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PTI

Afghan Taliban leader Agha Jan arrested in Karachi

03/04/2010

A key Afghan Taliban leader, who was once in-charge of the outfit's political affairs, was arrested today in Karachi by Pakistani intelligence agencies, weeks after the capture of the group's number two Mullah Baradar from the port city.

Motasim Agha Jan was held along with several of his accomplices during a raid on a house in Ahsanabad area of Karachi, official sources said. He was arrested as part of an ongoing crackdown on the "Quetta Shura" or council of the militants led by Mullah Muhammad Omar, the elusive chief of the Afghan Taliban.

Agha Jan, who was earlier in-charge of political affairs of the Afghan Taliban, is the seventh senior leader of the outfit to be arrested in Pakistan in the past two months. He is believed to have led Taliban leaders in recent talks in Saudi Arabia. Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, considered to be Mullah Omar's deputy in the Afghan Taliban hierarchy and head of the group's military operations, was arrested in Karachi last month in a joint operation by the CIA and Pakistani intelligence agencies. Mullah Abdul Kabir, operational commander for the four eastern Afghan provinces of Nangarhar, Laghman, Kunar and Nuristan, was arrested near the northwestern city of Nowshera.

Mullah Abdul Salam and Mullah Mir Mohammad, the Taliban "shadow" governors for the northern Kunduz and Baghlan provinces respectively, were also nabbed in Nowshera district.

Another Afghan Taliban leader who was arrested in Pakistan much earlier is Younis Akhundzada alias Akhundzada Popalzai. He served in important positions in the Taliban government in Afghanistan during 1994-2001 and was reportedly made "shadow" Governor of Zabul province. Syed Tayyeb Agha, ex-spokesman of Mullah Omar, too was arrested in Karachi this month, according to official sources.

Reports from Afghanistan said Agha is the son-in-law of Mullah Omar. Agha had introduced himself to investigators as Tayyeb Popalzai to hide his identity, sources said. All the arrested militant leaders are considered to be part of the Afghan Taliban's "Quetta Shura," so named because the council was till recently based in the southwestern city of Quetta.

Sources said many Afghan Taliban leaders moved to Karachi after US officials complained that they were living in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan province. Pakistan had been insisting that Afghan Taliban leaders were not hiding in the country. The capture of the senior Afghan Taliban leaders has sparked a row between the Pakistani and Afghan governments as Kabul wanted all the arrested militant leaders to be handed over to it. Afghan Interior Ministry spokesman Hameed Omar said Pakistan has agreed to hand over Mullah Baradar but Pakistan has said it will consider any requests for the extradition of the arrested Taliban leaders.