

Blackwater gets Afghan security contract

ANI, Washington

The US State department has awarded the US Training Centre, a business unit of the Moyock, which was formerly known as Blackwater Worldwide, a contract worth more than 120 million dollars for providing security services in Afghanistan.

Under the contract, the US Training Centre will provide "protective security services" at the new US consulates in Herat and Nazar-e-Sharaf, Afghanistan.

The firm is expected to start its work within two months time. The contract is for a year, but can be extended twice for three months at a time to last a maximum of 18 months, CBS News reports.

Interestingly, the order has come just four months after Iraq ordered hundreds of Blackwater security guards to vacate the country within seven days or face possible arrest.

Meanwhile, the Justice Department has put five Blackwater guards, who had opened fire on a crowded Baghdad street in 2007, on the list to prosecute them. However, it could not stop the US Training Centre from bidding on the multi-million dollar contract.

"Under federal acquisition regulations, the prosecution of the specific Blackwater individuals does not preclude the company or its successive companies and subsidiaries from bidding on contracts," a State Department spokeswoman said.

"On the basis of full and open competition, the department performed a full technical evaluation of all proposals and determined the US Training Centre has the best ability and qualifications to meet the contract requirements," she added.



A child from Myanmar's ethnic Chin tribe hangs on her mother's back at a sewing school in down town Kuala Lumpur yesterday. The United Nations' (UN) World Refugee Day is observed on June 20 each year. This event honours the courage, strength and determination of women, men and children who are forced to flee their homeland under threat of persecution, conflict and violence. PHOTO: AFP

Mehsud ordered Benazir's assassination

Pak FIA report

ANI, Lahore

Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has held the killed Taliban chief-tain Baitullah Mehsud responsible for the assassination of former Prime Benazir Bhutto.

The FIA has submitted its final report over the gun and bomb attack on Bhutto on December 27, 2007 in Rawalpindi's Liaquat Bagh, according to which the assassination plot was planned by former students of Madrassa Darul-Uloom Haqqania.

The 39-page investigation report quoted one of the prime suspects, Hassnain Gull, as revealing that Bhutto was targeted for her stance on the Lal Masjid operation.

The report said that an ISI official also confirmed that he had recorded a telephonic conversation in which Mehsud himself is heard issuing instructions to some of the arrested terrorists to assassinate the PPP leader, The Daily Times reports.

Hillary to visit Pakistan in July

AFP, Islamabad

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will visit Pakistan in July, her counterpart in Islamabad said yesterday.

"In July I'm expecting Secretary Hillary to visit Islamabad for a second session of the strategic dialogue," Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi told a joint news conference with US envoy Richard Holbrooke.

Holbrooke arrived on Friday evening for talks with Pakistani leaders and to review progress on intensifying co-operation between the allies.

Holbrooke added: "People all over the world should be more aware of the sacrifices Pakistani people and the army have made in pushing back militants in Swat, South Waziristan and other north-western regions."

"We have a common enemy, we have a common threat," Holbrooke said, adding that this was a long struggle and that much more needed to be planned and done.

UN and US urge Suu Kyi's release

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

The United Nations and United States have renewed their calls for Myanmar's military rulers to release detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi as the Nobel peace laureate marks her 65th birthday under house arrest.

Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary general, told a news conference on Friday that he was "deeply concerned" that Aung San Suu Kyi remained under house arrest and said she, along with all other political prisoners in Myanmar, should be released as soon as possible so they can participate in elections set to be held this year.

"I have been persistently, consistently demanding that all the political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, should be released without condition as soon as possible so that they would be able to participate in the political process since Myanmar is going to have an election this year," Ban said.

"This election should be an inclusive process where all the parties and all the people can participate. This election must be held in a credible and impartial and objective way."

The first elections since 1990 are scheduled this year, part of the government's so-called "road map to democracy", which critics deride

as a sham designed to cement the power of the military which has ruled since 1962.

CALLS FOR DIALOGUE

The country's new electoral laws were widely criticised as designed to keep Aung San Suu Kyi out of the race.

The military government of Myanmar, also known as Burma, has held Aung San Suu Kyi either in prison or under house arrest for 15 of the last 21 years, and she remains under house arrest as she turns 65 on Saturday.

