



AFGHANISTAN · CRITICAL MINERALS · GOVERNANCE

Gold, Power and Grievance

Afghanistan's Mining Sector and Unrest

How unresolved internal disputes over mining control, revenue and local rights are driving violence in northern Afghanistan



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ABOUT PAYF

Pak Asia Youth Forum

Pak Asia Youth Forum (PAYF) is a public diplomacy platform and lobbying think tank. Its research briefs examine developments that shape regional stability, governance and cooperation across Asia.

This investigative report draws on PAYF ground sources, documents and photographs obtained in the area, and published reporting cited in the endnotes. Allegations are presented as reported; where figures or claims have not been independently verified, the text says so.

CITATION

Suggested form

Bhatti, Muneeba Abdul Khaliq. *Gold, Power and Grievance: Afghanistan's Mining Sector and Unrest*. PAYF Investigative Report No. 01. Pak Asia Youth Forum, October 2026.

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SUMMARY

Executive summary

Afghanistan's mineral wealth is globally significant, yet mining under Taliban rule operates with little legal restraint or transparency: subsidiary laws have been repealed, no independent body audits proceeds, and concessions have allegedly gone to commanders and officials through informal applications. Reported corruption includes a US\$200,000 bribe over the Wikador mine and a US\$700,000 talc scheme in Nangarhar, while residents of Badakhshan and Takhar report seized farmland and deadly clashes. This report concludes that the unrest is driven by rivalry between the Kandahari and Haqqani factions over mining. Haqqani-affiliated commanders, notably Jumma Khan Fateh, resisted the 2024 transfer of the ministry from Haqqani-aligned Shahabuddin Delawar to Kandahar-aligned Hidayatullah Badri. Fateh surrendered on 17 August; the Taliban later revealed, from an audio clip, that he had contacted the Afghanistan Freedom Front, an Afghan armed resistance group. The investigation and the reshuffle show that the unrest in northern Afghanistan is an internal matter rooted in internal grievances, with no external connection.

KEY FINDINGS

- 01** Afghanistan's mineral wealth is globally significant, yet mining under Taliban rule operates with little legal restraint or transparency.
- 02** Reported corruption includes a US\$200,000 bribe over the Wikador mine and a US\$700,000 talc scheme in Nangarhar.
- 03** Residents of Badakhshan and Takhar report seized farmland and deadly clashes.
- 04** The unrest is driven by rivalry between the Kandahari and Haqqani factions over mining.
- 05** Haqqani-affiliated commanders, notably Jumma Khan Fateh, resisted the transfer of the ministry from Haqqani-aligned Shahabuddin Delawar to Kandahar-aligned Hidayatullah Badri.
- 06** Fateh surrendered on 17 August. The Taliban later revealed, from an audio clip, that he had contacted the Afghanistan Freedom Front, an Afghan armed resistance group.
- 07** The investigation and the reshuffle show that the unrest in northern Afghanistan is an internal matter rooted in internal grievances, with no external connection.

01

SECTION ONE

Introduction

“Yet Afghanistan is behaving as if it were selling gravel, not assets central to the global economy.”

Beneath Afghanistan’s mountains lies one of the most concentrated reserves of critical minerals in the world: lithium, rare earths, copper and cobalt, the materials that power batteries, semiconductors, renewable energy and modern weapons. Yet Afghanistan is behaving as if it were selling gravel, not assets central to the global economy. Geological surveys by the [United States](#) and Afghanistan’s own Ministry of Mines have confirmed nearly 90 mineral occurrences, more than 30 of them classified as “critical.”¹

Mining in the country is regulated by the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum in Kabul, which maintains offices in different parts of Afghanistan. The country has more than 1,400 mineral fields, including barite, chromite, coal, copper, gold, iron ore, lead, natural gas, petroleum, salt, sulfur, lithium, talc and zinc, among many other minerals, as well as gemstones such as high-quality emeralds, lapis lazuli, red garnet and ruby.²

The deposits are spread across the country. Afghanistan has six lapis lazuli mines, the largest located in Badakhshan province, and around 12 copper mines, including the Aynak copper deposit in Logar province. The northeastern provinces, particularly Takhar and Badakhshan, are considered among the richest regions in terms of natural resources, especially precious and semi-precious stones such as lapis lazuli and emeralds, as well as valuable metals such as gold. More than 77 types of minerals and metals have been identified in the two provinces alone.

THE CONFLICT

Rivalry between the Kandahar leadership and the Haqqani Network over the mining sector.

The unrest in northern Afghanistan is driven chiefly by the rivalry between two factions, the Kandahar leadership and the Haqqani Network, over the mining sector. Local commanders in the mining regions, affiliated with the Haqqani faction that controls mines and strategic economic assets, are resisting the transfer of mining authority from Haqqanis to Kandaharis. Local residents, meanwhile, face forced displacement, unequal economic benefits, severe environmental damage and violent crackdowns. For them, it makes little difference whether a gold industry exists: as one local put it, it “doesn’t benefit the local communities here, it benefits only the powerful people.”³

“It doesn’t benefit the local communities here, it benefits only the powerful people.”

A LOCAL RESIDENT OF THE MINING REGIONS

AT A GLANCE

Figures as stated in this brief

1,400+

Mineral fields across Afghanistan

~90

Confirmed mineral occurrences, more than 30 classified as critical

77+

Types of minerals and metals identified in Takhar and Badakhshan alone

203

Mining contracts signed over four years, announced value above US\$250 million

17

Mining-related incidents recorded, July 2024 to August 2026

~1,000

Special-force personnel deployed to Badakhshan to centralise control of the mines

02

SECTION TWO

Location

Where are Afghanistan’s major mineral deposits located?

Table 1 Major mineral-producing provinces and areas at a glance

Province	Principal minerals and areas	Status noted in this report
Logar	Mes Aynak copper deposit	30-year agreement signed in 2008 with a consortium of Chinese companies; extraction delayed
Badakhshan	Gold, lapis lazuli and precious stones; Shahr-e Buzurg, Yawan, Kohistan, Raghistan, Khash and other districts	Disputes among local commanders, miners and central authorities over control of mining operations
Nangarhar	Talc and chromite, alongside other minerals	Subject of an alleged talc bribery scheme (see Section 7)
Takhar	Gold; Chah Ab and other areas	Disputes between companies and communities; January 2026 incident (4 dead, 5 injured); mining suspended
Herat	Iron ore and coal	Ministry has announced contracts with private companies
Kandahar	Shah Wali Kot and other areas (mineral potential)	2025 tender announcement for a polymetallic deposit; award not established
Other provinces	Gold in Baghlan; chromite in Parwan; coal, marble, gemstones; potential lithium	See contracts table in Section 4

LOGAR

Copper

MES AYNAK, LOGAR PROVINCE

Mes Aynak is one of Afghanistan’s most significant copper deposits. In 2008, a 30-year mining agreement was signed with a consortium of Chinese companies. Commercial extraction has nevertheless been delayed by issues between the company and the Taliban, including the Taliban’s apprehension of company officials.⁴

BADAKHSHAN

Gold and lapis lazuli

Badakhshan's key mineral-producing areas include Shahr-e Buzurg, Yawan, Kohistan, Raghistan and Khash, among other districts. The province holds gold and precious stones, and reports have highlighted disputes among local commanders affiliated with the aforementioned major factions, miners and central authorities over control of mining operations and the distribution of benefits.

NANGARHAR

Talc and chromite

Nangarhar, in eastern Afghanistan, is an important area for talc and chromite extraction, alongside other mineral resources.

TAKHAR

Gold

Gold mining operates in Chah Ab and other areas of Takhar. Reports have documented disputes between mining companies and local communities. In January 2026, an incident left four people dead and five injured, and authorities suspended mining activities while it was investigated.⁵

HERAT

Iron ore and coal

Herat holds mineral resources including iron ore and coal. The Taliban's Ministry of Mines and Petroleum has announced contracts with private companies for extraction at different locations.

