REPORT OF A FIELD TRIP TO KUNAR

February 4 - 8, 1990

by Bernt Glatzer

PARTICIPANTS: A. B. Afzali
M. Idress
N. M. Niaz
B. Glatzer
Takbir (Driver)

DEPARTURE: From Peshawar February 4, 1990, 11:30

RETURN TO PESHAWAR: February 8, 1990, 16:30 by the same route

ROUTE: Warsak Road - Mohmand Agency - Nawa Pass (16:00) - Nawabad Bridge - Narang (17:20)

ACCOMMODATION: Four nights in DACAAR's camp in the old secondary school of Narang

TRANSPORTATION: One four-wheel driven pick-up car.

THE TRIP TO NARANG (February 4, 1990)

Road conditions through Mohmand Agency were excellent. At the foot of the Nawa pass the asphalt ended and the road became difficult and muddy. On the Mohmand side the ascent to the pass was recently repaired and is good enough even for Bedford trucks. On the Kunar side repairs are still going on. ACLU (a branch of CCSC, a US funded organization) is busy with two heavy machines, a bulldozer an a grader. The main problems are landslides and boulders falling on the road during rains. We saw only pick-ups and small Afghan buses plying over the pass, no trucks except one which had fallen from the road. Sarkanay at the foot of the pass is still depopulated and the whole area of Sarkanay is infested with mines except for the main road. The mine fields are marked by
red and white painted sticks. The only inhabitants of Sarkanay seem to be the occupants of a Hizb-e Islami(G) military camp.

On the western side of the Kunar river, between the river and the main road, most of the fields are green and well maintained, except for some fallow areas between Bar Narang and the Alakadari of Narang near the road. On those fallow areas we saw large flocks of sheep and goats obviously belonging to nomads whose camps were situated on the foot of the western hills. In this area between the road and the river most houses except a few qalas are intact although only a few people could be seen. Between the road and the western hills most of the houses are destroyed or left in decay. Some of the villages are totally destroyed, large areas are lying fallow.

DACAAR's construction unit is housed in a wing of the old high school (a fort-like structure) in Narang. The rest of the school is occupied by the local unit of NLFA (Mujaddedi) under Commander Hajji Abdul Qader (A Safi from Badel and member of Narang Shora as well as of the Joint Shora of Chagha Sarai). A second signboard outside the old high school indicates a "clinic" of Deutsche Afghanistan Nothilfe inside the building but we could not trace anything of it except the signboard.

INSPECTION OF CONSTRUCTION SITES AND OF THE EXPERIMENTAL FARM
(February 5, 1990, morning)

We inspected the construction sites of the secondary school in Narang and the primary School in Bar Narang, the works were in full swing. In Narang the workers were mainly busy with covering the roof with mud, in Bar Narang the roof beams were being put up. It seems that the Narang school will be finished in the very near future. To my surprise I saw children already flocking into the school, two primary classes have taken up lessons in one room. The floor was covered with straw and some of the children brought along woven carpets (gilims). The teachers did not appear, the school books showed the imprint of the seven parties' school board. Outside the building beside DACAAR's signboard another green one was put up reading "Shahid Abdul Latif Madrasah" followed by the sign of Hizb-e Islami (G)'s school organization. In addition the green flag of HIG was hoisted on the roof top of the school. One may consider it positively that schooling has started in the building already but I feel we may face a serious problem if one of the political parties appear to have taken over the school.
already. We decided not to interfere at the moment and to leave it to the Narang shora to decide. Dr. Rahimi suggested when the school will be finished we should invite the Narang shora to a ceremony and formally hand over the key to it.

While inspecting the primary school in Bar Narang we were approached by a village elder reminding us that DACAAR had promised to construct a culvert or bridge for/over the Narang Canal which passes by the school and also to clean the canal in this part. We declared that we would stick to our promise which comprises only supply of equipment, materials and sophisticated work, but the unskilled labour has to be provided by the villagers without payment. We reminded him that traditionally such works were done as "ashar" (unpaid work parties for community tasks). Mr Afzali and I are of the opinion that not only would funds be wasted but also would traditional community organization be destroyed if foreign organizations take over tasks which also can be fulfilled by the locals themselves.

