Goodwill Gesture'; Talks Continue On The Fate Of 19 Remaining Captives

Taliban spokesman Yousuf Ahmadi said talks would continue on the fate of the remaining hostages. But he reiterated the group's demand for Taliban prisoners in Afghan jails to be released in return for the remaining captives.

"As we freed two sick female hostages as a gesture of goodwill, we hope that the Afghan government will also free our prisoners," Mr. Ahmadi said.

The government of President Hamid Karzai has rejected any deal for the release of the hostages.

Ghazni Governor Mirajuddin Pattan demanded the Taliban "immediately and unconditionally free the rest of the hostages."

He said there had been no ransom paid for the two freed yesterday and there would be none for the others.

"We call upon the Taliban to immediately and unconditionally free the rest of the hostages," Mr. Pattan said. The holding of women was against the tenets of Islam, he said, referring to the 14 female captives.

The Taliban abducted 23 South Koreans in volatile Ghazni on July 19. Two male hostages have been shot dead, and the insurgents have threatened to kill more if jailed Taliban prisoners are not released.

Meanwhile, a man who identified himself as a German national who was abducted a day before the South Koreans told AFP in a telephone interview arranged by the Taliban yesterday that his captors want to kill him.

The man, who gave his name as Rudolph Blechschmidt, said he was ill and appealed to the German government to help secure his freedom.

"The Taliban want to kill me," he said, speaking in broken English.

"I live with Taliban in the mountains. I am in danger also, and I am very sick."

It was not possible to independently confirm the man's identity.

A German identified in the media as 62-year-old engineer Rudolph Blechschmidt was captured on July 18 with a German colleague in the province of Wardak, adjacent to Kabul.

The other German suffered circulatory failure a few days later and was shot dead by his captors.

Four Afghans captured with the engineers are also believed to be held by the Taliban, who have issued demands for the release of prisoners in exchange for the German's life.

The German embassy said its officials had been in contact with the hostage's captors and confirmed demands had been made, but would give no further details.

KEYWORDS: HOSTAGES; WAR; TERRORISM; KIDNAPPING

Has Musharraf learned his lesson?

IDNUMBER 200708140091
PUBLICATION: National Post
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: National
SECTION: Editorials
PAGE: A12
BYLINE: Akbar Hussain
SOURCE: National Post
WORD COUNT: 145

Re: Terror Bases On Our Soil: Pakistan, Aug. 13.

Sometimes lessons are learned the hard way. I hope that has happened to Pakistan's President, General Pervez Musharraf. He has finally agreed that terrorists do indeed have a safe heaven in Pakistan and are being supported from there.

There are signs that some strategic mistakes were committed at the beginning of the Afghan conflict. The remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaeda could have been wiped out if they were pursued when they were taking shelter in Pakistan. This lapse gave them time to regroup and rearm in Pakistan. Now I hope President Musharraf realizes that it was foolish to use terrorists to keep a diplomatic balance with Afghanistan. The recent Islamic terrorist activities in Pakistan have proved that they should be destroyed and are not to be trusted.

Akbar Hussain, Toronto.

KEYWORDS: 0

Pakistan caught between military rule, radical Islam; Far from moderate Muslim state of founder's dream

IDNUMBER 200708140057
PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A14
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: ARIF ALI, AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES / A boy sells Pakistani flags and banners of founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah at a makeshift stall in Lahore yesterday. ;
KEYWORDS: TERRORISM; TERRITORIAL ISSUES; FOREIGN RELATIONS
BYLINE: RANA JAWAD
SOURCE: AFP
WORD COUNT: 408

ISLAMABAD – As Pakistan marks its 60th anniversary, the country finds itself chafing under military rule with its identity and very existence threatened by a rising tide of Islamic extremism.

Osama bin Laden's Al-Qa'ida network and its Taliban allies plot insurrection and global terrorism from bases in Pakistan's northern tribal zones, and military ruler Pervez Musharraf is under intense to strike hard against them.

Security experts say the threat of radical Islamic terrorism is the product of military rule – and only a return to democracy can help to bring it to an end.

The military has ruled the country for more than half of its existence and its influence is pervasive. It has its own economic empire, running industries, banks and housing estates.

