

Newsletter, November 17, 2023

Dear friends,

Afghanistan is now featured in the local press as the country to which Pakistan is forcibly deporting masses of refugees. Pakistan justifies this by saying that Afghans have carried out numerous attacks. There are attacks in Pakistan. But they tend to be carried out by the Pakistani Taliban. The Pakistani Taliban do not have much to do with the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan's economic decline is obvious. The population is dissatisfied. Elections will be held in January. The refugees have to be used as scapegoats. My colleagues suspect that Pakistan wants to force the UN to transfer more refugee aid to Pakistan. Some of the refugees concerned have been in Pakistan for decades. When they return to Afghanistan, most of them are left with nothing. The Afghan economy is also in dire straits. On the other hand, returnees hardly have to expect reprisals for political reasons.

In 1994, Pakistan assembled the Taliban movement mainly from Afghan refugees in Pakistan and armed them in such a way that the Taliban became a dominant force in the Afghan civil war that was raging at the time. Pakistan wanted to dominate Afghanistan with the help of the Taliban. With a compliant Afghanistan, Pakistan wanted to resolve long-simmering border issues in its favor. Pakistan's hereditary enemy in the minds of its military is India. A free Afghanistan is a threat to Pakistan. If India and Afghanistan stick together, Pakistan is in trouble. Pakistan also hoped for economic relations with parts of the former Soviet Union that had become free at the time, such as Tajikistan or Uzbekistan. In order to export Pakistani products there, it had to be possible to travel safely through the Afghanistan in between. The Taliban were supposed to ensure this. Pakistan therefore had partly understandable reasons to dominate Afghanistan and to create the Taliban movement for this purpose. The Afghan Taliban were also quite compliant as long as they fought against the Afghan government and the US and its allies who protected it. After all, the Taliban were dependent on Pakistani arms aid and the possibility of retreating to Pakistan. However, it was clear that the Taliban would no longer need Pakistani weapons and retreat options as soon as they had defeated the "democratic" government and the foreign troops. After that, the Taliban could and did align their policies with Afghan national interests. The Pakistani military is slowly realizing that its plan to rule Afghanistan through the Taliban was based on a milkmaid's calculation. The lamentation is great. The anger at the "ungrateful" neighboring country will probably last longer.

There were very few Jews left in Afghanistan. The last Jewish family left a year ago - peacefully bid farewell by the Taliban. They regretted the loss, but had to admit that they were unable to protect the Jews sufficiently from attacks by the Da'esh - the supporters of the Islamic State.

For three to four weeks, the Ministry of Agriculture stalled OFARIN with the request to plant 20,000 walnut trees in the province of Khost. Our people went there every day. The officials were bothered by minor details in the text of the project description. Area measurements used in Afghanistan had to be converted into square meters. Most of the time, the responsible officials were absent. Finally, the deputy minister intervened. He took exception to the high personnel costs. OFARIN had budgeted a lot for educating the population. However, the personnel costs were only allowed to amount to 30% of the total costs. I am grateful to the deputy minister for this correction. OFARIN now has to plant 33,500 trees. The application was revised, approved and immediately taken to Khost, where the provincial and district authorities quickly waved it through, although some officials complained that they actually expected certain bribes for such approvals.



The work in Khost began immediately. Now a larger number of trees must be planted by February. From March, the seedlings sprout leaves and roots. A 60 cm deep and 150 cm x 50 cm large pit has to be created for each tree. It is planted in this pit at the end of February. One man creates three such pits every day. Our contract partner, part of the Tani tribe, had promised us 100 workers a day. But now more than 200 men are coming every day. After ten days, more than 7000 pits are already finished. It should work.

OFARIN's schooling has started in a completely different area of Khost. A brother and sister are each teaching a boys' and a girls' class. Next week, some trainers from Kabul will travel to Khost and discuss the lessons with the teacher. These two classes are just the beginning. We have already reported that it should also be possible to work with existing schools in Khost to spread our methods. To do this, we need many trainers who live in Khost and can travel to different parts of the province. There also seem to be more opportunities to set up schools in Khost than in Kabul under the watchful eye of the Ministry of Education.

We have rented a property in the center of Khost from where OFARIN's regional activities will be managed. It cannot be ruled out that OFARIN will take on further agricultural projects there. This is due to the organization HTPU, Agriculture Company. The name HTPU refers to the founders of the organization, namely a Hasara, a Tajik, a Pashtun and an Uzbek. A year ago, these people were still sitting in our Kabul office and had started their own agricultural activities in Khost province. We have reported on this repeatedly since April of this year. Later, this group succeeded in winning OFARIN for the nut tree project. It must be admitted that three of the founders of HTPU now live abroad. Only the Pashtun, our project manager Naqib, who comes from Khost, is still in Afghanistan. But the other three still have their deposits and profits with HTPU. In terms of personnel, our financial manager Hewad and some friends from Khost have joined HTPU and have also committed themselves financially. This means that only Pashtuns are still active at HTPU in Afghanistan. They want to use the name to promote the peaceful coexistence of all Afghans. We at OFARIN can imagine that there will be meaningful cooperation with HTPU in the future.



But the school program is also going well in Kabul and Logar. The Ministry of Education visited many of our classes in Kabul and wrote a very positive report. You will remember that the Ministry telephoned us in the

summer and asked us to suspend classes until further notice. This request was never revoked. We ignored it after no written confirmation followed. In the meantime, the ministry seems to have forgotten its telephone order. From such events, we realize that the Ministry of Education is a battlefield in the Taliban's war over education. So we are not safe from surprise destructive interventions by the reactionary Taliban faction in the future either.

Our colleagues Sarghuna and Ferusan are preparing for the start of pre-school lessons in Kabul. The ladies who are preparing our midwifery program have moved into rooms in the Shindowal district of Kabul, are having furniture made and are buying medicines and equipment for their work.

Kind regards

Peter Schwittek.