KANDAHAR

Mineral potential

Shah Wali Kot and other parts of Kandahar have been identified as areas of mineral potential. An announcement in 2025 referred to an investment and tender opportunity for a polymetallic deposit in Shah Wali Kot. An announcement alone, however, does not establish that a final contract was awarded or that commercial extraction is under way.⁶

ELSEWHERE

Other resources

Other significant mineral resources include gold in Baghlan, chromite in Parwan, coal, marble, gemstones, and areas with potential lithium deposits.

A distinction runs through this entire picture: the existence of a mineral deposit, an operational mine, and a deposit formally awarded under a mining contract are three different things.

1 · Deposit

A mineral occurrence exists

2 · Operational mine

Extraction is actually under way

3 · Awarded contract

Rights formally granted under contract

03

SECTION THREE

Revenue

How much money do the mines generate, and where does it go?

THREE NUMBERS

Announced contract value, government royalties and company profits are not the same thing.

To understand mining revenues, it is necessary to distinguish between the announced value of a contract, government royalties and a company's profits.

Two gold-mining projects in Takhar, July 5, 2026. According to the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, the combined investment value of the two projects was approximately US\$8.9 million. The ministry announced a 40 percent royalty for the government and a commitment of US\$2 million for community services in the area.⁷

Contracts announced over four years, July 24, 2025. According to the ministry, 203 small and large mining contracts were signed over four years, with a combined announced value exceeding US\$250 million.⁸

These figures represent the announced value of contracts. They do not mean that the same amount was transferred to the government treasury. They demonstrate the economic significance of mining, but not how revenues are divided between Kandahar and the Haqqani Network. Establishing that would require full contract terms, actual production figures, company profits, royalty payments and government revenue accounts.

US\$8.9m

Combined investment value, two Takhar gold projects (Jul 2026)

40%

Royalty announced for the government on those projects

203

Small and large contracts signed over four years

US\$250m+

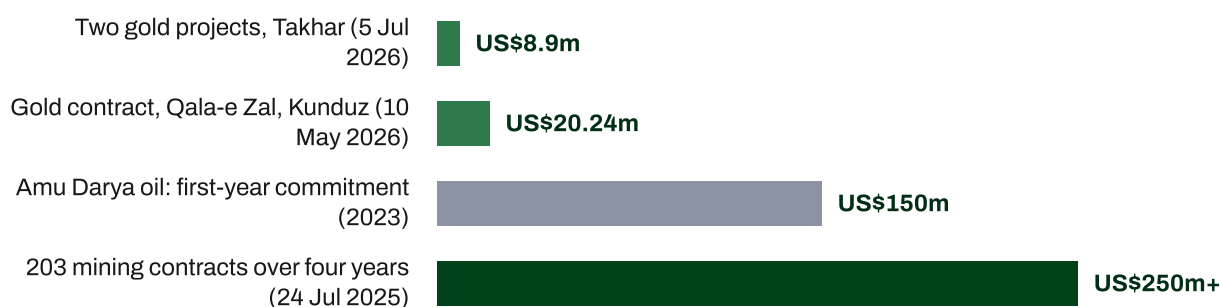
Combined announced value, not treasury receipts

Table 2 Announced values and reported terms of selected contracts⁹

Contract or project	Date	Announced value	Reported terms
Two gold-mining projects, Takhar	5 July 2026	Approx. US\$8.9 million	40% royalty to government; US\$2 million for community services
Gold mining, Qala-e Zal district, Kunduz (Subhan Momand Company and Azerbaijan's Reef Group)	10 May 2026	US\$20.24 million (five-year contract)	30% royalty; US\$200,000 for social services
203 small and large mining contracts	24 July 2025 (over four years)	More than US\$250 million	Announced value only; not treasury receipts
Amu Darya basin oil extraction (Chinese state-owned company)	5 January 2023	US\$150 million first-year investment commitment	25-year term; company recovers costs before Afghanistan receives its share of net revenues

Figure 1 Announced values, not treasury receipts

US\$ million, as stated by the ministry or reported



Announced values of contracts and commitments; they do not show money transferred to the state treasury.

3.2

Proceeds

Where do mining proceeds go?

Another fundamental concern is the protection and management of revenues generated through the sale and extraction of mineral resources. Reports argue that the Taliban administration lacks a sufficiently transparent legal framework for revenue collection, public expenditure, financial administration and budget management, and that no effective independent institution exists to scrutinise its financial operations. This raises a critical question: how are revenues from Afghanistan's mineral resources collected, recorded, audited and incorporated into the public treasury?¹⁰

A credible system would keep a clear record of payments by mining companies, royalties owed and collected, operating expenses deducted and revenues transferred to the state, with independent auditing and public reporting. Without such safeguards, citizens cannot determine whether mineral wealth funds public services and national development or is diverted to private or factional interests. Reports claim that mining revenues are at risk of being misappropriated by Taliban leaders and used to advance personal or group interests rather than the public good.

3.3

Case study: Amu Darya basin

The Amu Darya oil contract: questions about costs, investment and oversight

A frequently cited example is the oil-extraction agreement for the Amu Darya basin, signed with a foreign company on January 5, 2023. It runs for 25 years, with the company committing to invest US\$150 million in the first year. Under it, the company recovers its costs before Afghanistan receives its share of net revenues.¹¹

The central concern is that Afghanistan lacks sufficient contractual authority to scrutinise the company's expenditure independently. If the cost-recovery mechanism is not subject to effective independent auditing, the company could have an incentive to report higher costs, reducing the revenue available to Afghanistan. Eight months into the first year, the company had not begun substantive work and had effectively secured control of the concession without delivering the anticipated investment.¹²

25 yrs

Contract term, signed 5 January 2023

US\$150m

First-year investment commitment

8 months

Into year one, substantive work had not begun

3.4

On the ground

Financial flows on the ground

Numerous photographs, documents and other evidence from the area indicate that major factions, including the Kandahar leadership and the Haqqani Network, are operating around the clock, trying to remove as much mineral wealth as possible and export it abroad as quickly as they can. In some areas of Badakhshan, lush pistachio forests once covered the landscape, but all the trees have been cut down, leaving the areas barren. Reports say that substandard mining practices, businesses run by local power brokers and corruption among Taliban fighters have combined to facilitate the plundering of the mines.

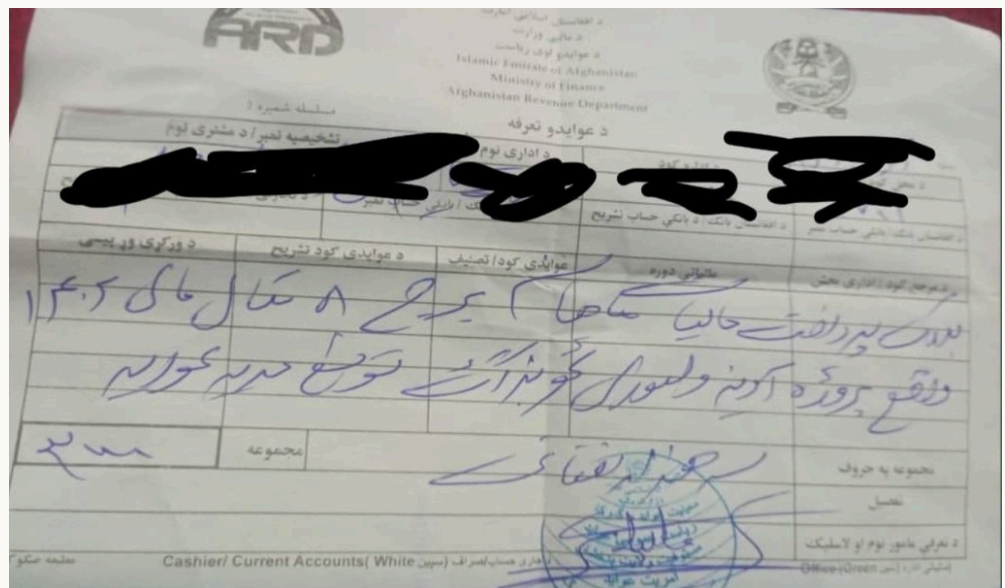
Transporters complain that although the contracts do not provide for payments from them, local Taliban personnel allegedly impose a 10 percent tax on every vehicle and scooter, amounting to approximately AFN 10,000 per vehicle. According to the drivers, the payments are not collected through banks but handled in cash on-site, creating extensive opportunities for corruption.¹³

FIGURE 2

Afghanistan Revenue Department (Ministry of Finance) receipt with handwritten entries; identifying details redacted.

