

U.N. agency pulls foreign staff out of Afghanistan after slaying

By Paul Haven
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KABUL, Afghanistan — Unable to protect its staff from Afghanistan's cascade of violence, the U.N. refugee agency on Tuesday pulled international workers out of the volatile south and east and suspended all aid to refugees returning from Pakistan.

The decision, taken after the weekend slaying of a 29-year-old French refugee worker, could affect tens of thousands of Afghans. A group of international aid organizations also said Tuesday it was considering a pull-out from the south, raising fears the desperately poor region could become even more isolated.

"We are taking today a painful decision to temporarily reduce staff in the eastern and southern provinces," said Filippo Grandi, the chief of mis-

sion in Afghanistan at the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. "We will review the situation after two weeks."

Some 30 foreign staff members were being withdrawn, and refugee centers in the provinces of Nangarhar, Paktia, Khost and Kandahar were being closed, he said.

The agency said Monday that it had withdrawn its surviving international staffer out of Ghazni, where Bettina Goislar was gunned down as she traveled Sunday through a bazaar in a clearly marked U.N. vehicle.

That same day, a remote-controlled bomb went off beside a U.N. vehicle in Paktia province. And on Nov. 11, a car bomb exploded outside U.N. offices in Kandahar, wounding two people.

Maki Shinohara, the UNHCR spokeswoman, said that to minimize the effects of the pullout, a limited number of

Afghans will keep the agency's offices open, and it will work with other aid organizations to try to keep support flowing.

"Operations will be scaled down, inevitably. The biggest impact will be on refugees returning from Pakistan because we can't operate the reception centers," Shinohara said. She said about 5,000 refugees returned from Pakistan each week in October, but with winter approaching, only about 1,300 a week in November.

Some 2.5 million Afghan refugees have returned to the country, in addition to 500,000 internally displaced people, since the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001, mostly from Pakistan and Iran. UNHCR said the few remaining Afghan staff would help keep aid flowing to more than 220,000 Afghan returnees affected by the decision.

House approves energy bill, sends it to Senate

By Josef Hebert
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The House approved a far-reaching energy bill Tuesday that would provide billions of dollars in tax incentives for oil, gas and coal producers and give a boost to corn farmers by requiring a doubling of ethanol use in gasoline.

It also would impose federal reliability rules on operators of high-voltage power lines for the first time, to reduce the likelihood of another cascading blackout like the one last summer.

Republicans called the bill farsighted and a key to improving America's energy security by expanding energy choices. But Democrats said the tax breaks amounted to giveaways to oil, gas and coal industries that don't need the help. They also said the legislation fails to focus on ways to conserve energy and develop renewable fuels. The House passed the bill by

a vote of 246-180, sending it to the Senate for final approval, probably later this week.

Despite the wide margin of victory in the House, the bill could run into snags in the Senate over a provision that would shield the makers of a gasoline additive from liability lawsuits.

The massive bill, covering some 1,400 pages, was crafted during weeks of largely closed-door negotiations between House and Senate Republicans and completed in a late-night conference just before midnight Monday despite Democratic protests.

The first overhaul of the nation's energy priorities in a decade, the legislation would provide \$23 billion in energy-related tax incentives over 10 years, or nearly three times as much as the White House had said earlier this year it would accept.

Nevertheless, President Bush hailed the House action.

"I commend the House for its vote today and urge the Senate to act

House approves energy bill

The House of Representatives passed the \$23 billion energy bill on Tuesday. Here are the major provisions:

- An estimated \$23 billion over 10 years in tax breaks with two-thirds for coal, oil, natural gas and ethanol.
- Doubling ethanol production for gasoline to 15 billion gallons a year by 2012. Production would increase to 3.1 billion gallons by 2005.
- Authority and financial help, including \$1 billion in loan guarantees, to build a pipeline to transport gas from Alaska's North Slope to the Midwest.
- Mandatory reliability requirements for high-voltage power lines and incentives to speed power line production.
- Authority for the federal government to expand transmission line routes if states can't agree.
- Tax incentives for improving energy efficiency of homes and some appliances, and to encourage use of renewable energy sources such as solar, wind and biomass.
- Tax breaks for development of clean technology and for utilities reducing pollution at coal-burning power plants.
- A requirement to speed up permits. Ease some environmental rules to promote energy development on public lands.
- Construction of a \$1 billion reactor in Idaho to produce hydrogen and tax breaks to help development of next-generation commercial power reactors.
- Product liability protection for manufacturers of gasoline additive MTBE, which contaminated water supplies in 28 states. Authorizes \$2 billion for companies to pay "transition" costs as MTBE is phased out over 10 years.
- A 10-year, \$1 billion program to deal with "coastal erosion" for six states with offshore oil and gas production. Louisiana would get more than half of the money.

SOURCE: U.S. Congress

expeditiously as well," Bush said in a statement from London, where he was on a three-day state visit.

In Washington, Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham said the administration would have preferred to see the costs lower but accepted the bill's tax package.

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