

# 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](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/in-model-afghan-city-kidnappings-surge/2013/04/24/2cf88976-a6b4-11e2-9e1c-bb0fb0c2edd9\\_print.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-model-afghan-city-kidnappings-surge/2013/04/24/2cf88976-a6b4-11e2-9e1c-bb0fb0c2edd9_print.html)

## In model Afghan city, kidnappings surge

By Kevin Sieff

April 24, 2013

HERAT, Afghanistan — Nine-year-old Ali Sena Nowruzee's disappearance was disturbingly predictable, even in a city largely untouched by the Taliban and often held up as an example of what a peaceful Afghanistan might look like.

As in dozens of other kidnappings targeting Herat's burgeoning middle class, residents assumed that he would be released once his family delivered tens of thousands of dollars in ransom. Instead, the rosy-cheeked third-grader became famous here after the discovery of his body, hastily buried on the city's outskirts.

In death, he has become a poster child for an unlikely crisis in an unlikely place.

In this modern city far from the battlefields, the growing epidemic of abductions has raised a troubling question about Afghanistan's future: What if eradicating the insurgency only creates space for a new generation of criminal networks?

Last year, nearly 500 people in Herat were arrested on kidnapping charges, compared with about a dozen five years ago, according to Afghan officials. Perpetrators asked for millions in ransom, targeting the families of industrialists, politicians and bankers, who typically remain quiet about the cases and often flee the country after they are resolved.

Other relatively peaceful parts of the country, including Kabul and Jalalabad, also have experienced a surge in abductions that weak police forces have been unable to stem, causing top U.S. and Afghan officials to worry about a threat to stability as insidious as any insurgency but with financial, not ideological, objectives.

The trend has been particularly alarming in Herat, Afghanistan's third-largest city, which has been a relative haven as war raged in other parts of the nation over the past decade. Cross-border trade with Iran and Turkmenistan and a thriving marble industry — as well as distance from the insurgency's southern and eastern strongholds — have aided Herat's prosperity since the fall of the Taliban, in 2001. Its economy, with more than 20 percent annual growth over most of the past decade, has outpaced that of every other Afghan city.

Today, the city that led an early revolt against a communist government in the late 1970s is unmistakably progressive by Afghan standards, with women driving unaccompanied along leafy avenues and quiet parks full of picnicking families.

Police investigations have yielded little insight into the character of the kidnapping networks that are plaguing Herat. There are mixed views about whether they are vast, well-connected enterprises or small-scale operations. Some Afghan officials contend that part of the ransoms end up in the hands of the Taliban, hundreds of miles away. Others say high-level government officials are involved.

The only consensus is that the crime spree has been a blow to growth and security in Herat, which U.S. Deputy Secretary of State William J. Burns praised last year for its “considerable economic potential.”

“These are crimes that undermine the legitimacy of the government and could even lead to its toppling,” Abdul Raziq Nejrabi, the head of Herat's national security tribunal, which deals with kidnapping cases, said of the city and provincial administrations.

### **A trusted protector turns**

Ali Sena vanished in December while on his way to school, a short walk from his home in an upper-middle-class residential neighborhood. His father, Naseer Ahmad Nowruzee, 41, who owns construction and money-exchange businesses, called the police and was told to wait — a request for ransom would come soon, as it always did.

“It was our greatest fear come true,” Nowruzee said.

Hours later, a man called to say that Ali Sena would be released for \$400,000. Even for a successful Herat businessman, it was an extraordinary sum, more than 500 times the average yearly income in Afghanistan.

It took three weeks for Nowruzee to negotiate the ransom down to \$65,000, an amount he could barely afford. In that time, the police traced phone calls and pursued leads in an unsuccessful attempt to identify and locate the kidnappers.

Soon, Nowruzee would learn that the man behind his son's disappearance was the very person he had trusted to protect his family from the growing kidnapping threat, the man Ali Sena called "my uncle," whose picture the boy kept on a family cellphone — his bodyguard, Abdul Samir.

In an interview at Herat's provincial prison, Samir said he was inspired by kidnapping reports he had heard on local television and radio. It seemed like an easy way to make money, he said.