10%

Alleged informal levy per vehicle, about AFN 10,000, paid in cash on-site



04

SECTION FOUR

Who Controls

Who controls Afghanistan's mining leases and contracts?

TWO LEVELS

Control over Afghan mining operates on two separate levels.

LEVEL ONE

Official contractual authority

Official contractual authority rests with the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, which formally grants mining rights to companies.

LEVEL TWO

Operational control

Operational control is a different matter. Local commanders affiliated with major factions, together with businesses and security institutions, may influence security, extraction, transportation and revenue collection in certain areas. According to reports published in 2026, official mining licences fall under the ministry and the central administration, but Taliban commanders and traders retain influence over operations in some locations.

205+

Contracts awarded, August 2021 to February 2024

150+

Companies receiving those contracts, most linked to local Taliban commanders

16

Articles in the ministry's standard mining contract

Major mining contracts and companies

Table 3 Major mining contracts and companies

Mine or project	Company or companies	Reported contract information
Ghorian iron ore mine, Herat	Watan Durakhshan	First block
Ghorian iron ore mine, Herat	Sahil Sharq Middle East	Second block
Ghorian iron ore mine, Herat	Shams Milli Afghan	Third block
Ghorian iron ore mine, Herat	Bakhtar Steel	Fourth block
Chah Ab gold mine, Takhar	China-Afghanistan, partnered with Zarawar Afghanistan	Contract announced in 2023
Tulak lead and zinc mine, Ghor	Afghan Invest	Contract announced
Koh Safi chromite mine, Parwan	Alim Shah Baba and Tayyeb Zabul	Contracts reported for separate blocks
Qara Zaghan gold mine, Baghlan	Bakhtar Union and Modasser Ashna	Contract announced
Shorandam cement project, Daman, Kandahar	Ahmad Nabizada	Listed as a project by the ministry

KUNDUZ

Qala-e Zal gold contract, 10 May 2026

On May 10, 2026, a five-year investment contract worth US\$20.24 million was announced for gold mining in Qala-e Zal district of Kunduz. The companies named were Subhan Momand Company and Azerbaijan's Reef Group. According to the ministry's announcement, the companies would pay a 30% royalty and contribute US\$200,000 toward social services.¹⁴

SCALE

Number of mining contracts

NUMBER OF MINING CONTRACTS

Reports found that at least 205 contracts had been awarded to more than 150 companies between August 2021 and February 2024.¹⁵ In July 2025, the Taliban's Ministry of Mines and Petroleum stated that it had signed 203 small and large contracts over four years. Most of these companies are linked to local Taliban commanders, or commanders hold major shares in them and so influence their operations.¹⁶

4.2

Licensing

The licensing process

Following the Taliban's return to power, the issuing of mining licences resumed. The licensing procedures, however, have allegedly been made so complicated that they create opportunities for abuse, bribery and arrangements involving commercial companies.

The Ministry of Mines and Petroleum signs agreements with applicants on standard contracts prepared by its technical deputy directorate. Each contract has 16 articles setting out the conditions and obligations of mining operations, including:

THE STANDARD CONTRACT: SELECTED OBLIGATIONS

Article Two

Companies must have qualified personnel, advanced equipment and the necessary facilities. They must also build the extraction infrastructure, follow regulations on surface water and groundwater use in gold processing, store waste and waste rock appropriately, and transport minerals for sale in coordination with the ministry.

Article Five

Companies must extract professionally and to technical standards, submit quarterly reports on extracted materials, meet environmental requirements, notify the ministry if associated minerals are found, and allow inspections by the ministry's authorised delegations.

IN PRACTICE

Obstacles push applicants toward informal mining.

In practice, obtaining a mining licence involves numerous obstacles: lengthy administrative procedures, high costs, complicated regulations, and the prevalence of corruption, together with control by Taliban factions and other commanders. These have led some applicants to bypass official channels and turn to informal mining. Various reports also indicate that in certain areas miners are required to make unofficial payments to local Taliban armed groups to continue operating or to obtain protection. These payments increase extraction costs and undermine incentives for lawful investment.¹⁷

CORRUPTION

Illegal licences, bribery, falsified figures and secret arrangements.

Corruption is one of the major challenges facing the sector. Reports point to the alleged issuance of illegal licences, bribery to accelerate administrative procedures, theft and manipulation of extraction and sales figures, and secret arrangements between influential individuals and mining operators. Such practices reduce public revenues, undermine public trust and contribute to clashes between the Taliban and local communities. These confrontations have caused casualties among local residents and Taliban personnel, while creating conditions for the irresponsible exploitation of natural resources.

4.3

Legal framework

Legal framework

The Taliban's leader has ordered the repeal of various subsidiary laws adopted during the twenty-year republican period or earlier. Legislation on mining, domestic and foreign investment, commercial companies, public procurement, public expenditure, financial administration and environmental protection has been repealed, suspended or rendered uncertain, which raises serious questions about the legal basis on which the administration awards mining rights and disposes of national resources.¹⁸

The central question is which legal standards now govern the allocation and exploitation of Afghanistan's natural resources if the former framework and its regulations are no longer in force. Without publicly accessible documentation, it is also unclear which legal instruments contracting parties use to define their rights and obligations.

**REPEALED,
SUSPENDED OR
UNCERTAIN**

Mining · Domestic and foreign investment · Commercial companies ·
Public procurement · Public expenditure · Financial administration ·
Environmental protection

“LAW” REMOVED

Enforceability of mining contracts in doubt

The leader also recently ordered the word “law” removed from procurement agreements, particularly mining contracts, which puts their legal status and enforceability in doubt.¹⁹ In a dispute, it is unclear which court or tribunal would have jurisdiction, which law would apply, how the rights of Afghanistan and its citizens would be protected, and how disputes with foreign investors would be resolved. These questions matter most for contracts covering major deposits, long investment periods and substantial economic interests.

Critics argue that the lack of a transparent and predictable legal framework could allow influential commercial interests to secure long-term access to Afghanistan’s mineral wealth, limiting the options of future governments. The concern goes beyond the wording of individual contracts to whether national resources are allocated under clear, public and accountable rules.

4.4

Tenders

Mining rights allegedly granted without competitive tenders

Some mining concessions have been awarded to Chinese companies through single-source procurement rather than open, competitive tenders, which raises concerns about competition, value for money, transparency and the fair allocation of public resources.

Certain emerald mines in Panjshir, lapis lazuli mines in Badakhshan, and coal mines in Dara-e-Suf and Balkhab have allegedly been allocated to Taliban members through simple applications, without a transparent tender process or, in some cases, a formal written contract.²⁰ This raises serious concerns about the legality and transparency of allocating public mineral resources.

DOCUMENTATION

What every concession should specify

Concessions should be supported by clear documentation specifying the location and boundaries, the duration, royalty obligations, investment commitments, environmental requirements, and the rights and responsibilities of the parties. Where rights are granted without a formal contract or competitive process, it becomes harder to establish who is responsible for environmental damage, unpaid royalties, unreported production or breaches of operating conditions. Such arrangements could also let politically connected individuals benefit from resources that should serve the wider public.