We also visited the experimental fields of our agricultural section. The staff seems to have difficulties in solving the weed problem which is badly affecting the plant growth on the experimental fields.

**INSPECTION OF IRRIGATION WORKS**
(February 5, 1990, afternoon)

All along the Salar Canal works were in full swing. Near Lachalay we saw two mine defusing teams in the canal bed working under Operation SALAM. I got the impression that the canal can be ready by the end of April provided the works are going on as intensively as now.

**VISIT OF CHAGHA SARAI**
(February 5, 1990 (afternoon))

We went to Chagha Sarai in order to pay a visit to the UN office. Earlier in an ACBAR meeting in Peshawar we were told that all NGOs working in Kunar should contact the UN office there. In Chagha Sarai nobody seemed to be aware of a UN office. Finally we found the building. It neighbours the RAFA camp near the power station. The two-storied building is still under repair, UN-staff had not yet arrived in Kunar.
The town is crowded with mujaheddin or men posing as mujaheddin. Houses are ill maintained, no traces of a civilian population could be seen. Most of the daily necessities can be found in the shops plus weapons and ammunition. The town makes a dirty and shabby impression, it is not a place to attract returning refugees. Most of the parties are running hospitals in Chagha Sarai, these are the only better maintained buildings in town. We also visited the two mass graves in Kerala on the other side of the Chagha Sarai bridge. Kerala has not recovered from the massacre, its houses are deserted.

Although all parties have their representatives and offices in Chagha Sarai the town seems to be clearly dominated by the Salafis (Wahabis). In the times of prayer passers-by are forcibly dragged into the mosque and made pray according to Wahabi rite. This happened also to my fellow travellers.

All the agricultural areas between the Nawabad bridge and Chagha Sarai are cultivated and well maintained. Wheat is grown almost everywhere. Houses are mostly in good repair, but only few are inhabited.

INSPECTION OF THE ROAD TO NANGALAM (PECH VALLEY): (Feb.6,1990)

...we followed the road up the Pech valley and turned a few km short of Nangalam. We were accompanied by our road surveying team which looked for a suitable base camp in Bar Kanday. The road is in bad shape, very narrow and dangerous, in rainy weather it gets very slippery, cars are in constant danger of sliding down into the gorge. Between Bar Kanday and Nangalam the road leads high up along a steep rocky slope. Here the road is supported only by earthen walls which can break off when soaked with water. It has happened already in some places. The only solution would be retaining walls of stones for many kilometers.

The whole Pech valley is green and fertile. All fields are well maintained, wheat is growing everywhere, farmers were busy with bringing out chemical fertilizers donated by Arab countries. Except around Wotapur which had been a Kabul and Soviet military post most of the villages are in good repair, but only a few houses seem to be inhabited. As in the Kunar valley most of the families have left the area and the men come back temporarily to work their fields. Near Wotapur farmers (Tajik/Deqan) told us that formerly they had been tenants paying half of their harvests to the landlords. The latter left the area with the Kabul forces and Hizb-
e Islami (G) took over the land. Now they have to pay one half of their harvest to that party. Despite an agreement of all donors operating in the Kunar province to distribute fertilizers free of charge the farmers of Wotapur say that they have to pay for the chemical fertilizers to the dominant party of the area.

SUMMARY

Economic Situation:

At first glance the economic situation of Kunar seems to be almost back to normal, most fields are fresh green with sprouting wheat. Pick-up cars with all sorts of merchandize are plying across the Nawa Pass into the valley. The Bazaar of Chagha Sarai as well as a new bazaar at the Nawabad bridge, the Narang bazaar and others are well equipped with the daily necessities. Almost all goods on sale come from Pakistan and the prevalent currency is the Pakistani Rupee. However, this prosperous impression may be misleading as the agriculture is based on the hope that the irrigation canals will be working by April. Products imported in Kunar are by no means balanced by exports produced in that valley. There is mainly a war economy, i.e. the goods marketed are not meant for a civilian population but mainly for the bands of warriors roaming about in the valley, and if it can be generalized what peasants in Wotapur told us, at least a part of the harvests will benefit the political and military parties instead of a civilian population. On the other hand a functioning agriculture is a prerequisite to the return of the refugees, therefore our efforts in the fields of agriculture and irrigation should continue. One thing can be said clearly: The economic situation is definitely not the reason why refugees still do not return to Kunar.

