

Karzai wants to pay Taliban to lay down their arms

Plan aimed at drawing insurgents back to civilian life

AFP, Kabul/London

Afghan President Hamid Karzai unveiled an ambitious Western-funded plan yesterday to offer money and jobs to tempt Taliban fighters to lay down their arms and return to civilian life.

His comments in an interview with the BBC came as US Defence Secretary Robert Gates described the Taliban as part of Afghanistan's "political fabric" but said any future role would depend on insurgents laying down their weapons.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also unveiled a long-term non-military strategy to stabilise Afghanistan and Pakistan that calls for sending in more civilian experts and bringing extremists back into mainstream society.

The Taliban militia and other insurgent groups have been waging an increasingly deadly rebellion against the Afghan government and foreign troops since a US-led invasion ousted the Taliban regime from power in late 2001.

"We know as the Afghan people we must have peace at any cost," Karzai said in the television interview aired Friday ahead of an international conference on

Afghanistan in London next week.

"Those that we approach to return will be provided with the abilities to work, to find jobs, to have protection, to resettle in their own communities."

Hardline Taliban supporters, who were members of al-Qaeda or other terror groups, would not be accepted, Karzai said, adding that he expected the plan to be announced at the London conference on Thursday.

The Taliban gives its volunteers higher salaries than the Afghan government can afford to pay its forces, and the president said his project would have international backing to provide the necessary funds.

The Taliban leadership have repeatedly rebuffed peace talks in the past, and on Friday a spokesman for the militia, Zabihullah Mujahid, reiterated that they would not negotiate with Karzai's government.

"Our only and main goal is the freedom and independence of our country. We cannot be bought by money and bounties. The Taliban will not sell themselves off for cash," Mujahid said, reacting to Karzai's comments.

"We insist on our previous stance that

we will not negotiate with this government. Any negotiation now would mean accepting being a slave of America. Our goal is enforcing an Islamic government and withdrawal of foreign forces."

Insurgent leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who commands another radical Islamist group Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan, would come to the table with the US and Afghan government, but only under strict conditions, his spokesman Zubair Sediqi said.

"All the foreign forces must leave Afghanistan unconditionally. A permanent ceasefire must be enforced. All prisoners from all side must be freed. An interim administration must take charge for one year," Sediqi told AFP.

Karzai has in the past urged the United States to back talks with Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar but Washington has resisted negotiations with any figures linked to wider extremist groups such as al-Qaeda.

Karzai has faced severe criticism from Western powers over the fraud-tainted August election that returned him to power, but said his position could be strengthened by increased resources.



A family starts building a makeshift house on the side of a road in Port-au-Prince on Thursday while some of the 33 orphans board an airport-bound bus at the Lycee Francais for being flown to France for adoption.

PHOTO: AFP



A picture shows the leg of a boy killed and dumped in a well above the surface following a violent clash on Thursday at Kuru Karama, 30km from Jos Township, Plateau State in Nigeria. A tank rumbled through the troubled Nigerian city of Jos on Thursday as soldiers escorted a truck loaded with bodies to a mass grave after four days of inter-religious clashes left over 300 dead.

More bodies recovered after Nigerian clashes

AFP, Kuru Karama

Volunteers recovered scores more bodies in Nigeria's troubled central Plateau state as the death toll from inter-religious clashes rose and the army was ordered to step up security.

Scores of bodies were picked up from streets, houses and open water wells in Kuru Karama, a village some 30 kilometres (19 miles) south of state capital Jos, the epicentre of four-days of Muslim-Christian clashes.

Many of the victims had been thrown into drinking water wells in the outlying village, the leader of a Muslim aid team said.

"So far we have retrieved 62 bodies but many more are still in the wells and I'm afraid we may have to sand-fill them because the bodies have decomposed so bad that the flesh disintegrates when we try to bring them out," Ibrahim Tanimu told AFP.

Mass relocation for Haiti homeless

AFP, Port-au-Prince

Haiti has launched a huge operation to move hundreds of thousands of homeless out of the ruined capital, as hopes of finding more survivors fade 10 days after the devastating quake.

Medics treated the countless injured in makeshift hospitals as gangrene began to set in, and fresh looting broke out in devastated Port-au-Prince even as some signs of normal life returned.

"It is difficult to work as before, but we're on course to regain control," President Rene Preval told reporters, seeking to counter charges that the government has been largely absent since the January 12 disaster.