A PROPERLY DOCUMENTED CONCESSION SPECIFIES

Location and boundaries

Duration

Royalty obligations

Investment commitments

Environmental requirements

Rights and responsibilities

“*The concern goes beyond the wording of individual contracts to whether national resources are allocated under clear, public and accountable rules.*”

SECTION 4 · LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Key figures named in this report

Table 5 Key figures and their reported roles

Name	Role or reported involvement
Hibatullah Akhundzada	Taliban leader, Kandahar-based; seeks to centralise control over mining, taxation, appointments and revenue
Sirajuddin Haqqani	Leader of the Haqqani Network, rooted in Paktia, Paktika and Khost; reported chromite-revenue links are alleged, not documented
Fasihuddin Fitrat	Taliban Army Chief of Staff; travelled to Shahri Buzurg (October 2025) and Shukai (May 2026) to manage mining disputes; alleged 7% stake in the Awez mine
Jumma Khan Fateh	Former district governor of Nusay; his faction linked to Musa Kaka; reported removed from his position and arrested on 22 June 2026
Musa Kaka	Commander linked to Fateh's faction
Shafiqullah Hafizi	Former mining official, Badakhshan; faction clashed with the group of Abdul Rahman Ammar; replaced by Abdul Manan Rahimzai
Abdul Rahman Ammar	Former mining official; his faction clashed with Hafizi's group in October 2025
Abdul Manan Rahimzai	From Logar; appointed on 22 June 2026 as official responsible for mining affairs in Badakhshan
Ismail Ghaznawi	Former Badakhshan Taliban governor, who deployed a special force of about 1,000 personnel on 18 May 2026
Shabuddin Delawar	Minister of Mines and Petroleum until 2024, then head of the Afghan Red Crescent Society; accused of corruption
Haji Gul Agha (Mullah Hidayatullah Badri)	Appointed Minister of Mines and Petroleum in 2024; previously Da Afghanistan Bank governor and initial Minister of Finance
Abdul Rahman Qanit	Former Deputy Minister for Planning and Policy; signs placer-gold contracts; accused of widespread corruption
Shams al-Rahman Shaker	Ministry commissioner; allegedly took US\$200,000 over the Wikador contract; detained by Taliban intelligence
Haji Bashir Noorzai	Figure from Kandahar; allocated about 1,000 jeribs of gold-mining land in Takhar
Sayed Habibullah Shahpoor	Local administrator; reported 16% stake in the Awez mine
Dr Bashir	Senior Taliban intelligence official; allegedly receives a share of the Awez mine proceeds through Shahpoor

05

SECTION FIVE

Taliban Infighting

What is behind the disagreements between the Kandahar leadership and the Haqqani Network?

Understanding this issue requires an examination of the Taliban's internal power structure.

FACTION

Kandahari

THE KANDAHARI FACTION

Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada and his inner circle, based in Kandahar, constitute a major centre of decision-making authority. Their efforts to centralise control over mining, taxation, appointments and money collection are important elements of the Taliban's governing approach.

FACTION

Haqqani

THE HAQQANI FACTION

The Haqqani Network, led by Sirajuddin Haqqani, has historical roots in southeastern Afghanistan, particularly Paktia, Paktika and Khost. Following the Taliban's return to power, members of the network held important positions in security and government institutions.

CONTEST

Strategic revenues

COMPETITION OVER CONTROL

Reports stated that the Kandahar leadership was seeking to centralise control over strategic revenues and mining resources especially in Badakhshan and Takhar. They also described efforts to reduce the Haqqani Network's influence in customs and border institutions as part of broader centralisation measures, and they connected the network's influence to chromite revenues.²¹

An [ACLEED](#) analysis published in 2026 also identified tensions over mining regulation and local commanders' economic interests as factors contributing to violence in Badakhshan.²²

SEPTEMBER 2026

The distribution of power over mines

In September 2026, reports stated the distribution of power over mines, and other economic resources. According to these reports:²³

- **Kandahar leadership:** The central Taliban leadership under Hibatullah Akhundzada is attempting to bring mining contracts, extraction permits and revenues under centralised control.
- **The Haqqani Network:** Reports claimed that in previous years the network had influence over important revenue-generating institutions in Kabul, including customs offices, border checkpoints and the passport administration. They also alleged that the network remained connected to revenues from chromite mines.
- **The central point of competition:** The dispute is not simply about ownership of mines. It is also about who has the authority to award contracts, collect revenues and distribute economic resources.

5.2

Three main areas of disagreement

1

Control over mining and financial resources

Mining generates income through royalties, taxation, investment and mineral sales. Any network that exercises influence over contracts, customs, mine security or transportation may gain financial and administrative power.

2

Security and regional influence

Central authorities can expand their control by providing security, restricting the autonomy of local commanders and replacing regional officials. In Badakhshan, documented disputes between local commanders and central authorities have now escalated into armed conflict.

3

Appointments and political authority

When the central leadership appoints provincial mining officials, security personnel and contract supervisors, the autonomy of local commanders may decline.

The central questions are who makes the decisions, who collects the revenues and who benefits economically from mining activities. The broader competition for control over mining resources may form part of the Taliban's internal power struggles.

5.3

22 June 2026

The struggle between Kandahar's leadership and local commanders for control of mines

On June 22, 2026, reports claimed the Taliban leadership was attempting to remove gold and precious-stone mines in Badakhshan from the control of local commanders and bring them under the authority of the central leadership in Kandahar, led by Hibatullah Akhundzada. Changes in local officials, the removal of certain commanders and the deployment of a special force of approximately 1,000 personnel were part of these efforts.²⁴

This indicates an effort to centralise control over mining resources. However, the central leadership's attempts to strengthen its authority over local commanders do not, by themselves, prove that a war is taking place between the Kandahar leadership and the Haqqani Network.

5.4

What is known

What is known about the Haqqani Network, chromite, and mining revenues?

- **Leadership:** Sirajuddin Haqqani is the network's principal leader and has held significant security and political influence within the Taliban administration.
- **Chromite:** In September 2026 linked the network's influence to chromite-mining revenues. However, comprehensive documentation of individual mine contracts, ultimate company ownership and the network's precise financial interests has not been publicly established.
- **The Kandahar leadership's position:** Reports described efforts by Hibatullah Akhundzada's leadership to centralise control over mining and other strategic economic assets. Such policies could reduce the influence of networks with established relationships in regional administrations, customs and economic institutions.

2024 DECREE

A surprise reshuffle of
Kabul-based officials

In 2024, Taliban Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada issued a surprise decree reshuffling several Kabul-based officials. Among the most significant changes were the replacement of the governor of Da Afghanistan Bank and the appointment of a new Minister of Mines and Petroleum. According to the decree, Sheikh Shahabuddin Delawar, who had served as minister since the Taliban's return to power, was appointed head of the Afghan Red Crescent Society, replacing Matiul Haq Khalis, the son of Mullah Khalis. Haji Gul Agha, officially named Mullah Hidayatullah Badri, who had been governor of Da Afghanistan Bank, was appointed minister in his place. Gul Agha had initially been appointed Minister of Finance when the government was formed. He was subsequently removed after a reported misunderstanding with Hibatullah over financial transparency and the management of funds.²⁵

US\$40m

Monthly allocation
reportedly transferred to
Kandahar

Several credible reports indicate that the principal cause of the disagreement between Gul Agha and the leader in Kandahar was the transfer of a monthly allocation of US\$40 million to Kandahar. According to these reports, the money is distributed among sheikhs, mullahs, non-Taliban religious clerics in rural areas, and certain groups of so-called guest mujahideen, including members of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).²⁶

DELAWAR

Corruption allegations,
religious rivalry and
women's education

Delawar has frequently been accused in ground reports of administrative and financial corruption and of appointing numerous family members to positions in embassies and ministries. His reported differences with Hibatullah, however, appear to go beyond corruption allegations and his perceived status as a non-Kandahari figure. During a visit to Paktia, his remarks on the religious obligation of education for women triggered serious disagreements with the clerics based in Kandahar. Observers acknowledge that Delawar is regarded as having greater religious scholarship than Hibatullah and the clerics around him, and several Taliban leaders are said to recognise this. According to informed observers, Hibatullah's inner circle has viewed Delawar's religious arguments, influence and financial resources with apprehension. Reports claim that control over mineral resources, religious rivalry, Delawar's emphasis on women's education and his close relations with Americans are among the principal sources of disagreement between the two.²⁷

THE SHIFT

From a Haqqani-aligned minister to a Kandahar-aligned one

Delawar, who is close to the Haqqani Network, has been removed, and Hidayatullah Badri, who is close to the Kandahari faction, now heads the ministry. The change moved the mining portfolio from a Haqqani-aligned figure to a Kandahar-aligned one, and so carried the dispute beyond Kabul into the mining regions. Local commanders affiliated with the Haqqani faction, who control mines and strategic economic assets on the ground, do not accept the transfer of control to the Kandahari faction, leading to unrest and clashes.

