

Afghans protest Pak mining plan

AFP, Khost

Hundreds of protesters marched along the Pakistan border in Afghanistan at the weekend to condemn Islamabad's plan to mine and fence parts of the frontier, officials said yesterday.

Around 1,000 people protested in the southeastern province of Paktika on Sunday while another 500 marched in eastern Kunar, burning Pakistan flags and demanding the neighbouring government drop the plan.

President Hamid Karzai has spoken out strongly against the proposal, saying it is not the way to stop militants in Pakistan from crossing the border to carry out attacks as part of a Taliban-led insurgency plaguing Afghanistan.

At the rally in Paktika's Turwa district on the frontier, tribal elders said fencing or mining would only

affect villagers who move across the porous frontier to visit relatives or others from their tribe.

More than 1,000 people were at the demonstration to "express their anger", Paktika governor Mohammad Akram Khepelwak told AFP.

The elders warned they would organise widespread protests and demanded international pressure to stop Pakistan.

Mining the rugged 2,500-kilometre (1,500-mile) border, which was drawn up by the colonial British and is called the Durand Line, was not practical or logical, they said.

"This is a political trick, giving the impression to the world that they are fighting terrorism," said protestor Mohammad Akram Khan.

"They indirectly want to raise the Durand Line issue, taking advantage of Afghanistan's weakness

from war," he said.

Afghans dispute the border, saying it gives Pakistan land that should belong to Afghanistan.

Meanwhile in eastern Kunar province's Marawara district, about 500 protestors set ablaze Pakistan flags on Sunday and shouted slogans against Pakistan, an AFP reporter said.

"If Pakistan wants to root out terrorism, they need to target Taliban training camps and facilities in Pakistani soil and mine and fence around them," one protestor said.

Afghanistan and Pakistan have long been bickering about the Taliban insurgency which is undermining Kabul's internationally backed attempts to establish democracy and rebuild.

Karzai last month directly accused the Pakistan government of supporting Taliban insurgents.