THE WORLD

Afghan president grants wider powers to anti-graft body

AFP, Kabul

Afghan President Hamid Karzai yesterday boosted the power of an anti-corruption body that had faced fierce accusations of being toothless and half-hearted in its battle to wipe out graft.

The High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption will now be permitted to investigate allegations of corruption after · Karzai publicly signed a decree extending its authority, . the president said.

The decree marked "a very major and important step in our efforts at fighting corruption and : bribery in our country", Karzai document in his palace.

"It gives Mr Osmani and his unit further power. I wish him success," he said, referring to Mohammad Yasin Osmani.

US operations already started in Kandahar

Say coalition commanders

· AFP, Kandahar

Operations to push the Taliban out of their iconic Afghan stronghold of Kandahar are . underway and will steadily build in the months : ahead, military officials said yesterday.

The military and political efforts against the Taliban around Kandahar, Afghanistan's third biggest city and the militia's spiritual capital, are the next step in the US-led strategy to end a war · now in its ninth year.

"We have been making preparation and plans concerning Operation Omaid," said General Sher Mohammad Zazai, Afghan army commander in the country's south.

"We're still working on the plan," he said, without giving further details.

Kandahar is the next target in major military told reporters after signing the : operations to eradicate the Taliban from areas they have controlled, in many cases in tandem · with drug cartels, over the years since their regime was overthrown in 2001.

The commander of US and Nato troops in the head of the body, Afghanistan, US General Stanley McChrystal, · said the offensive had begun with initial military AFP on condition of anonymity.

and political efforts, including operations to secure key roads and districts.

Speaking by teleconference to reporters in Washington, he said: "That process has already begun (and) will ramp up in the weeks and months ahead," lasting "a significant time".

Operation Omaid follows Operation Mushtarak, currently under way in neighbouring Helmand province, which appears to have largely pushed back the Taliban and given the government a chance to take control. Mushtarak -- "together" in Dari and Pashto --

is the first operation in a 12-18-month campaign for which President Barack Obama is sending another 30,000 troops, with 10,000 from Nato, aimed at taking the fight to the Taliban. The strategy comprises military, political and civilian approaches in four stages dubbed

"shape, take, hold and build" and aims to ensure

that once eradicated, the insurgent threat does

not re-emerge. Initial stages of the strategy aimed at speeding up the war's end began in Kandahar province around November, a Western official told

Thai Red Shirts declare 'class war' PM ready for talks

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's rural underclass, vying to revive flagging momentum after a week of colourful protests, appealed yesterday for a popular uprising against the wellentrenched political and aristocratic elite.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva renewed an offer of talks with the so-called Red Shirt movement, but has stood firm against its demands for his resignation and snap elections.

Police said numbers had dwindled to 38,000 at the rally site, from more than 100,000 at the weekend, as the remaining Red Shirts sought to reach out to Bangkok's middle classes in their campaign against the allpowerful elite.



Red-shirted supporters of deposed Thai premier Thaksin Shinawatra chant slogans during an antigovernment protest in Bangkok yesterday. Thailand's prime minister said he was open to negotiations with red-shirted protesters who have massed in the capital demanding his resignation and fresh elections.

KATALYST

Request for Proposals (RFP)

A comprehensive study on the effectiveness of Katalyst media interventions

Katalyst is a pro-poor market development project implemented under the

Ministry of Commerce by Swisscontact and GTZ International Services and funded

by a donor consortium. Katalyst is working in a number of economic sectors

including service sectors. Mass media like print and broadcast media is among

them. Mass media potentially provides important business information and

intelligence, a voice for the private sector to share views and opinions and act as

a watchdog on behalf of the private sector. Katalyst requests proposals from

research firms for conducting a comprehensive study analyzing the effectiveness

Assignment: Assessing and capturing qualitative changes brought about by

The assignment has been broken down into five sections with a separate time

plan for each section. The five sections are broadly described below. However, the

Section 1A: Assess the changes (both qualitative and quantitative) resulting

Section 1B: Assess the impact of supporting two Jessore based newspapers,

"Gramer Kagoj" and "Loksamaj," to expand and improve their coverage of local

a soft copy of the proposal should be sent to tender@swisscontact-bd.org by the

Katalyst has the right to cancel a bidding process, accept or reject bids without

time plan is available in detailed RFP which will be shared once requested.

from the formation of a Business Reporters Network (BRN) in Jessore.

of its media interventions. The assignments are outlined below:

media interventions.

artners in Business Innovation

'Ransom paid for British boy'

AFP, Islamabad

A five-year-old British boy was reunited with his father in Pakistan on Thursday, a British high commission official said following a kidnapping ordeal that saw a ransom paid in Paris.