"The country is fighting two last battles which will decide the soul of Pakistan – first is the fight against extremism and second is the rise of a people's movement for genuine democratic rule," political writer Najam Sethi said. "The establishment of civilian supremacy is the one at the heart of the country's soul while the fight against extremism is an international concern which we have to address."

Pakistan has sent 90,000 troops to fight Taliban and Al-Qa'ida militants who found shelter in its lawless tribal regions after the fall of the hardline Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001.

The military government says it is doing what it can to combat the militancy it blames on the 1979–89 Soviet occupation of neighbouring Afghanistan when Pakistan and the United States armed and trained Islamic groups to fight the Soviets.

It was the beginning of the collapse of the vision of founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah, a British-educated lawyer who dreamed of a moderate Muslim state when British rule on the subcontinent ended Aug. 15, 1947.

Pakistan became a haven for Islamic militants and the state began enforcing Islamic "sharia" law under the 1977–88 regime of General Zia ul-Haq.

Education was segregated on the basis of religion and mullahs who had been at the lowest strata of society suddenly became some of the most powerful players in the state.

Hasan Askari, former head of the political science department at Punjab University, said religious extremism has brutalized Pakistan, which can no longer be described as a moderate and tolerant society.

"This has also adversely affected the search for knowledge and the quest for objective inquiry."

Analyst Sethi said the coming general elections, slated for early next year, and Musharraf's own election this year could decide the direction the country would go.

"If we do not establish people's supremacy we will go the path of Algeria and succumb to religious forces. We will become inward looking, parochial, anarchist, divided, fissured and plagued by sectarianism," Sethi said.

Afghanistan. Iranian president visits

IDNUMBER 200708140048
PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A13
COLUMN: Fast Track
KEYWORDS: POLITICIANS; GOVERNMENT; KYRGYZSTAN
DATELINE: TEHRAN
SOURCE: Reuters; AFP
WORD COUNT: 68

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad embarks on a three–nation tour of central Asia today to attend a major regional summit meeting and bolster Iran's links with neighbouring states. The president will hold talks with his Afghan counterpart, Hamid Karzai, in Kabul today before leaving for Turkmenistan and then attending a summit of the Shanghai Co–operation Organization in Kyrgyzstan.

Afghanistan. Taliban free 2 women

IDNUMBER 200708140047
PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.08.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A13
COLUMN: Fast Track
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: OMAR SHOBANI, REUTERS / (Taliban free 2 women);
KEYWORDS: WAR; FOREIGN AID; TERRORISM; AFGHANISTAN
DATELINE: GHAZNI
SOURCE: Reuters; AFP
WORD COUNT: 74

The Taliban freed two South Korean female hostages yesterday in what the militants called a "gesture of goodwill" in talks to free the remaining 19. Wearing headscarves and crying as they were bundled into a waiting vehicle, the pair were handed over to officials from South Korea. The militants captured 23 Christian aid workers on July 19. Two others were shot dead.

Amazing grazing on Calgary cuisine; From Rocky Mountain oysters to Brazilian barbecue spots, avant-garde to retro-chic, Calgary's food scene is vast and diverse

IDNUMBER	200708140036
PUBLICATION:	Edmonton Journal
DATE:	2007.08.14
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SECTION:	News
PAGE:	A8
ILLUSTRATION:	Colour Photo: Judy Schultz, The Journal / Dee Hobsbawn-Smith and Gail Norton at Cookbook Co. Cooks, a kind of foodie central in Calgary. ; Colour Photo: Leah Hennel, Calgary Herald / Graham Warner mixes a drink at the Raw Bar in Hotel Arts. ;
KEYWORDS:	FOOD BANKS; FOOD
DATELINE:	CALGARY
BYLINE:	Judy Schultz
SOURCE:	The Edmonton Journal
WORD COUNT:	1091

CALGARY – In the hottest summer most of us can remember, the patio at Bumpy's is busy with shade-seekers, chilling over their iced lattes. With its Big Mountain coffee and popular food counter, Bumpy's is a happening spot.

True, it's in an alley, but a happening alley, Calgary style.