Barack Obama also called for her release on Friday.

"I once again call on the Burmese government to release Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners immediately and unconditionally and to allow them to build a more stable, prosperous Burma that respects the rights of all its citizens," the US president said in a statement.

"I encourage all stakeholders in Burma to engage in genuine dialogue towards national reconciliation," he added.

Obama lauded Aung San Suu Kyi's determination, courage and personal sacrifice in working for human rights and democratic change in her country, calling her the "world's only imprisoned Nobel peace laureate".

US drone attack kills 13 in Pakistan

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

A missile, suspected to have been fired by an unmanned US drone, is reported to have killed 13 people and wounded seven others after it struck a house in the Mir Ali area of Pakistan's North Waziristan.

Two missiles struck the house in Haider Khel village yesterday, a Pakistani intelligence official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told a Reuters journalist.

The intelligence official initially put the death toll at three, but Noor Mohammad, a local government official, said later in the day that at least 13 people had been killed but their identities were not yet clear.

The US frequently uses missile attacks to hit Taliban and al-Qaeda targets in Pakistan's northwest, especially the tribal regions where many fighters are based.

UN launches Kyrgyzstan aid appeal

400,000 people displaced in ethnic violence; Uzbek president says unrest instigated from outside

ALJAZEERA ONLINE, REUTERS, Bishkek

The United Nations has appealed for \$71 million in humanitarian aid for Kyrgyzstan, where more than 400,000 people have been displaced by deadly fighting.

The UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said the appeal would provide aid to nearly 1.1 million people affected by the violence in the south of the Central Asian nation.

Meanwhile, Uzbek President Islam Karimov accused "outside" elements yesterday of instigating a wave of unrest in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan and said neither ethnic Uzbeks nor Kyrgyz were responsible for starting it.

His remarks echoed those by Kyrgyzstan's interim leadership which has blamed the country's deposed and exiled president of masterminding the violence that broke out last week.

"Neither Uzbeks nor Kyrgyz are to blame for this," Karimov was quoted as saying by the official Uza news agency. "These disruptive actions were organized and managed from outside."

The US envoy for Central Asia visited Kyrgyzstan on Saturday after the State Department suggested the country's deposed president may be responsible for last week's outburst of ethnic violence.

The United States and Russia, both operating military air bases in the strategic Muslim nation, are concerned that continued turmoil in Kyrgyzstan could spread to other parts of Central Asia, a vast former Soviet region north of Afghanistan.

Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake was in Kyrgyzstan to meet its interim leadership and visit the turbulent south.

In remarks posted on the State Department website, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Kurmanbek Bakiyev, Kyrgyzstan's president

who was toppled in a revolt in April, may be to blame.

"Certainly, the ouster of President Bakiyev some months ago left behind those who were still his loyalists and very much against the provisional government," she said.

"There certainly have been allegations of instigation that have to be taken seriously," Fighting between Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks has killed at least 200 people since it erupted a little over a week ago.

"I have been shocked by the extent of the violence and appalled by the deaths and injuries, widespread arson, sexual violence, looting of state, commercial and private property and destruction of infrastructure," John Holmes the OCHA head, said on Friday.

"I therefore urge all donors and supporters to ensure that this flash appeal for Kyrgyzstan receives a generous and rapid response."

Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary-general, has said there are shortages of food, water and electricity in the violence-hit areas.

"Hospitals and other institutions are running low on medical supplies," he said.

An aid appeal for neighbouring Uzbekistan, where about 100,000 refugees have taken shelter, would be launched next week, Ban said.

'OUTSIDE ELEMENTS' BLAMED For his part, Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan's president, accused "outside" elements of instigating the violence, saying neither ethnic Uzbeks nor Kyrgyz were responsible for starting it.

"Neither Uzbeks nor Kyrgyz are to blame for this," he was quoted as saying by the official Uza news agency on Saturday.

"These disruptive actions were organised and managed from outside."

"Forces that organised this subversive act tried to drag Uzbekistan into this standoff."

Kyrgyzstan's interim leadership has blamed Kurmanbek Bakiyev, the country's deposed president, of masterminding the violence.

