

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

Sydney Morning Herald

Afghans accuse spies in school attacks

By Ben Doherty

06/09/2012

WHEN the Taliban was ousted from Afghanistan in 2001, there were 5000 girls enrolled in schools across the country. A little over a decade on, that number is 2.4million.

But for girls in Afghanistan, getting an education remains a fraught, and at times, dangerous endeavour. The Afghan National Directorate for Security this week announced the arrest of 15 people for their alleged role in spraying the grounds of girls' schools in Takhar province with an as-yet-unidentified poison.

The Afghan ministry of education says that 550 schools in 11 provinces where the Taliban hold influence have been shut down by insurgents. Dissuading girls from school through fear — by poisoning wells, burning down schools or throwing acid in girls' faces as they walked to classes — has long been a terrorist tactic.

Six schools had been targeted in the past three weeks, and Afghan authorities have alleged it is the Pakistani government's spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence directorate or ISI, which is financing and assisting Taliban insurgents in their bid to poison Afghan schoolgirls.

“The regional spy agencies, namely ISI, are behind it,” National Directorate of Security spokesman Lutfullah Mashal told a press conference. “They are trying to sabotage the ... success

of Afghan education.” An ISI spokesman has dismissed the Afghan accusations as an “absurd and senseless ... attempt to strain ties between the two countries”.

The Taliban has also denied involvement. But among the 15 people arrested, Mr Mashal said, were a Taliban “deputy governor”, a Taliban commander, as well as two girl students and teachers at provincial schools. The two students, one in grade 11 and the other in grade 9, had been paid 50,000 afghanis (\$A1000) to spray the grounds of the girls’ schools in Takhar with a toxic powder, it is alleged.

Zakia, a year 9 student, told the Outlook Afghanistan newspaper: “When I entered the school, I smelt an odour. After smelling, I fell unconscious on the ground.”

Thirty-two per cent of boys in Afghanistan complete primary school, compared with just 13 per cent of girls. Girls are kept home not only because of violence against them, but also to work, because their families are poor, or because they have been married off, according to UN research. The number of girls attending school drops off dramatically after primary school.

About 1.9million Afghan girls are enrolled in primary school, but only 400,000 in secondary school and just 120,000 in higher education. Across Afghanistan, the adult literacy rate is just 26 per cent.

CARE Australia has been involved in community education programs since the days of the Taliban. Senior Programs Officer Alexandra Balmer says the vast majority of Afghan families want their girls in school. But barriers still exist to getting girls to class, and keeping them there, especially beyond primary years. Mothers and fathers who never went to school themselves are sometimes reluctant to allow their children to go, especially if it means time away from working in the home or on farms. Heavy snowfalls in winter — the season just gone was particularly severe — keep many at home.

And secondary school-aged girls need a separate, usually enclosed, place for lessons, especially physical education, a challenge for infrastructure-poor Afghanistan. “Distance in accessing schools is a major issue,” Ms Balmer says. “And when there’s not a safe space for girls to walk to school, that insecurity on the way to school is a barrier.”