Across the table, chef/writer Dee Hobsbawn-Smith is filling me in on all things edible. Born in France, she attended chefs school in British Columbia before planting herself firmly in the Calgary food scene, where she's become a well-known advocate for local producers.

Once a year she fills a large bus with urban food lovers and wanders the countryside, introducing them to the people who grow the best of everything, from ripe tomatoes and greens to elk meat and honey. Her soon-to-be-published book, *Shop Talk: the Insiders Guide to Getting Good Ingredients in Calgary and the Bow Valley*, is intended to lead local food enthusiasts to fine comestibles in and around the town.

"We truly are an international city, and we're a food city," she says emphatically, contradicting a recent nasty poll that dumped on the Calgary dining scene.

The Angus Reid Strategies survey found that while 36 per cent of Canadians think Calgary is the best city to find a job, fewer than 10 per cent rank it as the spot where they'd want to eat out or enjoy the nightlife.

"The average Calgarian is 34.9 years old, well-educated, well-travelled, well-heeled," Hobsbawn-Smith says. "They know what they want, and that includes authenticity at the table."

She mentions an off-beat spice-and-carpet shop with an in-house bakery producing a special rectangular naan, one you'd expect to find only in certain parts of Afghanistan. It's one of 300-plus local places she's

Amazing grazing on Calgary cuisine; From Rocky Mountain oysters to Brazilian barbecue spots, avant-garde to retro-chic, Calgary's food scene is vast and diverse

prepared to recommend to food shoppers.

EXPENSIVE TASTES

Calgary is a great spot for young, talented chefs. Cam Dobranski packed up his knives and moved down here from Edmonton five years ago. As the executive chef at Muse, he sees opportunity in a clientele that is international, corporate, wealthy, and seeking the unusual.

"I keep my food light, because I want people to be adventurous, to order four courses plus dessert. I can do 10-course tasting menus here, and it sells. I've sold \$90 entrees. Not often, but it can be done."

In this city, money doesn't just talk, it eats, frequently on expense accounts. A local restaurant can charge \$30 for valet parking, when there's on-street parking a couple of blocks away. A rack of lamb that would go for \$36 in Edmonton can ask \$50 here.

This hint of wretched excess doesn't amuse John Gilchrist. He's Calgary's best-known restaurant critic, with columns on radio and in every print medium that counts.

"This represents only a very small percentage of Calgary," says Gilchrist. "It's obvious, active, in-your-face money, it's the see-and-be-seen crowd, but it could dry up and blow away overnight. ... If the price of oil should suddenly drop, I could stand here and show you several places that will be gone."

Hobsbawn-Smith points out a small anomaly in Calgary's oil-and-gas-fuelled wealth. "The number of organizations in Calgary that exist to feed the hungry, from the Food Bank to Community Kitchens, is staggering," she says.

Although I'm a confirmed Edmontonian, I've done business in Calgary forever, and once had an office in the Palliser Hotel. Even then, Calgary had a food scene. The long-gone Owl's Nest was the place for serious dining. Pardon My Garden was the in-spot for vegetarian wannabees. There were coffee shops with personality, a couple of ritzy caterers, and Gail Norton's Cookbook Co. Cooks was about to open in Mount Royal Village.

Now, from her much bigger shop at 722 11th Ave., Norton operates a kind of foodie central that includes a busy cooking school, its vibrant curriculum dotted with celebrity guests. She offers a travel program with cooking schools in France and Italy, and a retail section for cookbooks, deli items and hard-to-find upscale ingredients.

"We appeal to a broad spectrum of ages and stages, from serious cooks to date nights, ketchup to truffle oil," says Norton. "There's always been a food scene in Calgary, an 'in' place to eat and shop. The scene is just bigger now."

ROCKY MOUNTAIN INFLUENCE

Rocky Mountain cuisine is a reality in Calgary. It takes confidence to offer Rocky Mountain oysters (bull's testicles, a.k.a. prairie oysters) on your menu, and I know of no other Canadian city that could support a Testicle Festival, a la Buzzard's, a restaurant popular for its cowboy cookin'.

The Calgary restaurant scene is enviable for its size and variety.

