

Peacekeepers to train Afghan bodyguards for Zahir Shah

AP, Kabul

The international peacekeeping force in Kabul said yesterday it would start training 40 Afghans to become personal bodyguards for the former king once he arrives in the country.

The two-week training course starts Monday and comes after the United States and Italy raised concern about the security situation here ahead of Mohammad Zahir Shah's return. Those fears prompted a delay in his arrival, which had been scheduled for last Tuesday and now appears will occur toward the end of April.

As spokesman for the peacekeepers, Flight Lt Tony Marshall, said the 40-strong personal security detail was multi-ethnic, but he refused to say which ethnic groups were represented and in what numbers.

The king is an ethnic Pashtun. He reportedly requested his security be provided by someone other than the defense or interior ministries -- both of which are dominated by ethnic Tajiks, most of them from the Panjshir Valley.

The Panjshiris consider themselves the only true wielders of power in Afghanistan and want no part of royalist Pashtuns who spent much of the Taliban era as exiles abroad.

The king has lived in Italy since he was ousted by a cousin Mohammed Daoud in 1973. The Italians have assumed responsibility for him ever since, and have been actively involved in planning his return to Afghanistan to convene a traditional assembly that will select a transitional government to rule until elections.

The United States has said it had been helping to train a group of Afghans to guard the king once he

100 AL men

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the 29 incumbent ward commissioners of the DCC have filed nomination papers for the election.

They however did not use their party identity and submitted their nomination papers as independent candidates.

The AL leaders contesting for ward commissioners are: S Ali Haidar of ward 3, Jamal Mostafa of ward 4, Mohammad Mostafa Kamal of ward 5, AKM Dewar Hossain of ward 11, Md. Wakil Uddin of ward 18, Md. Monsur Ali of ward 23, Md. Rafiq Ali Bhuiyan of ward 25, Maksud Hossain Mohsin of ward 26, Rahmat Ali of ward 27, Jamal Chowdhury of ward 36, Shamim Hasan of ward 39, Rokeya Shahabuddin of ward 41, Abu Hossain of ward 43, Habibur Rahman of ward 45, Sheikh Bazlur Rahman of ward 46, Md. Sadek Khan of ward 47, Mokhlesur Rahman of ward 54, Humayun Kabir of ward 59, Alhaj Kazi Masum of ward 61, Karmal Uddin Kabul of ward 64, Mir Samir of ward 70, Abdur Jabbar of ward 72, Naimul Haq of ward 75, Alimullah of ward 76, Md. Shahid of ward 79, Md. Shahidullah of ward 82, Khaleduzzaman Chowdhury of ward 85, Monirul Islam of ward 87 and Kazi M. Mainuddin Samir of ward 89.

The Election Commission (EC) has fixed April 25 for voting in three metropolises -- Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi -- where election could not be held even after three years of expiry of tenure of the elected representatives in the local government bodies.

Woes of commuters

task for traffic controllers to bring about immediate improvement in the chaotic city traffic by strictly enforcing traffic laws.

Lately, visitors to Kolkata have reported quite an improvement in that city's traffic management. If Kolkata, which has a greater volume of vehicular traffic than Dhaka, can appreciably improve their traffic control system, there is no reason why Dhaka cannot do so, unless, of course, we choose to maintain the status quo indefinitely.

It has lately been seen that the so-called 'maxis' that have now joined the ranks of buses and minibuses, are gradually deteriorating in their service as well as appearance. They are resorting to the same overloading practices of buses and minibuses. The traffic police are apparently quite indifferent when it comes to checking overloading.

On a happier note, the BRTC, which has lately introduced city service, is found to be observing some discipline in matters of discipline and stopping at designated spots. Significantly improved service is also noticeable in the operation of Metro AC coaches and also of Nirapad coaches plying the Motijheel-Uttara routes. However, since availability of such services is very limited, it has a very little impact on the whole transportation scenario of the metropolis, which can be best described as precarious.

The ever-growing number of rickshaws will continue to remain an

Road accident kills 3 in Bogra

UNB, Bogra

arrives. Marshall said the 40 new recruits had received previous training, but refused to say by whom. He also refused to say who would be conducting the two-week course.

Italian carabinieri and Swedish military police have already been training a selected group of Afghans to be bodyguards for Afghan Cabinet ministers.

Marshall said the king's 40-man team would act as a close, personal security detail, travelling with him and guarding him while at residence, a two-story gated compound in Kabul's nicest residential area.

The team will form just a part of Zahir Shah's security. Gen. Mohammad Jorat, head of security and public affairs in the Interior Ministry, said before the king's arrival was delayed that a 600-man detail would be deployed to guard the royal convoy from the airport to the king's home the day he arrived.

He said another 20 troops had been assigned to guard the king's house, working in two, 10-man shifts a day.

It wasn't clear if those plans had been altered, but Marshall did say there had been a slight change in the role Italian carabinieri would play on the day the king touched down.