GULF OIL SPILL Partner accuses BP of 'misconduct'

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

BP's partner in its damaged, gushing oil well in the Gulf of Mexico has accused the UK-based energy company of "gross negligence and wilful misconduct".

Anadarko Petroleum Corp, owner of a quarter of the well pouring out up to 60,000 barrels per day (9.5 million litres), broke its near-silence on the spill on Friday to squarely pin the blame for the crisis on BP.

"Frankly, we are shocked," Jim Hackett, the chairman and CEO of US-based Anadarko, said in a statement.

"BP's behaviour and actions likely represent gross negligence or wilful misconduct."

BP, on the back foot all week answering tough questions on the Gulf spill and its safety record in general, said it "strongly disagrees" with Anadarko's claims.

Anadarko's shares rose by 2.2 per cent in after-hours trading following Hackett's statement.

In contrast, moments after Anadarko's statement, credit rating agency Moody's cut BP's rating to junk level, citing potential liability from the spill.

Earlier in the day Moody's cut by three notches its rating on BP debt, which is trading around junk levels.

SCRAMBLING FOR CASH

BP is scrambling to line up resources to pay for a \$20bn damage claims fund demanded by Barack Obama, the US president.

BP was seeking \$1bn in loans from seven different banks, the Reuters news agency said, while US broadcaster CNBC said the energy giant was hoping to raise \$5bn with a bond.

Congress marks Rahul Gandhi's 40th birthday

IANS, Lucknow

The Congress in Uttar Pradesh yesterday took out marches and organised blood-donation camps, besides distributing sweets, fruits and medicines amongst the poor on the occasion of party general secretary Rahul Gandhi's 40th birthday.

Congress workers also used the occasion to garner support for the party for the 2012 assembly elections in the state by reaching to the masses, both in rural and urban areas, and highlighting the achievements of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.

Besides holding the normal celebrations, party activists got connected with the masses with their slogan 'Ek ho jao... Congress lao, Pradesh bachao' (Get united... Vote Congress to power and save the state) and appealed to the public to bring a Congress government in the state for its all-round development, Congress spokesperson Akhilesh Pratap Singh told IANS.

In Amethi, the parliamentary constituency of Rahul Gandhi, a number of social gatherings were organised by the Sultanpur district unit of the Congress, where the party workers were seen dancing to the beat of drums and setting off fire crackers.



Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.

Indian govt to re-examines Bhopal gas disaster

BBC ONLINE

A group of senior Indian government ministers who have been asked to re-examine the 1984 Bhopal gas disaster have held their first meeting.

There has been widespread anger in India following the conclusion of a court case last week.

More than 25 years after the Bhopal gas leak killed thousands of people, the court finally convicted seven former managers at the plant.

They received minor fines and brief prison sentences.

The disaster struck when a cloud of toxic gas leaked from a plant run by the American company Union Carbide.

But apart from the efforts of a determined group of campaigners, the incident had been all but forgotten in India.



Sweden prepares for fairytale royal wedding

AFP, Stockholm

Sweden's future queen Crown Princess Victoria was set to wed her former personal trainer in one of the largest public celebrations ever organised in Stockholm.

Crown Princess Victoria, 32, will tie the knot with 36-year-old commoner Daniel Westling in an afternoon ceremony at the Stockholm Cathedral before a majestic procession through the streets of the capital, decked out in flowers and blue and yellow flags.

More than 1,200 guests, including royals from around the world like Beatrix of the Netherlands, Albert of Monaco, Jordan's King Abdullah and a slew of Scandinavian majesties have been invited to witness the exchange of vows.

The ceremony and surrounding events are "much more important than all of those ever organised" by the royal palace, its information chief Nina Eldh said.

The Swedish capital, made up of 14 islands and set in a Baltic Sea archipelago of some 24,000 islands, should prove a picturesque backdrop for the princess's big day.

After the ceremony, the couple will ride through the city centre in a horse-drawn carriage before navigating Stockholm's clear waters in the same royal barge Victoria's parents, Queen Silvia and King Carl XVI Gustaf, used on their wedding day, 34 years ago to the day.

PHOTO: AFP

Crown Princess Victoria (L) and Daniel Westling talk during a gala performance at the Stockholm Concert Hall in Stockholm on Friday, at the start of the princess's nuptials this weekend.

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