5.5

Case study: Badakhshan

The Badakhshan gold-mining dispute: what happened?

Reports during 2025 and 2026 identified Badakhshan's gold mines as an important example of internal competition for control over mining, and of the tensions this has created within the Taliban. The incidents below fall into two groups: disputes among Taliban factions and officials, and confrontations between mining interests and local communities.



Photograph. Jumma Khan Fateh and Fasihuddin Fitrat seen together in a meeting.

A DISPUTES WITHIN THE TALIBAN

24–27 Oct 2025

Shahri Buzurg district,
Badakhshan

Disagreements between the faction associated with former mining official Abdul Rahman Ammar and the group linked to the other former mining official, Shafiqullah Hafizi, escalated into armed clashes. On 27 October, members of a border-security unit became involved in support of Hafizi's faction, and one border-security officer was killed. Taliban Army Chief of Staff Fasihuddin Fitrat, who is close with the Haqqani faction, travelled to the area to try to resolve the dispute.²⁸

10 May 2026

Qatqati area, Shaki
district

An armed clash over a gold mine left at least one person dead and three others injured. Reports said the dispute concerned access to and control of the mine, and the armed individuals involved were associated with a Taliban-linked figure. Some miners alleged that they had been asked to pay one million Afghanis per person to continue working. This allegation has not been independently verified.²⁹

18 May 2026

Shaki, Nusay and
Shighnan districts

Approximately 15 people were arrested amid disputes over mining operations, including relatives and associates of influential Taliban officials and commanders. Among them was Musa Kaka, a commander linked to the faction of Jumma Khan Fateh, who was arrested by Taliban intelligence in connection with the gold-mine disputes in Shaki. According to reports, former Badakhshan Taliban Governor Ismail Ghaznawi deployed a special force of approximately 1,000 personnel to expand operations aimed at controlling mining activities, and some mining camps, tunnels and equipment were destroyed.³⁰

Reports claimed that after Musa Kaka's arrest, some of his armed associates dispersed to different parts of Badakhshan, while individuals loyal to Fateh went on alert in Nusay and Maymay districts. These developments raised concerns about further clashes between rival Taliban factions.



Photograph. Jumma Khan Fateh with local commanders in Badakhshan.

20–21 May 2026

Shukai and surrounding areas

Tensions over control of gold mines led to the suspension of mining at some sites. Local residents and armed individuals, including figures linked to Taliban factions, were involved. Approximately 150 additional Taliban fighters were deployed to the area, and Fasihuddin Fitrat again travelled there to help manage the disputes. The situation involved both disputes between local residents and Taliban-linked actors and internal rivalries over control of the mines.³¹

23 May 2026

Reports said Jumma Khan Fateh, close with the Haqqani faction, had agreed to disarm his unofficial fighters and leave the area.

22 June 2026

Efforts to bring mining under central control

The Taliban leadership attempted to remove gold and precious-stone mines in Badakhshan from the control of regional commanders and place them directly under the authority of the central leadership in Kandahar. Abdul Manan Rahimzai, originally from Logar province, was appointed to replace Shafiqullah Hafizi as the official responsible for mining affairs. Jumma Khan Fateh, the former district governor of Nusay, was removed from his position and arrested.³²

The leadership deployed a special force of approximately 1,000 personnel to Badakhshan and replaced or detained certain local officials. According to reports, the objective was to increase central control over gold and precious-stone mining. Some Taliban officials described the deployment as an effort to protect mining operations.

June–July 2026

Breakdown of negotiations

Fateh, a commander reportedly affiliated with the Haqqani faction, resisted giving up his influence over the mines and the command of his armed supporters, as the central leadership sought to transfer control of mining operations and proceeds from local commanders to officials aligned with Kandahar. Disagreements over mining proceeds, local authority and the disarmament of Fateh's supporters escalated, and efforts by senior Taliban officials to resolve the dispute through negotiations failed to produce a lasting agreement.

11–13 Aug 2026

Nusay district

Armed clashes erupted between Fateh's supporters and Taliban forces. Reports indicated that Taliban helicopters attacked positions held by Fateh's fighters, and casualties were reported on both sides.³³

17 Aug 2026

Fateh surrendered after negotiations with Taliban Army Chief of Staff Fasihuddin Fitrat. Taliban authorities subsequently announced that he would face trial.³⁴

23 Aug 2026

An audio recording circulated that allegedly showed Fateh communicating with the Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF), an armed opposition group. The Taliban side portrayed the recording as evidence of contact with resistance forces.³⁵

TAKEN TOGETHER

Taken together, the confrontation reflects internal Taliban divisions over mining proceeds, factional influence and central control. Fateh's affiliation with the Haqqanis, and his resistance to transferring mining authority to Kandahar-aligned officials, provide important context. Furthermore, the Taliban's claim to have discovered the AFF audio clip during their investigation also indicates that locals support the resistance fighters, with no external involvement.

06

SECTION SIX

Fighting With Locals

Land, livelihoods and the residents of Badakhshan and Takhar

6.1

Disputes

Mining has brought them no benefit and has instead destroyed the environment and caused agricultural land and pastures to disappear.

Disputes

A number of residents in Badakhshan province are complaining about mining companies and about the sale and seizure of agricultural land. They say individuals and companies affiliated with the Taliban buy up farmland, and where owners refuse to sell, the land is seized by force. Most residents, driven by poverty and economic hardship, are compelled to sell without regard for the long-term consequences for their livelihoods, the environment and food security.³⁶

According to these residents, mining has brought them no benefit and has instead destroyed the environment and caused agricultural land and pastures to disappear. They say Taliban-affiliated companies are carrying out unprofessional, large-scale extraction, and that its continuation poses a serious threat to the province's agriculture, livestock and livelihoods.

The residents add that Badakhshan's minerals could have driven the province's development and economic growth. In the absence of law, oversight and transparency, however, they have become a field for looting and plunder and for the spread of corruption. Revenues from extraction, they say, are not spent on regional development, infrastructure or improving people's lives, but go into the pockets of local power brokers and Taliban-affiliated networks.

NETWORKS

Haji Bashir Noorzai · Qari
Fasihuddin · Mawlawi
Amanuddin · Jumma Khan
Fateh

Reports indicate that since the Taliban's return to power, gold and other mineral extraction in these provinces has been carried out through both formal and informal channels involving networks associated with influential figures in the group, including Haji Bashir Noorzai, Qari Fasihuddin, Mawlawi Amanuddin and Jumma Khan Fateh. Weak oversight, limited transparency and the presence of these networks have created conditions in which a substantial share of mining revenues allegedly flows to a small circle of powerful individuals, while local residents receive very little of the economic benefit.



Photograph. Mawlawi Amanuddin pictured with other commanders.

ASSESSMENT

Together, these developments show that the conflict in northern Afghanistan stems from infighting between the Kandahari and Haqqani factions, with no external factor involved. This internal rivalry is also what allows the resistance to succeed, as locals have aligned with it in the fight over control.