Sahil Saeed was recovered by Pakistani police on Tuesday after being dropped near the town where he was kidnapped at gunpoint from his grandmother's house as he and his father prepared to fly home to Britain after a family holiday.



Five-year-old British boy Sahil Saeed (L) is kissed by his father Raja Naqqash Saeed during their reunion at the British High Commission in Islamabad yesterday.

Key al-Qaeda figure killed in Pakistan

AFP, Washington/ Peshawar

An al-Qaeda figure who helped plan a deadly attack on the CIA in Afghanistan is believed to have been killed in a US drone strike in Pakistan, a US counterterrorism official said.

"We have indications that Hussein al-Yemeni -- an important al-Qaeda planner and facilitator based in the tribal areas of Pakistan -- was killed last week," the official told AFP Wednesday on condition of anonymity.

Yemeni's specialty was in "bombs and suicide operations" and he was suspected of playing "a key role" in the December attack at a CIA post in eastern Afghanistan that killed seven Americans, the official said in an email.

Earlier Pakistani security forces on Wednesday killed five militants including two Taliban commanders who were wanted over an uprising in the northwestern Swat valley, the military said.

Bakht Farzand and Mian Gul who who had a 10-million rupee (117,000 dollar) reward on their heads, were killed along with three other militants in a clash in Pattan town, it said.

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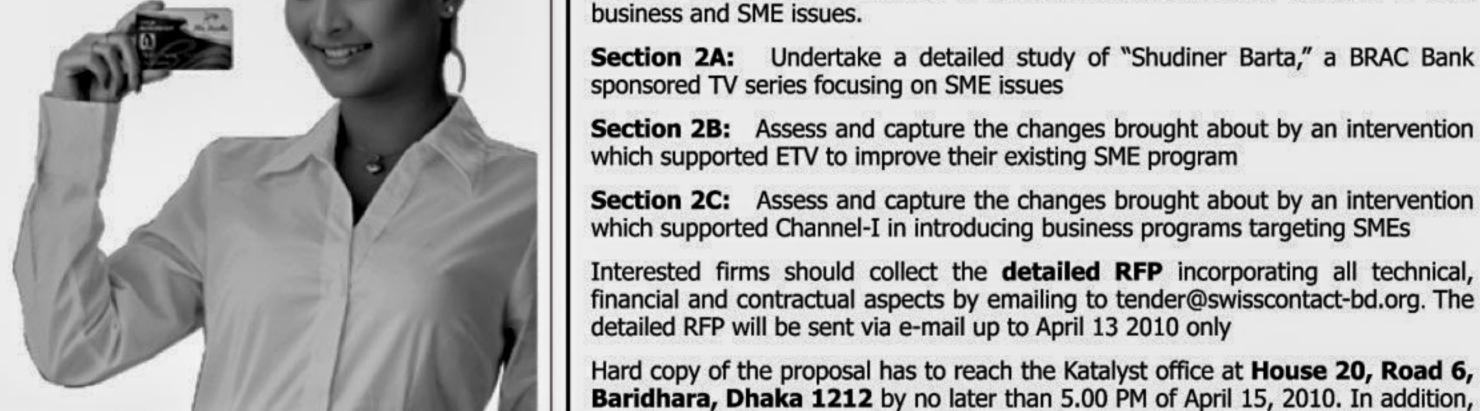
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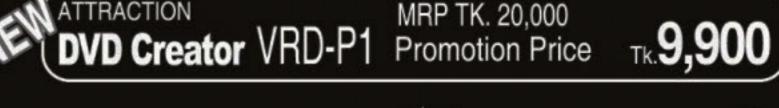
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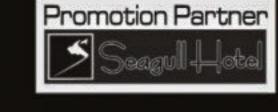
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