

Province Profile - Panjshir



(Map: USAID)

Panjshir is a new province, formed in 2004 along the Panjshir River Valley from land that was previously in Parwan Province.

Key Facts

- **Governor of Panjshir Province:** Keramuddin Keram (appointed 26 April 2010).
- **Provincial Capital:** Bazarak.
- **Size:** 1,400 sq. miles (slightly smaller than Rhode Island).
- **Members of Parliament:** 2, including 1 woman, out of 249 total house members.

Total Province Population: approx. 140,000

- Almost all of the population is ethnic Tajik.
- Official population estimates vary significantly – from 137,000 ([USAID](#)) to over 300,000 ([US PRT](#)).
- The heavily mountainous terrain that covers 90% of the province contains many uncountable population settlements and groups of nomads.

Literacy and Education:

- Around one-third of all people in Panjshir are literate (43% of men and 20% of women) – just above the national average of approx 28%.
- About half of all boys and one-third of all girls attend primary school. Most secondary is boys-only
- Local access is a major challenge; many students must travel several miles to get to school.

Economy of Province:

- The majority of the economy is agriculture-based. It is a major source of revenue for approx 40% of households.
- The only semi-industrial sector in the province is related to mining precious stones.

Infrastructure:

- 16% of households have access to electricity, but only 3% is serviced by municipal supply.
- 91% have access to community drinking water.
- Approx. half the province is road-less, and only one-third of all roads are car-worthy, given seasonal conditions (of winter snow, etc).

Key Issues

Strong Prevailing Security Environment

- **Cooperation and trust is high** between local forces (mostly former-mujahedeen) and the US-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). The PRT base is guarded entirely by Afghan forces.
- Panjshir recorded **no IED attacks for all of 2008 and 2009**. However, a recent explosion (with no casualties) shocked locals and was widely condemned.
- It has been a **poppy-free province** for several years. Last year it was awarded \$1.4 million through the Min. Of Counternarcotics' Good Performance Initiative.
- The province is **popular with visiting western officials** due to its proximity to Kabul and relatively good security allowing freer travel and access.

The Legacy of Massoud

- Ahmed Sher Massoud, the '**Lion of Panjshir**' who held off Soviet forces from the small mountain stronghold, remains one of the most iconic figures in recent Afghan culture. His assassination by Al Qaeda two days before Sept. 11, 2001 is regarded as a national tragedy.
- However, his ongoing veneration by Tajiks also seeds resentment from some Pashtuns who are fearful of a Tajik-minority taking over the country.
- A number of **high-profile officials also hail from Panjshir**, including Yunos Qanuni (Speaker of Parliament); Marshall Qasim Fahim (1st Vice President and former Min. of Defense). Massoud's brother, Ahmad Zia, was formerly Karzai's 1st Vice President.

Tajik Stronghold

- The 2009 presidential **election results** in Panjshir recorded a heavy loss for Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun, in the deeply Tajik province.
- **Previous governor Bahlol Bahij** is a Tajik former mujahedeen and Northern Alliance commander. His recent departure caused some political disturbance. Whilst in office he was an outspoken critic of the lack of authority and local involvement from the Kabul central government versus the apparent strength and self-determination of the provincial government in Panjshir.

Economic Opportunities and Key Developments

- **Road building** remains a basic prerequisite of economic development for the mountain-locked communities of the Panjshir. A USAID-funded road completed in 2007 cut the driving time between Barazak and Kabul from five hours to two.
- **Gemstone mining** remains a small-scale operation, with the potential to expand. Emerald production in the region has been estimated at up to tens of millions of dollars a year.

Recent Events

- **New Provincial Leadership:** a new provincial governor was appointed this week, the first change since 2005.
- Additionally, the **leadership of the American led PRT** also changed in March 2010.

Possible Questions

- How can the security success of Panjshir be replicated in other provinces?
- Could more roads also open up the province to greater security threats?