

Afghan News Roundup compiled by Elayne Jude for Great North News Service

Kajaki Dam resurfaces, Arab upset, Karzai's accusations, candidates in the clear and a first for Kabul's police, as reported in other countries

Millions more for Kajaki Dam

In February 2007, the Kajakai Dam was fought over by NATO and the Taliban as part of Operation Kryptonite. The governor of Helmand province, Assadullah Wafa, reported over 700 insurgents (including Pakistanis, Chechens and Uzbeks) coming via Pakistan to fight 300 NATO troops, mostly Dutch and British.

In October 2011, Coalition forces launched an operation to root out the Taliban and connect the notorious Kajaki Dam with the rest of province. This would allow the belated installation of a third turbine, providing electricity for tens of thousands.

Now another, possibly last ditch, effort has been launched to complete the project, which began in 2002 and has cost an estimated \$500 million. Afghanistan's power utility, Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS), under the guidance of USAID, has launched a contract competition to pick the company to install the third turbine. The two-phase project will likely cost about \$75 million, and won't be completed until 2015.

USAID also has made a new two-year, \$3 million deal with Black and Veatch, an engineering firm which has worked on the Kajaki dam for years. The company will provide technical support to whoever wins the contract install the third turbine.

The U.S. military no longer has control of the region, or of the supply route it cleared in 2011. Troops pulled out of their last base in Kajaki in December, and Afghan forces assumed responsibility for security. President Karzai's refusal to sign the BSA is another stumbling block to signing off development projects.

USAID says that although U.S. military commanders protested a decision last year to put Afghanistan's power utility, DABS, in charge of the project, it has enough control to make sure work is completed. USAID has rehabilitated the first two turbines at the dam, in the face of security challenges.

"Throughout this process, USAID and DABS have worked closely together, and USAID has approved the process by which the contract was selected to ensure transparency," a USAID spokesman said in a statement to Foreign Policy magazine. "We will continue to provide quality assurance and quality control throughout the process of installing the third turbine, including reviewing vouchers of the contractor."

Construction of the dam was first completed by the United States in the 1950s as part of an ambitious project to introduce irrigation and electricity across the region. After the Soviet occupation and subsequent civil wars, the dam has fallen into decay.

USAID has reserved upwards of \$260 million for the effort, considered Afghanistan's major power initiative.

People don't party in houses on fire

Reports of a Saudi hunting party in western Afghanistan province drew sharp criticism from the Afghan media. The Saudis intended to hunt rare wild birds, contravening President Karzai's decree prohibiting this activity.

The foreign affairs ministry subsequently announced a government investigation into the allegations.

Activists and local media agencies reported that 60 to 160 Arabic, Pakistani, Kashmiri and Bangladeshi hunters, including the commerce minister of Qatar, visited Herat and Farah provinces to hunt rare birds and species, and were permitted to do so by foreign affairs ministry

of Afghanistan.

Foreign ministry spokesman Janan Mosazai said visas for the foreigners might have mistakenly been issued, if the reports are proved to be true.

The hunters were criticised for their lack of tact in pursuing a lavish and illegal recreation at a time when Afghans are busy rebuilding their country. The sheikhs allegedly arrived in multi-million dollars transport aircrafts and luxury vehicles on the invitation of an Afghan presidential hopeful. Local press commented that 'they should know that people do not go for parties to houses that are on fire and where dwellers mourn deaths of their beloved ones. The virtually blind sheikhs should notice that not a day goes by that Afghans beat their chest and mourn.'

An Arabs demonstration of political support for their host in upcoming presidential elections is also seen as a violation of the Afghan constitution, meddling in internal affairs and a challenge to the writ of the Afghan government.

Sensitivities are particularly raw following the recent deportations of Afghan exiles in Saudi Arabia, where they had legal residence previously.

Karzai accuses US of children's deaths

According to Dawn, President Karzai has accused the US of killing civilians in an airstrike.

"As a result of bombardment by American forces last night [13 January 2014]... in Siahgird district of Parwan province, one woman and seven children were martyred and one civilian injured," a statement from Karzai's office said.

"The Afghan government has been asking for a complete end to operations in Afghan villages for years, but American forces acting against all mutual agreements... have once again

bombarded a residential area and killed civilians."

ISAF said it was "aware of reports that at least two civilians were inadvertently killed today during an Afghan-led joint operation in Ghorband (Siahgird) District... An enemy force engaged Afghan and coalition forces from several compounds. Afghan and coalition forces returned fire and required defensive air support to suppress the enemy fire."

ISAF reported that one of its soldiers was killed in the fighting, as well as at least 10 insurgents. A Taliban spokesman said that 12 Afghan soldiers had been killed.

Siahgird district, about 40 kilometres (25 miles) north of Kabul, is on the main road from the capital to Bamiyan.

Dawn add that Karzai has often used accidental shootings and misguided airstrikes to berate foreign powers and provoke public anger.

The Attorney General's office announced that investigations into past criminal activities of current Presidential candidates would be closed on the grounds of insufficient evidence.

"After a comprehensive investigation into the Presidential candidates of the upcoming elections, the Attorney General's office couldn't find any specific charges against any of the candidates," spokesman Baseer Azizi said.

Election officials are said to have sent information on five candidates to the AG for further investigation. The cases are said to include allegations of human rights violations.

The Attorney General's office declined to name any of the Presidential candidates who were investigated.

First female police chief

Colonel Jamila Bayaz was appointed as police chief for the first district of Kabul city, the first female appointee to such a post.

Col. Bayaz vowed to provide better security for the district, the main commercial site for Kabul's citizens.

Kabul security chief, Gen. Zahir also praised Col. Bayaz's record while she was serving in the Criminal Investigation Department of Kabul security command.

"I hope that we see a female Provincial Police Chief in the future, we are working on that and soon you will see it," Ministry of the Interior spokesman Sediq Sediq.

Last year the most senior female police in Helmand was shot dead as she left her home to go to work.

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