On that day in December, before Ali Sena reached school, Samir told the boy to hop on his motorcycle. Then he raced to a friend's house, where Ali Sena would be kept as a prisoner for five weeks.

"Once we arrived there, he started to cry," said Samir, who said he planned to free Ali Sena when Nowruzee delivered the money.

That's typically how kidnappings in Herat end.

In November, the son of the former mayor was left on the outskirts of the city, bloody and bruised, after his father paid \$200,000 for his release. A physician's son was freed last month after nearly \$100,000 was paid. Ghulam Sakhi Zurmati, a trader from Herat province, spent 72 days in a hole in the ground until his family came up with \$150,000 late last year.

But days after Nowruzee's associate deposited bags full of \$100 bills in an alley specified by kidnappers — after Ali Sena's mother prepared his favorite meal, in anticipation of his return — there was still no sign of the boy.

### **A city in shock**

There would be no sign until early February, when police located the home where he had been kept, in a closet-size room that now held little more than a blanket and empty juice boxes. One of the kidnappers confessed and told authorities where to begin digging.

When they found Ali Sena's body, police saw that he had been bludgeoned in the back of the head. According to forensic tests, he was buried alive. It was the kind of brutality that Afghans in the insurgent-dominated south and east are accustomed to, but a level of violence new to Herat.

Word spread rapidly across Herat. The next day, more than 10,000 people closed their businesses and marched across the city behind Nowruzee, who held his son's body.

"The death of human rights," the crowd screamed.

The family refused to bury Ali Sena until the government gave assurance that his killers would be executed.

"We needed to send a message," Nowruzee said. "This can't continue happening. The Taliban never permitted this kind of criminal activity."

A day later, as protests paralyzed the city, Afghan President Hamid Karzai called Nowruzee on his cellphone. He asked: Was there anything the government could do to help?

Nowruzee had only one demand: He wanted his son's killers to be executed.

"You bury the child," Karzai said in the conversation, which Nowruzee recorded and shared with a Washington Post reporter. (Officials from the presidential palace who insisted on anonymity confirmed that the account was accurate.) "I will issue the decree immediately and will speak with the chief justice."

Nowruzee accepted the president's pledge and buried his son.

In early March, a court sentenced Samir and an accomplice to death. Four others involved in the kidnapping were given six to 20 years in prison. The other defendants said Samir ordered Ali Sena to be killed because the boy would be able to identify his kidnappers. Samir, in the interview, said another collaborator ordered the killing without his permission.

It appeared that Ali Sena's death had become a tipping point, an outlet for public anger over an escalating problem that many here say has been ignored by the Afghan government and Western forces because of the Taliban's apparent lack of involvement.

"We worked hard for what we have, and now anyone with money is a target," said Alhaj Siroos Allaf, the deputy chairman of Herat's chamber of commerce. "People are tired of being scared and receiving no help from the government. They are leaving Herat."

### **Kidnappings continue despite outcry**

Since February, photos and posters of Ali Sena's face, many printed with the words "May his memory endure in our hearts," have become ubiquitous across the city. A group of businessmen started the National Assembly of the People, an anti-kidnapping group aimed at pressuring the government into action.

The police chief, Rahmatullah Safi, has countered by plastering billboards with photos of himself returning kidnapped children to their parents.

"Police in the service of the people," the billboards read.

But other government officials have been implicated in kidnapping schemes. The police chief of Injeel district, outside Herat city, has also been charged in Ali Sena's kidnapping, accused of helping orchestrate the crime. Saleem Shah, the district police chief, has not yet been sentenced.

Despite the public outcry, the kidnappings have not stopped. Last month, five employees of a marble extraction company were abducted. Last week, a teenage girl was kidnapped and raped.

Nowruzee has hired four new bodyguards, whom he acknowledged he does not entirely trust. But he and his family don't leave the house, which is plastered with billboard-size images of Ali Sena, unless they have to. His wife, Nafisa Nabizada, is afraid to visit her son's grave.

"I used to love my city and my country," she said. "Now I've had enough of Afghanistan."