6.2

Case study, continued

The Badakhshan gold-mining dispute (continued)

B CONFRONTATIONS WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES

7 Jul 2024

Archa Kotal, Kalafgan district, Takhar

Residents protested against a new salt-mining contract, fearing it would restrict their employment opportunities and access to water. Seven local residents and four Taliban members were injured in clashes.³⁷

11–12 Jan 2025

Shahri Buzurg district, Badakhshan

Residents protested against mining contracts allegedly awarded to relatives of Taliban officials and to Taliban-linked individuals from outside the area. The protesters raised concerns about the economic rights of local communities and their access to employment.³⁸

3 Feb 2025

Awez village, Shahri Buzurg district, Badakhshan

A dispute over ownership of land containing a gold mine escalated into violence. Former jihadi commander Abdul Ghafoor claimed the land belonged to him, while the Taliban maintained that it belonged to the state. Forces including members of the governor's and provincial police chief's security details opened fire on civilians trying to prevent the land from being seized. Abdul Ghafoor's 27-year-old nephew, Misbahuddin, was killed, and two other people were injured.³⁹

2 Jan 2026

Chah Ab district, Takhar

Local residents clashed with Taliban members and a Taliban-linked mining company after mining operations began in a residential area. Several people were wounded, although the number was not confirmed.⁴⁰

5–7 Jan 2026

Samti area, Chah Ab district, Takhar

Violent clashes erupted between local residents and a gold-mining company over mining activities, environmental damage, water shortages and the lack of financial benefit for the community. According to the Taliban Interior Ministry, three local residents and one company employee were killed, and five people were injured. The Associated Press reported four deaths and five injuries, while other local reports claimed higher casualty figures. The Interior Ministry said a company security guard and a local resident had been arrested and that mining operations were suspended pending an investigation.⁴¹

21 Jul 2026

Protest by miners, Badakhshan

Mine workers protested outside the provincial mining department against the closure of mining operations. They alleged that workshops belonging to low-income miners had been shut down while operations linked to influential individuals continued, and that miners had faced threats, beatings and demands for unofficial payments. No casualties were reported.⁴²

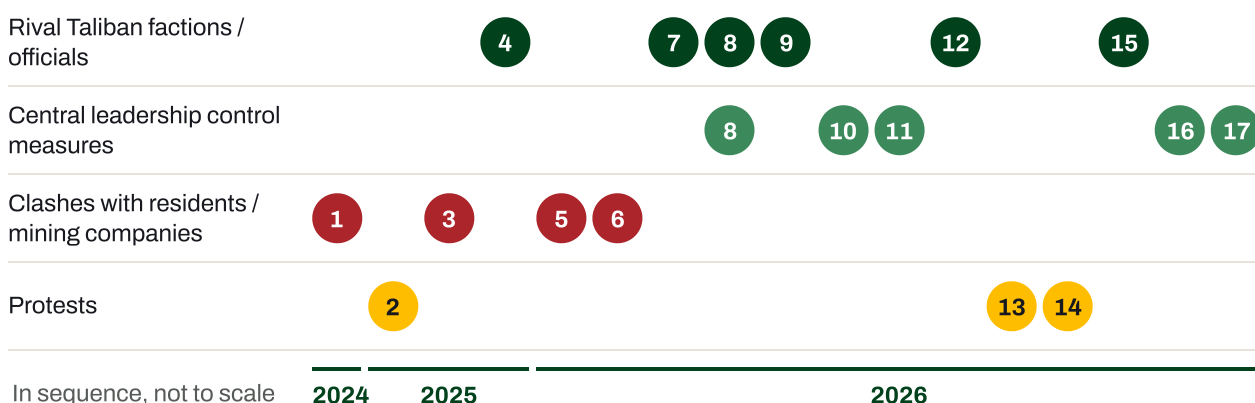
Aug 2026

Arghanj Khwah district area

Local protests against the mines reached a severe level. Around 100 pieces of machinery and around 200 trucks had been sent for digging and extraction but faced resistance from residents. Machinery owners and drivers said around 1,500 people had risen up, that people came out from the mining area, that some were dispersed, and that vehicle windows were broken.⁴³

Figure 3 Timeline of reported mining-related incidents by type, July 2024 to August 2026

Badakhshan and Takhar. Numbers match the incident key in Table 6.



Incidents at a glance

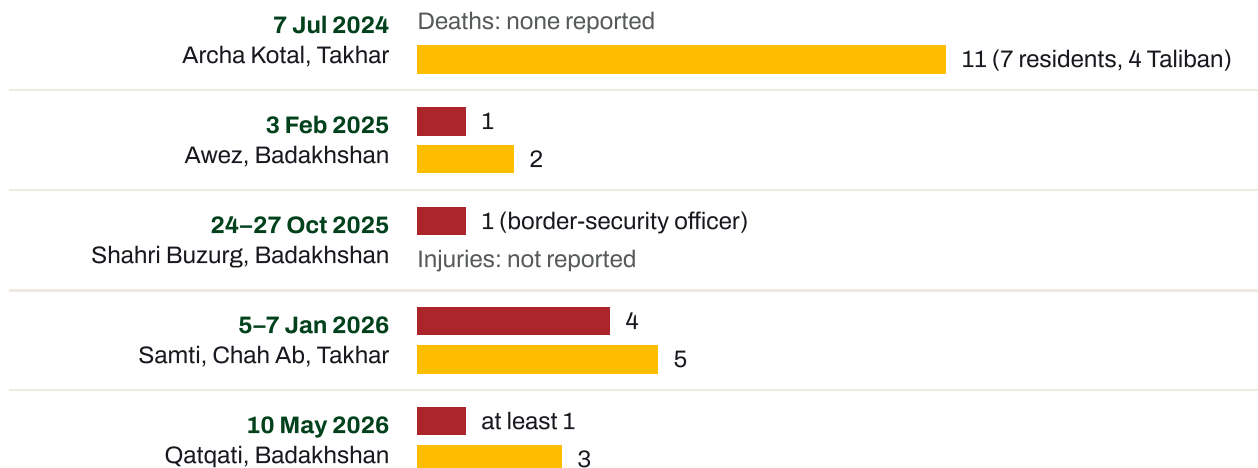
Table 6 Key to numbered incidents shown in Figure 3

No.	Date	Location	Type	Reported outcome
1	7 Jul 2024	Archa Kotal, Kalafgan, Takhar	Residents vs. authorities	7 residents and 4 Taliban members injured
2	11–12 Jan 2025	Shahri Buzurg, Badakhshan	Protest	Contracts allegedly awarded to relatives of officials and outsiders
3	3 Feb 2025	Awez, Shahri Buzurg, Badakhshan	Land dispute; shooting	1 killed, 2 injured
4	24–27 Oct 2025	Shahri Buzurg, Badakhshan	Faction clash	1 border-security officer killed; Fitrat sent to mediate
5	2 Jan 2026	Chah Ab, Takhar	Residents vs. Taliban and company	Several wounded
6	5–7 Jan 2026	Samti, Chah Ab, Takhar	Residents vs. company	4 killed, 5 injured; operations suspended
7	10 May 2026	Qatqati, Shaki, Badakhshan	Faction clash	At least 1 killed, 3 injured
8	18 May 2026	Shaki, Nusay, Shighnan, Badakhshan	Arrests; force deployed	About 15 arrested incl. Musa Kaka; ~1,000-strong force; camps destroyed
9	20–21 May 2026	Shukai and surrounding areas, Badakhshan	Faction and local tensions	Mining suspended at some sites; ~150 fighters deployed
10	23 May 2026	Badakhshan	Central control	Fateh agrees to disarm and leave
11	22 Jun 2026	Badakhshan	Central control	Mines moved under Kandahar; Rahimzai replaces Hafizi; Fateh removed and arrested
12	Jun–Jul 2026	Badakhshan	Failed negotiations	Fateh resists giving up the mines and his armed supporters; talks produce no lasting agreement
13	21 Jul 2026	Badakhshan	Miners' protest	No casualties reported
14	Aug 2026	Arghanj Khwah district	Residents' resistance	Vehicle windows broken; some dispersed
15	11–13 Aug 2026	Nusay district, Badakhshan	Armed clashes between Fateh's supporters and Taliban forces	Helicopter attacks reported; casualties on both sides, no figures given
16	17 Aug 2026	–	Surrender	Fateh surrenders after negotiations with Fitrat; to face trial
17	23 Aug 2026	–	Audio recording	Alleged contact between Fateh and the AFF; presented by the Taliban side as evidence of contact with resistance forces

Figure 4 Reported deaths and injuries in selected incidents

People, as reported; figures have not been independently verified

■ Deaths ■ Injuries



Incidents with no stated figures are omitted.

