

Prison Staff 'Colluded' in Taleban Jailbreak

Author: [Khan Mohammad Danishju](#)

No one raised alarm as hundreds of prisoners escaped through tunnel in Kandahar.

Officials and analysts in Afghanistan say a mass escape by over 500 prisoners in the southern city of Kandahar would have been impossible without the collusion of prison staff.

The Taleban said 106 commanders from the movement were among the 541 inmates who got away on April 25 by crawling through a 360-metre tunnel they had dug.

Following the incident, prison governor Gholam Dastgir, his deputy and a number of warders were questioned. Around 20 provincial officials from the security sector were suspended or dismissed.

The deputy director of Afghanistan's national security service, Hesamuddin, said 18 arrests had been made in connection with the case, adding that no more details could be made public for the moment.

Hesamuddin was among a number of officials summoned and questioned by the upper house of Afghanistan's parliament.

Afghan justice minister Habibullah Ghaleb, who has overall responsibility for the penal system, said the nature of the escape pointed towards active collusion by some staff.

"The prisoners' collective escape through a tunnel shows that they were assisted from inside the prison," he said. "If there wasn't cooperation on the inside, how then could the Taleban go to each individual cell, open the doors, escape, and make off in vehicles – all of this in secret, with no one aware of what was going on?"

The ministry's director of prisons, Brigadier-General Amir Mohammad Jamshidi, agreed that some staff at the Kandahar facility must have assisted the breakout, But he advanced his own theory, that the prisoners escaped through the main gates of the jail rather than through a tunnel, which he said would have been impossible given the large numbers involved.

Political analyst Dad Nurani pointed out that prisoners were tunnelling their way out of the Kandahar jail as far back as the Soviet occupation of the 1980s. He agreed that warders must have assisted in some way, as such an escape would not have been feasible otherwise, even if the digging took place in silence.

In a phone interview he gave to IWPR, Taleban spokesman Zabiullah Mojahed denied prison warders were involved, saying they were being made scapegoats to cover the government's embarrassment.

"Whenever the Taleban score surprise achievements, the government imprisons some innocent individuals whom it accuses of collaborating with the Taleban, just to cover up its own defeat," he said.

The Taleban say they planned the escape carefully, renting a house near the jail in the name of a fictitious company to use as their logistical headquarters.

This was not the first time that the insurgents had engineered a mass escape in Kandahar. In 2008, they attacked the prison's main gate with a truck laden with explosives. They claimed to have freed all 1,500 inmates, while officials said 900 got away.

The day after the latest escape, officials in Kandahar announced that they had captured 70 of the escaped prisoners. They paraded 20 of them, some of whom told reporters they were forced by armed Taleban inmates to join the escape.

The Taleban insist no one was forced to escape, and none of those who did so has been recaptured.

Shekiba Hashemi, a member of parliament from Kandahar, said widespread public discontentment with the Afghan government had contributed to the incident.

"Government officials are appointed on the basis of nepotism. Inexperienced, corrupt individuals are awarded key posts in government, while experienced specialists are not recruited," she said. "People have lost confidence in the government and are fed up with the presence of these individuals in positions of power. This has paved the way for people to cooperate with the Taleban."

Hashemi said rumours of a planned jailbreak had been circulating in Kandahar well before it happened.

Local resident Tawab Akhondzadah confirmed he had been hearing the same stories.

“People were saying the Taleban wanted to escape. Officials were so incompetent and negligent that they did not even draw any conclusions from what people said,” he said.

As well as raising questions about the behaviour of warders, the mass jailbreak showed up the lack of modern security equipment at this and other facilities in Afghanistan.

As the national security service’s deputy chief Hesamuddin, put it, “Security at all of Afghanistan’s prisons is not good, so the incident at the Kandahar jail could also happen at others.”

Khan Mohammad Danishju is an IWPR-trained reporter in Kabul.

Location: [Pakistan](#)
[Afghanistan](#)

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/prison-staff-colluded-taleban-jailbreak>