Alongside the Haitian plan, French and US rescue workers have begun to clear debris and human waste from around the city's ceremonial square, the Champ de Mars, which has become a giant ad hoc refugee camp.

"We want to stop living like animals," said Carole Deslouis, who finally received the promise of food and shelter in the square Thursday after days of washing her children with filthy water and begging for rice.

US forces are also repairing the main port,

hoping to slowly reopen it from Friday and help receive the massive international aid shipments for the hundreds of thousands of survivors.

US Navy and US Army divers were to start rebuilding the badly-damaged pier to relieve pressure on the country's overburdened main airport.

The 7.0-magnitude quake has killed at least 75,000 and left a million homeless.

Haiti's government said it would try to relocate an estimated 500,000 left destitute, moving them out of squalid, stinking bivouacs into temporary accommodation outside Port-au-Prince.

"The government has made available to people free transportation. A large operation is taking place: we're in the process of relocating homeless people," said Interior Minister Paul Antoine Bien-Aime.

The government will hire about 34 buses to take quake victims to the south and north of the Caribbean nation to hastily set up villages designed to hold 10,000 people each, and work with local mayors to identify sites.

Hopes rise as damaged port reopens

AFP, Port-au-Prince

Thousands of Haitians waited by the sea on earthquake-cracked mud, surrounded by bags and babies, hoping the imminent reopening of the capital's port would allow them to flee.

The main port, a potential hub for the international campaign to feed this quake-devastated nation, was to open partially Friday, despite strong signs of damage, including buckled wharves, leaning telephone poles and slanting cranes.

With Port-au-Prince's airport overloaded with aid and military flights, many hoped the harbour would help receive massive international aid shipments for hundreds of thousands of desperate survivors of the January 12 earthquake.

World will 'not back down' on Iran, says Hillary

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Thursday the international community is "united in its resolve" to put pressure on Iran over its disputed nuclear programme, and will not back down.

However, the chief US diplomat stopped short of

renewing the US threat of sanctions following a weekend six-power meeting in New York when China, which is reluctant to use such measures, sent a lower-level envoy.

"Let me be clear, we will not be wavered out and we will not back down," Hillary told reporters as she stood with

European Union foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton.

Iran has for three months balked at an offer from the Vienna-based UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to ship abroad low-grade nuclear fuel so it can be further enriched and returned to refuel a Tehran medical research reactor.

Somali insurgents raid foreign aid offices

AFP, Mogadishu

Somali Islamist rebels from the Shebab and Hezb al-Islam groups stormed the offices of international aid agencies in the restive western city of Beledweyn yesterday, officials and witnesses said.

Fighters stormed the compound and made away with computers and other equipment following heavy fighting between insurgents and pro-government militias in the town, located 300 kilometres (185 miles) north of Mogadishu.

"There was heavy fighting in the city this morning and Islamists took control after the clashes," a local humanitarian worker told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Recruitment of a Gender Equality Specialist

Cowater International Inc. is the implementing agency for a project funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), "Strengthening Comptrollership and Oversight of Public Expenditures" (SCOPE). This is a capacity-development project, working with the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (OCAG) of Bangladesh. We are seeking applicants for full-time employment as the Gender Equality Specialist.

The primary responsibilities of the Gender Equality Specialist will be to assist SCOPE, working closely with OCAG counterparts and an international GE Expert to:

- Collaborate closely with other SCOPE specialists and counterparts to identify key entry points for addressing gender equality.
- Act as secretary for the Gender Mainstreaming Advisory Committee (set agenda items, provide background materials and documents, organize meetings, write and circulate the minutes, make recommendations, and provide follow-up on specific actions).
- Conduct gender sensitization training and training on gender equality tools.
- Provide inputs and guidance on the integration of gender considerations into audit manuals and pilot audits.
- Conduct attitudinal and knowledge surveys.
- Ensure gender disaggregated data is being collected in all areas.

Desired qualifications include the following:

- Masters or Ph.D. in a relevant discipline;
- at least 10 years of directly relevant experience working in the gender equality area;
- experience in developing or improving guides, checklists, and other tools;
- experience working in/with senior levels of government;
- experience in gender equality work at the macro-level or policy level;
- demonstrated skills and experience in facilitating workshops or other training events, especially for government;
- experience with donor-funded projects;
- fluency in English; and
- excellent communication and writing skills.