6.3

Significance

The significance of these events

These incidents suggest that mining disputes involve more than commercial disagreements. They also involve land ownership, local authority, security deployments and competition over control of mines. Land ownership, employment opportunities, security costs and local communities' share of mining revenues all contribute to disputes, and the incidents reported in Badakhshan and Takhar show how the economic benefits of mining intersect with local grievances.

These resources could play a fundamental role in the economic development of both the provinces and the country. During the past five years of Taliban rule, however, the extraction, management and distribution of mining revenues have faced numerous challenges. Despite the considerable potential of the deposits, inadequate infrastructure, weak management, corruption in mining operations and structural problems have prevented the resources from being used effectively and sustainably.

SINCE AUGUST 2021

Mining has operated through two channels

Since August 2021, mining under the Taliban has operated through two channels. In the formal sector, companies are authorised to operate after completing administrative procedures and obtaining licences from the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum. These generally include submitting technical and financial documents, evaluating applicants, issuing licences and monitoring operations. A substantial portion of mining activity, however, takes place informally, conducted by local armed groups or unlicensed operators who receive support from certain Taliban commanders and officials. The absence of effective oversight, combined with the alleged interference of some Taliban leaders, has reduced public revenues, enabled private profiteering and caused significant environmental, economic and social harm to the people of Badakhshan and Takhar.

CHANNEL ONE

Formal sector

Technical and financial documents submitted

Applicants evaluated by the ministry

Licences issued

Operations monitored

CHANNEL TWO

Informal mining

Local armed groups or unlicensed operators

Support from certain Taliban commanders and officials

No effective oversight

Lost public revenue; environmental, economic and social harm

“ *These resources could play a fundamental role in the economic development of both the provinces and the country.* ”

SECTION 6 · THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE EVENTS

07

SECTION SEVEN

Corruption and Bribery

7.1

The minister

The Minister of Mines and Petroleum

A half-finished house is under construction in Khushal Khan, Kabul, one of the city's most valuable areas, built by Shabuddin Delawar, who served as the Taliban's Minister of Mines and Petroleum until his 2024 reassignment. According to the information obtained, work is ongoing, the building is currently at the third floor, and it may be completed at six or seven floors.⁴⁴

**FIGURE 5**

Half-finished multi-storey house of Shabuddin Delawar under construction in Khushal Khan, Kabul.

AFN 200m

Corruption case sent to Kandahar; no full acquittal

US\$200,000

Allegedly taken over the Wikador gold-mine contract

Delawar is accused of widespread corruption in the mining sector. About a year and a half ago, a corruption case involving 200 million afghanis was sent to Kandahar, and he has still not obtained full acquittal. He is also alleged to have taken money from various companies during his time at the ministry. A source says even the intelligence agency obtained some dollars from him, but he was simply transferred from the Ministry of Mines to the Afghan Red Crescent Authority.

Delawar has several commissioners in the ministry who collect bribes on his behalf from companies that win tenders. One of them, Shams al-Rahman Shaker, allegedly took US\$200,000 from a company in exchange for awarding the contract for the Wikador gold mine in Badakhshan. The company recorded the handover on video, and Shaker is currently detained by Taliban intelligence.⁴⁵

7.2

Samti and Wikador

Allocation without tenders: Samti and Wikador

The Samti gold mine in Chah Ab district, Takhar, containing approximately 24 tonnes of gold, and the mines in the Wikador area of Raghistan district, Badakhshan, are among Afghanistan's significant natural resource deposits. They were allegedly allocated without transparent tenders or proper legal procedures, through special orders issued by officials at the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum.

7.3

Haji Bashir Noorzai

The role of Haji Bashir Noorzai

A substantial portion of Takhar's gold-mining area, approximately 1,000 jeribs of mineral-rich land, was allocated to Haji Bashir Noorzai, a controversial figure from Kandahar. He allegedly transferred the area to an unidentified and technically unqualified company that lacked the expertise and technical standards for mining.⁴⁶



Photograph. Image accompanying PAYF reporting on the allocation of gold-mining land in Takhar.

7.4

Local tactics

Political bribes and local tactics

To silence certain local individuals and reduce criticism, some were given small mining plots of one, two or even ten jeribs. The main mining areas, however, were allegedly allocated to relatives of the ministry's deputy ministers and to companies closely associated with them.

7.5

Nangarhar talc

Talc mining corruption: US\$700,000 allegedly distributed among the minister's team

According to documents, another significant case concerns talc extraction in Nangarhar, involving an alleged US\$700,000 bribery scheme.⁴⁷

HOW IT WORKED

The alleged scheme, step by step

- 1 An initial committee verified the existence of 300,000 tonnes of talc.
- 2 The minister's adviser, Matiullah Haqqani, rejected the committee's report and appointed another committee to conduct a fresh assessment.
- 3 The second committee included two advisers to the minister, Waheedullah Halimi and Matiullah Haqqani; Director of Policy Murtaza Wahidi; Head of Monitoring and Evaluation Mawlawi Sadiq; Nangarhar provincial director Haji Hidayatullah; and Head of the Ministry's Office Miraj Mohammad.
- 4 The members allegedly reached a secret agreement with traders under which they received US\$1 in bribes for every tonne.
- 5 As a result, an additional 700,000 tonnes of talc were allegedly recorded fraudulently, enabling the distribution of US\$700,000 among senior officials.

Table 7 The alleged Nangarhar talc scheme in numbers

Step	Reported figure
Talc verified by the initial committee	300,000 t
Additional talc allegedly recorded fraudulently by the second committee	700,000 t
Alleged bribe per tonne agreed with traders	US\$1
Total alleged bribes distributed among senior officials	US\$700,000

Table 8 Members of the second talc assessment committee

Name	Position
Waheedullah Halimi	Adviser to the minister
Matiullah Haqqani	Adviser to the minister
Murtaza Wahidi	Director of Policy
Mawlawi Sadiq	Head of Monitoring and Evaluation
Haji Hidayatullah	Nangarhar provincial director
Miraj Mohammad	Head of the Ministry's Office

7.6

Placer gold

Placer gold contracts awarded on personal connections

Reports from Badakhshan and Takhar indicate that the ministry has allegedly awarded contracts for extracting placer or alluvial gold to individuals on the basis of personal connections, in violation of legal procedures, instead of to qualified mining companies. The exception is a limited number of companies linked to the sector. The contracts are signed by Mawlawi Abdul Rahman Qanit, the ministry's Deputy Minister for Planning and Policy, who has been accused of widespread corruption.

“

Every contract is awarded in exchange for a bribe. If you do not pay a bribe, you will not receive a contract. Under the law, these contracts should be awarded to mining companies. However, he has been awarding them to individuals instead of companies on the basis of personal connections. Those individuals are then required to hire another company to carry out the extraction, creating opportunities for corruption.

A SOURCE

PROTEST

Company owners
suppressed and threatened

Documents show that some successful contractors are registered companies and others are individuals. Company owners protested outside the Badakhshan Directorate of Mines over the alleged corruption. They were suppressed, threatened and told to keep the matter concealed.⁴⁸

The photographs on the following page show printed lists with a row for each listed individual and columns of amounts. They are reported to relate to gold-mining contracts in Badakhshan and Takhar.

This figure shows two pages of a printed ledger. Each page contains multiple columns of text and numbers, organized into rows for individual entries. The text is in Persian/Dari script. The layout is consistent across the pages, with a clear header section followed by data rows.

FIGURE 6

Printed multi-page lists in tabular form, with a row for each listed individual, reported to relate to gold-mining contracts in Badakhshan and Takhar.

This figure is a close-up of a single ledger page. It features a header row with titles in Persian/Dari, followed by numerous rows of data. The columns include names, identification numbers, and various numerical amounts. The handwriting is clear, and the page is well-organized.

ردیف	نام و نام خانوادگی	شماره شناسنامه	مبلغ	تاریخ	ملاحظات
1	محمد علی...	...	...	...	...
2	...	...	...	...	...
3	...	...	...	...	...
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21	...	...	...	...	...

FIGURE 7

Close-up of one ledger-style sheet with columns of amounts per listed individual, reported to relate to gold-mining contracts in Badakhshan and Takhar.