Social and political Situation:

Kunar is still an empty land under military occupation. This becomes the more evident if one compares Kunar with the neighbouring Mohmand Agency on the Pakistani side of the border. Ethnically, culturally, and economically Mohmand resembles pre-war Kunar in almost every respect. In Mohmand one can see children, men and women moving everywhere in the villages, fields, and even on the roads. In Kunar nothing of the kind. Therefore I asked as many people as possible why the refugees don't return home in spite of relative peace and prosperity of the valley.
The first answer usually was the official party version: "Only after an Islamic Government is installed in Kabul will the refugees return in honour and safety." However, I doubt that people are so much concerned about the politics of Kabul. I think what matters is the situation in the province itself. When asked again people usually say: "The area is still insecure we fear that the war may come back to Kunar any time". I feel this answer is closer to the point, particularly if we understand by "insecurity" not only the threat of shooting and bombing but also the political insecurity within "liberated" Kunar. This political insecurity reaches also to the economy (who will benefit from the prospering agriculture and from foreign aid? Who will be in control of farm lands, buildings, canals, and other assets?).

I could not find evidence for the view that refugees are prevented by force from returning home. But I also found no evidence to the contrary. The two, three families we saw crossing the Nawa Pass in western direction do not prove anything.

The political set-up in Kunar at present is at least not encouraging for civilians to live there. For the near future I wish to get deeper into the problem why refugees hesitate to return.

During our stay in Kunar the Joint Shora of Chagha Sarai was still functioning. It had begun to organize elections in the province on the principle of one-man-one-vote. Eligible were not individuals but the parties. On an electoral poster we saw the following parties named: Hizb-e Islami(G), Hizb-e Islami(K), Jamiat-e Islami, Jama’at ad-da’wat alal-Quran wa as-Sunnat-e Afghanistan (Salafi), Nejat-e Milli, Mahaz, Harakat(Mansur), Harakat(Nabi), Dawlat-e Inqilabi Islami(Nuristan), Ittehad-e Islami(Sayyaf), Esha’at at-Tawhid wa as-Sunnat(Salafi), Ittehad-e Islami(Waqar).

The election is to establish the percentage according to which each party will be represented in a provincial shora of 100 seats. This shora then has to elect a new wali (governor), the uluswals (sub governors), alaqadars (local administrators), gazis (judges) etc.

The week before we came the Interim Government had sent a wali of its choice to Kunar but he was rejected by the Joint Shora and sent back to Peshawar. The Interim Government in turn opposed strongly the Kunar election. The Joint Shora postponed its election and the following week it sent a three members delegation to Peshawar to negotiate with the Interim Government.
The shora of Narang and Badel continued unchanged since last year but it was now mainly busy with provincial politics. It was therefore not available to us. We only met Hajji Abdul Qader who represents the Narang and Badel shora in Chagha Sarai and whom the Joint Shora later sent to Peshawar to negotiate with the Interim Government.

P.S.:  

Near the intake of Narang Canal a conflict broke out between two families about the course of the canal. The latter had been diverted during the 1970-s. Family A wanted to restore the original course, Family B insisted in the new course. After shooting broke out between the two sides the case was taken to the Narang and Badel shora. Unable to enforce a decision this shora delegated the case to the Chagha Sarai shora where it is now pending. In this connection ... whose father is a member of the Chagha Sarai shora mentioned that political parties operate rather on the surface, what matters are tribal and lineage affiliations, family members may belong to different political parties (tansimha) but when it comes to serious conflicts they will stand together.