Since this is a full-time position, applications are being sought from individuals only, not from firms and other organizations. Please send your CV and remuneration expectations by 28 January 2010 to:

Peter J. Armstrong
Field Project Manager
SCOPE Project
2nd 12-Storey Government Building
(9th floor), Segunbagicha, Dhaka-1000
Applications can also be sent by fax or by email:
Fax: 88 02 9362447
Email: parmstrong@cowater.com



Two months old Sumatran tigers named Puji (R), a male, and Wati, a female, born in captivity at Jakarta's Ragunan Zoo lie on a rug in the sun after a bath at the zoo yesterday. The Indonesian government has hatched a plan to save the endangered tigers from extinction by allowing people to adopt captive-born animals as pets for 100,000 USD a pair, officials said.

PHOTO: AFP

California on mudslide alert as storms hit

AFP, Los Angeles

Torrential rain and strong winds pummelled California for a fourth consecutive day Thursday as officials warned of tornadoes, flash floods and mudslides in areas ravaged by last year's wildfires.

Around 800 homes in hilly suburbs surrounding the Los Angeles area have been issued evacuation orders as the fourth storm to hit the region this week arrived, causing power outages and transport chaos.

The National Weather Service said the storm could produce from one to two inches of rain in coastal and valley areas and two to four inches in the foothills and mountains.

Scattered thunderstorms "will occur and may become severe this afternoon," possibly generating waterspouts, small tornadoes and 60-mile-per-hour winds, according to an NWS advisory.

Later Thursday the NWS issued a tornado warning for parts of southern California and Arizona.

Around 3,000 homes in Los Angeles were left without power after electricity was knocked out late Wednesday, the Department of Water and Power said.

A flash flood warning would remain in effect until late Thursday, officials in Los Angeles County said.

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Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207
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Invitation for Expression of Interest (EOI) for "Designing PRIME Health Service Initiatives".

Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) is implementing a project titled "Promoting Financial Services for Poverty Reduction (PROSPER)" with financial assistance of DFID. The project has two components: viz "Learning and Innovation to Test New Ideas (LIFT)" and "Programmed Initiatives for Monga Eradication (PRIME)". PRIME is being implemented in the northern region of Bangladesh covering 35 upazilas of five districts namely: Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Kurigram and Gaibandha through 16 partner NGOs. PKSF has taken initiatives to provide Health Services to the monga-affected people for their better livelihood in the PRIME areas under the project. For this purpose, PKSF intends to design a Primary Health Service for the Monga affected households.

PKSF now invites Expression of Interest (EOI) from eligible consultants/organizations for short-listing of consultants/organizations for the service of "Designing PRIME Health Service Initiatives".

Scope of the Service:

- i) Design and develop a document on PRIME health service initiative, delineating the scope and objectives, and its implementation modality, matching with PKSF's focus and the needs of the area; ii) Assess training needs for the Health Assistants, develop training module and arrange required materials.

In undertaking this service, the individual consultant/organization needs to consider, but not limited to, the following services: Maternal & Child health awareness; Reproductive health awareness; Awareness on Communicable Diseases Control; Behaviour Change Communication; Awareness on nutrition and hygiene; Awareness on safe water and sanitation; Ensure strong referral system (GOB, NGO and private facilities).

Eligibility of the individual consultants/organizations for the service: Must have proven experience of designing and implementing in national level primary health project(s), experience of training need assessment and module development related to primary health. Working experience with the poorest community group in the northern part of the country and good understanding of the GOB and WHO health system are also desirable.

Interested consultants/organizations may submit their EOI incorporating the following information and documents:

1. Profile of consultants/organizations with name and full address.
2. Details of consultants /Directors of the organizations with name & position, educational qualifications and professional experience (in years).
3. (i) Details of similar assignments conducting in last five years. (ii) Details of similar assignments presently being done. Both will include description of service, required time and name and address of the clients.
4. List of the key personnel with curriculum vitae who may be engaged for this assignment.

Expression of Interest (EOI) should reach the office of the undersigned on or before February 06, 2010. Request for Proposals (RFP) will be sent to the short-listed individual consultants/organizations only.

Details Terms of Reference (TOR) may be collected from the office of PKSF upon submission of a written application. The TOR may also be seen on the website of PKSF (www.pksf-bd.org).

Deputy General Manager (Admin.)