As the king has lived in Italy since he was ousted by a cousin Mohammed Daoud in 1973. The Italians have assumed responsibility for him ever since, and have been actively involved in planning his return to Afghanistan to convene a traditional assembly that will select a transitional government to rule until elections.

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we had given permission to Jatyabadi Bastuha Dal to use loud speaker.

"I've urged Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) authorities to check how this happened."

Mentionably, despite prior permission from DCC, AL was not allowed to hold its scheduled rally at the Muktangan on March 28. As the AL leaders and workers left the venue and gathered in front of the party central office, police lobbed around 50 tear gas shells and charged batons on them, injuring at least 20 persons including former minister Matia Chowdhury.

Earlier on March 23, government banned assembly at the Osmany Uddyan barely 12 hours before AL's scheduled 'mass hunger strike' there.

As AL leaders and workers tried to stage a hunger strike on the pavement in front of the Jatiya Press Club, police charged batons and tear shells on them.

On March 21, police foiled an AL rally at the Muktangan although the party had prior permission.

4-party nominees

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Ahmedward 59, Haji Mosharraf Hossain Khokon-ward 60, Nurul Karim Jinnah-ward 62, Anwar Parvez Badal-ward 64, Mohammad Mohan-ward 69, Alhaj Hossain Mollah-ward 71, Binoy Sarkar-ward 72, Kazi Abu Bashar-ward 74, Mokbul Islam Tipu-ward 76, Mohammad Farid Uddin-ward 79, MA Shahed Montu-ward 80, Mohammad Shahed-ward 83, Atiquillah Atique-ward 84, Badal Sarkar-ward 85 and Nabi Ullah Nabiward 86.

There was hectic lobbying for alliance ticket for ward commissioner because the main opposition party Awami League is keeping off the polls race. The aspirants thought getting alliance nomination virtually meant winning the election.

Sources said this time the highest number of alleged criminals are going to contest the DCC election. They noted that the election would be quite different from the earlier ones for reasons -- absence of AL from the race and 'more than one candidate' from the ruling coalition.

"Due to absence of AL, the alliance candidates (some without being nominated) will mainly go for show of strength against each other, instead of seeking vote," said one source.

Ramallah sieged

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military operation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the callup of twenty thousand reserve soldiers, the largest mobilisation in a decade.

Sharon did not explain what branding Arafat an enemy would mean in practical terms, but left open the possibility that the Palestinian leader could be expelled from the Palestinian territories at a later time, as several Israeli Cabinet ministers have demanded.

Israeli Defense Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliyahu said that no Palestinian engaged in terror activity against Israel was immune from Israeli reprisals. Asked whether that also applied to Arafat, the defense minister said the Palestinian leader would not be harmed physically.

As the Cabinet met, tanks rolled into Ramallah, and soldiers exchanged fire with Palestinian gunmen. Four Palestinians and an Israeli soldier were killed in the fighting.

Moulana Salah Ahmed, president of Khulna Zila Imam Parishad and Principal of Govt Alia Madrasah has strongly condemned police action on their 'peaceful procession.'

Meanwhile, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate has already issued warrant of arrest against Dr Azizur Rahman and four of his followers on charge of writing articles against holy Quran and Namaz.

Dr Azizur Rahman and four others accused have been absconding since publication of a booklet where he has misinterpreted holy Quran, creating serious reaction among Muslims.



PHOTO: STAR
Members of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (movement for protection of environment) formed a human chain in front of Rajuk Bhaban yesterday demanding a planned Dhaka city.

5-yr plan for dev of gas sector finalised

UNB, Dhaka

The government has finalised a five-year plan for the development of country's gas sector at an estimated cost of about US\$ 2,095 million.

The plan includes exploring fields to increase reserve, development of new sites, construction of pipeline for transmission and distribution, setting up NGL plants, and expansion of LPG and CNG uses.

As local and foreign investments will not be enough to implement the projects, the government in the recently concluded Bangladesh Development Forum meet in Paris sought foreign assistance.

The donors did not clarify anything about the assistance. Sources concerned here believe the donors are waiting for government's decision on gas export after receiving reports of the national committees.

However, for several projects

drawn up in the five-year plan the Asian Development Bank (ADB) proposed conditional financing -- one major condition being export of 300 mcf of gas to India everyday.

Sources at the Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry said the government planned various projects on priority basis that would cost \$1,000 million.

These included exploration of \$18.65 million, development and production of new wells-\$70.03 million, transmission pipeline-\$619 million, distribution pipeline-\$158.22 million, NGL fractionation and gas processing plants-\$107.6 million, and CNG transportation and clean fuel projects-\$26.5 million.

Besides, the government has also planned 14 new transmission lines to reach natural gas to different parts of the country. Cost for the pipelines has been estimated at \$1,095 million.

Of the 14 pipelines, several have

been listed in the ADB proposal. Apart from foreign assistance for the 10-inch to 30-inch pipelines, the government also expects private investments in the sector.