I love a table in the flowery courtyard at Cilantro, an autumn lunch with wood smoke in the air at the River Café, a stroll around the garden at Rouge, where chef Paul Rogalski hosts an annual Slow Food feast-of-fields, and insists that his waiters and kitchen staff spend time working in his large garden. I love the

Amazing grazing on Calgary cuisine; From Rocky Mountain oysters to Brazilian barbecue spots, ~~ant-gar~~

Italian ambience at Mercato and Lina's, where the restaurant-cum-grocery store concept purrs along nicely. I love breakfast at the classic Fifties enclave, Diner Deluxe, and at the Avenue Diner with the cool red tractor seats at the counter. I love a sausage lunch in crazy-busy Spolumbo's, and an evening of wild boar pizza and house-brewed beer at Wildwood, followed by a stroll along the Elbow River with the rafts bobbing past. Or there's a martini by the pool at Raw Bar, and a bowl of delicious onion soup a few steps away at St. Germain, all within the uber-cool confines of the Hotel Arts.

Funny thing: This town never stopped eating onion soup, caesar salad and a good ribeye, even when chefs and critics in other cities condemned such dishes as pure kitsch. Now, the same dishes are retro-chic.

CATCHING NEW WAVES

While I could do without the Dallas-meets-Gotham-City attitude from some of the high rollers, Calgarians do have a knack for catching waves, from Brazilian barbecue spots called churrascarias to the first izakayas — drinking bars that also sell sushi snacks — in the province.

More retro-chic? Supper clubs, those sophisticated late-night watering holes that once thrived in big cities, are thriving here now.

Linda Green is a well-connected Calgary food lover with back-door access to numerous favourite spots. She's been to the right cooking schools, knows the right chefs, and genuinely loves good food. Green relies on her roster of A-list take-aways for spontaneous parties, picking up sushi at Globefish, Greek specialties at Pegasus, stopping by Forage for special items.

"Lamburgers are a hot party item now," she says.

For that reason, Green recently spent an afternoon in a restaurant kitchen with her "favourite chef in the whole world," hand-forming 30 kilograms of lamburgers by his secret recipe.

"No, I can't tell you his name," she says.

"He'd be mobbed. Everybody would want to do it."

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Taliban release two S. Korean hostages; Freeing of women 'gesture of good faith'

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PAGE: A4
KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM
DATELINE: KABUL, Afghanistan
SOURCE: New York Times
WORD COUNT: 403

KABUL, Afghanistan – Two women who were among 23 South Koreans kidnapped by the Taliban in mid-July were freed Monday and were later in South Korean custody, in the first major breakthrough in the hostage case in nearly a month.

The two women, identified as Kim Ji-na, 32, and Kim Kyong-ja, 37, were going through a medical checkup "in a safe location" after they were handed over from the Taliban, said Cho Hee-yong, spokesman for the South Korean Foreign Ministry in Seoul.

Kim Ji-na, a digital animation artist, and Kim Kyong-ja, a computer software worker, were part of a group of 23 South Korean church volunteers in Afghanistan whose bus was hijacked July 19 on the road between Kabul and Kandahar.

Two of the men in the group have since been killed. The South Korean government, under intense pressure to win the release of the remaining 21, entered direct negotiations with the militants last week.

A Taliban spokesman, Qari Yousuf Ahmadi, contacted the New York Times by telephone at 4 p.m. Afghan time to say the two women were free. "We have released two female Korean hostages unconditionally as a gesture of good faith," he said. The women were handed over by a group of Taliban representatives and tribal elders, he said.

Shireen Mangal, a spokesman for the governor of Ghazni province, where the remaining hostages are being held south of the capital, confirmed that the two women arrived at the office of the Afghan Red Crescent in the city of Ghazni an hour later. He said the two women were sick, but he declined to say anything more about their condition.

The women wept as they got out of a Toyota sedan driven by an Afghan elder, and into one of the two Red Cross sport-utility vehicles waiting for them on a rural Afghan roadside eight kilometres southeast of Ghazni, The Associated Press reported. The women said nothing to the reporters on the scene, who were told by a Taliban spokesman where the handoff would take place.

The women, who wore scarves on their heads, were then driven to the American military base in Ghazni city, where U.S. soldiers searched them and admitted them to the base.