7.7

Informal applications

“The mines are being auctioned off for next to nothing.”

A source

Contracts allegedly awarded through informal applications

As part of the plundering of Afghanistan’s mineral resources, Qanit allegedly awards contracts even on the basis of simple handwritten applications submitted in the marketplace, enabling him to collect contract fees and generate revenue. One source said: “Serious corruption is taking place in the awarding of contracts. Even construction companies are being given contracts to extract minerals. Companies specialising in mining are denied contracts if they refuse to pay bribes.”

Owners of several companies also accuse the deputy minister of signing contracts in the private rooms and homes of landowners, influential individuals and traders, without complying with legal requirements or professional standards. In the words of one source: “They are concerned only with their own revenue. The mines are being auctioned off for next to nothing.”

The same source states that, under the law, payments collected from contractors for environmental protection are intended to benefit local communities affected by mining. The Taliban are allegedly diverting these funds for their own revenue, depriving affected residents of their rightful share.

7.8

“Malik”

An unidentified intermediary

Reports say that an individual using the alias “Malik” operates from Kabul’s Serena Hotel and that the Ministry of Mines cannot award contracts without his approval.⁴⁹

If a private intermediary were exercising undisclosed influence over the allocation of public contracts, it would raise fundamental questions about conflicts of interest, corruption, accountability and the integrity of government procurement. The relevant evidence would include contract-award records, communications between decision-makers, documented payment flows, company ownership information and corroborated testimony from people directly involved.

THE RISK

The broader concern remains: where procurement rules are absent or ineffective, contracts are not transparently documented, and mining rights are allegedly granted to politically connected individuals through informal applications and undisclosed approvals, the risk of corruption and misappropriation of national resources rises substantially.

7.9

Case study: Awez

The Awez (Ovez) gold mine, Shahri Buzurg district, Badakhshan

Several Taliban leaders hold undisclosed financial stakes in a gold mine operated by the foreign company “Urgent” in the Awez area. The mine is allegedly being exploited in violation of the 10-year contract signed with the company, with the involvement of Taliban officials who hold shares in the operation.

Alongside several other foreign nationals, Sayed Habibullah Shahpoor, son of Hafizullah Sadat and a resident of Yakawlang district, Bamyan, is said to hold a percentage-based stake. Shahpoor made a shareholder to facilitate arrangements with Taliban leaders.⁵⁰



Figure 8. Business licence of Urgent Mining and Processing (president: Wang Min), issued by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, shown with a Ministry of Mines and Petroleum permit.

STAKES

Reported distribution

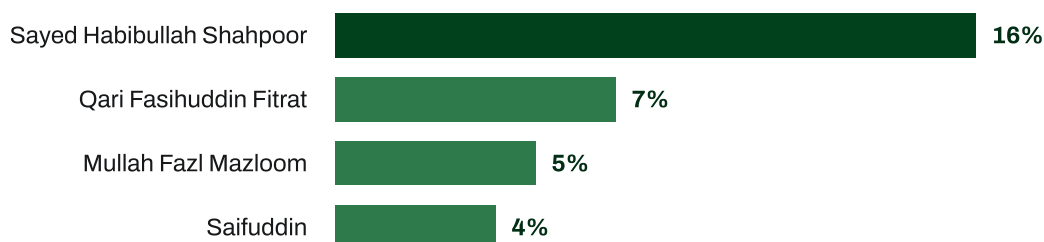
The reported distribution of stakes is:

- **Foreign investors:** the principal share.
- **Sayed Habibullah Shahpoor:** 16 percent.
- **Qari Fasihuddin Fitrat:** 7 percent. Taliban's Chief of General Staff, close to the Haqqani faction and a prominent Badakhshan-based commander and powerbroker.
- **Saifuddin:** 4 percent. He is identified as a former commander from Badakhshan and a deputy in the Taliban's Administrative Affairs Office.
- **Mullah Fazl Mazloom:** 5 percent. He is identified as a deputy minister at the Ministry of Defense and is involved with Shahpoor in legal matters and arrangements for hiring security personnel.

Table 9 Reported undisclosed stakes in the Awez (Ovez) gold mine

Holder	Reported stake	Identification
Foreign investors	Principal share	Operate the mine through the company "Urgent"; head identified as Wangmin
Sayed Habibullah Shahpoor	16%	Son of Hafizullah Sadat; from Yakawlang, Bamyan
Qari Fasihuddin Fitrat	7%	Taliban Chief of General Staff; Badakhshan-based commander and powerbroker
Mullah Fazl Mazloom	5%	Deputy minister at the Ministry of Defense; involved with Shahpoor in legal matters and arrangements for hiring security personnel
Saifuddin	4%	Former Badakhshan commander; deputy in the Administrative Affairs Office

Figure 9 Reported undisclosed stakes held by named individuals (%)



Source: PAYF ground sources (alleged, unverified). Foreign investors reportedly hold the principal share; its exact percentage is not specified.

DR BASHIR

Senior Taliban intelligence official

A senior Taliban intelligence official identified as Dr. Bashir is also alleged to receive a share of the mine's proceeds through Shahpoor. Dr. Bashir has long maintained a group involved in kidnappings and other forms of extortion, and that he abducted Shahpoor in connection with a legal dispute and demanded \$100,000 for his release. After that incident, Shahpoor became a business associate of Dr. Bashir.

THE BARGAIN

Taliban figures receive their shares in exchange for preventing local resistance and opposition to the mining operations.

16%

Shahpoor

7%

Fitrat

5%

Mazloom

4%

Saifuddin

08

SECTION EIGHT

Conclusion

THE CONTEST

Who decides

Who collects the proceeds

Who benefits

The incidents, irregularities and grievances documented in this report point to one conclusion: the unrest in northern Afghanistan is driven by the rivalry between the Kandahari and Haqqani factions over control of mining, with no external factor involved. Mishandled legality, complicated licensing, contracts awarded without tenders, alleged corruption and local grievances have all deepened the dispute, but they play out within a contest over who decides, who collects the proceeds and who benefits.

Subsidiary laws on mining, investment and procurement have been repealed or left uncertain, and no independent institution audits how proceeds are collected and spent. Concessions have allegedly gone to commanders, officials and their associates through informal applications and personal connections, alongside reports of bribes, undisclosed shares in mines and unofficial payments on the ground. Residents of Badakhshan and Takhar bear the cost through lost farmland and pastures, environmental damage and almost no share of the benefits, and their protests have repeatedly turned into confrontation.

BADAKHSHAN

Where the pressures
converge

These pressures converge in Badakhshan. Local commanders affiliated with the Haqqani Network, including Jumma Khan Fateh, controlled the mines for a long time. The 2024 reshuffle moved the ministry from Shahabuddin Delawar, who is close to the Haqqanis, to Mullah Hidayatullah Badri, who is close to the Kandahari faction, and the central leadership then replaced local officials, removed commanders and deployed a special force of about 1,000 personnel. The Haqqani-affiliated commanders did not accept this transfer of power or the pressure from the Kandahari faction. Fasihuddin Fitrat, the army chief of staff, who is also close to the Haqqani faction, travelled to Badakhshan to settle the dispute with Fateh, but the negotiations failed to produce a lasting agreement, and armed clashes erupted in Nusay district in August 2026. Fateh surrendered on 17 August after further negotiations with Fitrat. The Taliban's claim of discovering an audio clip allegedly showing Fateh in contact with the Afghanistan Freedom Front, made during their investigation, also indicates that locals support the resistance fighters, with no external involvement. Local politics have fed the unrest, and residents are now assisting the resistance fighters in return. Without transparent contracts, independent audits and accountable institutions, the contest will continue and local communities will keep paying for it.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Without transparent contracts,
independent audits and
accountable institutions, the
contest will continue and local
communities will keep paying for it.

Endnotes

Where no published source is listed, the information was provided to PAYF by ground sources and reviewed by the PAYF Research Desk.

- 1** U.S. Geological Survey, Open-File Report 02-110. pubs.usgs.gov/publication/ofr02110
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