The proposed pipelines include 55-km Bakhrabad-Meghnaghata, 125-km Ashuganj-Elenga loop line, 240-km Nalika-Bonarpura-Ishwardi-Kushtia-Jessore-Khulna, 260-km Nalika-Bogra-Rangpur-Syedpur-Dinajpur-Thakurgaon-Panchagarh, 60-km Bonarpura-Rajshahi, 25-km Elenga-Nalika, 45-km Dhanua-Dhamrai, 105-km Ashuganj-Narsingdi-Haripur with spur line up to Meghnaghata, 300-km for Cox's Bazar-Khagrachari-Rangamati-Bandarban, 30-km Shahbazpur-Bhola, 200-km Shahbazpur-Patuakhali-Barisal-Faridpur-Madaripur-Gopalganj, and 200 km around Dhaka city.

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Barapukuria power project

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A source said PDB has arranged payment of Tk 5.5 crore today -- apparently to put the finance ministry in a situation so that it is forced to issue the guarantee to avoid "complications" with China.

PDB argues that if this power project is not given a green signal, the whole coal mine project would be jeopardised and future power generation scenario would become grim.

"There are a number of power projects suspended by the government for one reason or another. But it is a hard reality that we need more power in the immediate future," the PDB official argued.

But getting the finance ministry guarantee is not the only problem for the project.

Sources said that Petrobangla, the owner of the 192 million dollar Barapukuria coal mine, has not given PDB any guarantee of coal supply for the power plant. Moreover, there is a general lack of coordination between Petrobangla, the raw material supplier and PDB, the user of coal.

PDB claims that Petrobangla has given the guarantee for coal supply but Petrobangla differs with the PDB

claim. "We did not give any guarantee because we did not get any such request from PDB," said a top official of Petrobangla.

However, he claimed that the coal mine will go into full production from 2004, one year before the power plant is scheduled to start operation.

"We had a coordination meeting with PDB recently and we discussed progress of the coal mine project," he said indicating that Petrobangla verbally guaranteed coal supply to PDB.

"In fact, PDB's delay in implementation of the power plant project will create immense problems for us. The coal mine will start partial production from July 2003 and go into full production in 2004. But PDB's plant which is supposed to consume around 70 to 85 percent of the produced coal will not start operation before 2005. That will mean we will have serious problems in storing coal," the Petrobangla source said.

However sources said that PDB requested Petrobangla long ago for a 30-year coal supply guarantee. Till date, the guarantee has not been given in writing.

PDB in July 12 last year signed

an agreement with a consortium of three Chinese companies--CMC, SEC and SEEC-- to implement the Barapukuria Power Plant Project.

But the agreement remains ineffective due to a government policy against supplier's credit -- a non-transparent financing system that is often criticised by World Bank-led donors for creating scope for corruption.

As this project remained suspended, China took initiative to give it some life during the visit of Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji in early January. During his visit, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed on the project although there was already a final agreement.

The project came under criticism by industry insiders as it is at least 70 million dollars costlier than any plant of similar size.

The coal mine is designed to produce one million tonnes of coal a year.

The mine has an estimated deposit of two billion tonnes of high quality coal, which is equivalent to 60 trillion cubic feet of gas in terms of thermal value.

Friend turns foe over DCC polls

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more killings, as these candidates are severely divided over the DCC election scheduled for April 25.

Meanwhile, two persons -- Md. Ahsanul Islam Titu, son of former Awami League lawmaker Alhaj Mockbul Hossain, and Md. Mukul Hossain alias Ratan -- arrested in connection with the Wahid Murder Case were placed on a two-day remand.

Mohammadpur Police produced them before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court, Dhaka on Tuesday with a prayer for seven-day remand.

"He assigned some of his gang members to kill Wahid who had a very good chance of winning. About 10 armed members of the gang came in a microbus and lay in wait for Wahid. As soon as he appeared, they sprayed bullets on him," he said.

Fatally injured, Wahid later died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Police said Salu has long been leading a gang of more than 30 youths in the area, named as accused in many criminal cases with the Mohammadpur Police Station, Salu was recently arrested in connection with the Sajal Chowdhury Murder case and released on bail.

Salu is also accused of grabbing others' property, extortion from people doing construction works in the area and blackmailing innocent residents of the areas.

Since the killing, a tense situation has been prevailing among the candidates for ward commissioner of Mohammadpur area including those belonging to BNP and its different front organisations. Residents of the area apprehend

Wahid. My husband came to know about the conspiracy and told me and his brother Humayun Kabir that he might be killed any time."

Investigation Officer (IO) of the case, Sub-Inspector Samiul Alam told The Daily Star Thursday night that several police teams were assigned to arrest the FIR-listed accused, including the principal accused Salu.

Asked why Mockbul's son was arrested although his son was not included in the FIR, SI Samiul Alam said he was arrested on suspicion.

KCC polls

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Nazrul Islam Manju has rejected this nomination board and served show cause notices upon two senior vice-presidents of the party, Sekander Zafarullah Khan Shachru