The Taliban has been demanding the release of prisoners held in Afghan prisons and by American forces at

Bagram airbase, in exchange for the remaining South Korean hostages. The Taliban spokesman said his group was now expecting some reciprocal action after the release of the two women.

Calgary soldier comes home a hero; Emotional crowd greets returning troop

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DATE: 2007.08.14

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SECTION: City & Region

PAGE: B1 / FRONT

ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Ted Rhodes, Calgary Herald / Cpl. Jeffrey Taylor gets hugs from his wife Shawna and daughter Kenedee, 9, as he arrives at Calgary International Airport on Monday after completing his tour in Afghanistan. ; Colour Photo: Shawna Taylor ;

KEYWORDS: PERJURY

BYLINE: Meghan Waters

SOURCE: Calgary Herald

WORD COUNT: 211

A hero's welcome and a sea of support greeted Cpl. Jeffrey Taylor at the Calgary airport as he returned from his tour of duty in Afghanistan.

As the automatic doors to the arrivals lounge swished open Monday, Taylor's children leaped into his arms, dropping the handmade cardboard sign that read "Welcome home daddy. We are so proud of you."

The reservist's mom sobbed and his wife clutched at the husband she hadn't seen in months.

The stoic soldier, his face tanned from the Afghan sun, had several tears escape the corners of his eyes.

"The changes (in Afghanistan) were amazing, I feel like it was all worthwhile," he said of his experience.

His daughter Kenedee, 9, said she was proud of her hero dad.

"He was helping girls be able to go to school. That's really cool," she said.

Taylor's mom Jennifer said she will be able to sleep at night now that her boy is safe at home.

"He's not allowed to go back again," she said.

Taylor's wife Shawna said she was overwhelmed by the crowd who welcomed her husband home.

"I don't think he expected this many people to be here," she said.

The Taylors said they were disappointed city council rejected a proposal that would see support—the—troops magnets on city vehicles, particularly when Taylor is a municipal employee, in the waterworks department.

Ward 12 Ald. Ric McIver said he attended Taylor's homecoming so he could send a message the city is proud of its troops.

"Our way of life, the freedoms and privileges we have, at the end of the day were provided by soldiers," he said.

"Saying thank you is the very least we could do."

As the boisterous crowd trickled out of the airport, Taylor said the four months since he last saw his family was difficult to endure.

"I just want some quiet time hanging out with my family," he said.

Taylor gently took the hand of his eight-year-old son, Nathan, and whispered, "Let's go home."

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Taliban free two S. Koreans; Hostage release called 'gesture of goodwill'

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Omar Sobhani, Reuters / Two South Korean women are escorted to freedom after being released by their Taliban captors on Monday in Afghanistan. ;
KEYWORDS: ARMAMENTS; NUCLEAR WEAPONS; NUCLEAR REACTORS; ASYLUM; FOREIGN RELATIONS; FAMILY REUNIONS; PROPAGANDA; FOOD SUPPLY
DATELINE: GHAZNI, Afghanistan
SOURCE: Agence France-Presse
WORD COUNT: 192

Afghanistan's Taliban freed two South Korean female hostages Monday in what the terrorist group called a "gesture of goodwill" toward talks to free the remaining 19 captured nearly a month ago.

Wearing Muslim headscarves and crying as they were bundled into a waiting vehicle, the pair were the first hostages freed since the group captured 23 Christian aid workers on July 19. Two others were shot dead.

An official from the International Committee of the Red Cross said the two women were handed over to officials from South Korea, which named them as Kim Gin-A, 32, and Kim Kyung-Ja, 37.

"We feel fortunate that at least some of the hostages have been released," South Korean foreign ministry spokesman Cho Hee-Yong said in Seoul, where tearful family members welcomed the release.

"But we again urge the kidnappers to immediately release all our citizens they hold hostage," Cho told reporters.

A woman who identified herself as one of the two released hostages told AFP by telephone before the handover that she was "OK."

Asked if she was one of the South Koreans, she said, "Yes, Korean. We are two, we are OK."

The women were to be taken for a medical checkup at a South Korean military unit at Bagram military base north of Kabul before being flown home, said a South Korean foreign ministry official who asked not to be identified.