

News Briefs

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Airport Set to Expand

The Japanese embassy in Kabul and Afghanistan's foreign ministry have announced that construction on a new terminal at the city's airport is set to begin in 2005.

The new building, large enough to accommodate 1,600 passengers and built to international standards, will include new police booths, restaurants, a customs branch office and a special VIP section.

"The present terminal has room for 120 people but 240 people are using it, which is a big problem for both the passengers and us," said Technical Deputy of Ministry of Aviation Raz Mohammad Aalami.

Alhaj Ghulam Nabi Teemar, the airport's director, predicted that "the number of flights will increase and that will have a positive effect on the economy of the country".

The 30 million US dollar project is being paid for by Japan and is expected to take three years to complete.

Workers Protest

In the first known demonstration for employees' rights in Kabul, more than 500 construction workers marched on August 24 from a square in the western part of the capital toward the president's office and the labour and social affairs ministry office in the centre of the city.

The demonstrators were protesting the growing presence of foreign workers in the country whom they say are taking an increasing number of government-contract jobs.

"We don't want foreign laborers, we want work from [President Hamed] Karzai's government," the protesters chanted.

Ahmad Jalal, one of the demonstrators, accused security officials at the labor and social affairs ministry of preventing the protesters from entering the building so they could voice their demands.

But a spokesman for the ministry denied the protesters were prevented from entering the building. "Nobody has come here and the door of the ministry is open to anyone," he said.

The president's office, according to Jalal, also refused to give them a hearing.

Khwaja Najmuddin, a spokesperson for the protesters, warned that the construction workers “will turn to committing theft, fighting and pillage if the government doesn’t find employment for us because our children are dying of hunger”.

An IWPR investigation last month discovered widespread dissatisfaction by local labourers and construction companies with the growing presence of foreign workers and companies in the country.

Support for the Cinema

Hashmat Khan, an Afghan movie actor, would like Afghan movies to reflect local customs and culture, rather than turn into another Hollywood or Bollywood.

That’s why Khan, who in recent years has played leading roles in several Indian films, recently returned to Afghanistan to establish a film academy with financial aid from the government of India.

Originally India considered helping professionalise Afghan movie actors by giving them scholarships to the country’s Pona Institute. But luckily for Khan, and established and aspiring actors here, the Indian government ultimately decided to finance a film academy in Afghanistan.

Khan said he plans to improve Afghan movies and train those interested in film-making.

Saleem Shaheen, an actor in Afghan films, who heads up two local movie companies, agrees with his plan. “I want to be professional in movie-making, and most of our movies should be produced according to Afghan culture,” he said.

By IWPR reporters Zarghoona Salehi, Najibullah Khilwatgar, and Forozan Danesh Rahmani.

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