

(1) Moscow ...

has hosted in four months to push for political negotiations. "The US had been invited to take part in the consultations but it refused [to attend] for reasons unclear to us," it added.

According to the Russian foreign ministry, ways and means to coordinate regional efforts for facilitating the process of national reconciliation in Afghanistan and bringing peace there topped the agenda.

"The parties [concerned] had a frank and thorough exchange of views on the current political and military situation in Afghanistan as well as on its prospects and expressed common concern over growing terrorist activities in the country leading to rising tensions and increasing violence which adds to the predicament of the Afghan people," the statement said.

"The meeting's participants stressed that there was no military solution to the Afghan crisis [and] the only way to resolve it was by ensuring a national reconciliation using political methods in accordance with the United Nations Security Council resolutions." (Pajhwok)

(2) Governor ...

"This was the aid which was considered by the president himself to be given to the families. As representatives of the president, we called the families here and gave them the money, which was brought here by a delegation," Omarkhail said.

According to Omarkhil, Taliban families are not involved in what Taliban fighters do and that they deserved the support.

"We cannot say that the child will follow his father Mullah Mottaqi. Also, we cannot say that he will become a good person (in the future)," he added.

The Ministry of Defense (MoD) meanwhile confirmed that representatives of the ministry had gone to Kunduz to give support to the Taliban families.

"The delegation which went there (to Kunduz) was representing the Ministry of Defense, but they (the delegation) told us that the budget which was allocated for martyrs and disabled persons of the Defense Ministry was never used for the Taliban," said Mohammad Radmanesh, MoD spokesman.

CEO Abdullah Abdullah also expressed the same opinion about the Taliban families, but said giving money to Taliban families needed further investigations.

"We cannot count the local residents as members of the Taliban if someone from their relatives are among the Taliban. But despite that I insist that government will decide on the case if investigations showed something different," he said. "This is a complicated issue and it is not known what is the reason behind the support. Before this a number of government officials said that the Taliban receives most of their equipment from government institutions, Nazari Paryani, a military analyst said.

Government pays 100,000 AFs to the families of martyred Afghan soldiers, but the families do go through a complicated process before receiving the funds. (Tolonews)

(3) Iran Calls ...

it is imperative for the regional countries to send a resolute message to terrorists that they are committed to fight terrorism in the region.

The second round of talks on Afghanistan was held in December 2016 with the participation of Russia, Pakistan, China, India, Iran and Afghanistan.

Rahimpour led the Iranian delegation in Afghanistan conference in Moscow.

In relevant remarks in early April, Russian Foreign Min-

istry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova announced that her country has invited Iran to take part in the conference on Afghanistan in Moscow at the highest diplomatic level.

"Moscow will host another round of regional talks on Afghanistan on April 14 and Iran has been invited to attend the event," Zakharova said.

She reiterated that the talks will focus on security in Afghanistan.

"In our opinion, the main goal of the consultations is to develop a single regional approach with regard to further promotion of the national reconciliation process in that country, while maintaining Kabul's leading role and complying with the earlier reviewed and approved principles on the integration of the armed opposition into peaceful life," Zakharova added.

She also said that other countries such as Afghanistan, Central Asian states, China, India, Pakistan and the US have also been invited to attend the conference. (FNA)

(4) Afghan ...

the ICC said in a statement.

"In accordance with the ICC Anti-Doping Code ... Shahzad will be provisionally suspended, with such suspension coming into effect on 26 April 2017, unless he exercises his right to challenge the imposition of the provisional suspension before such date," the sport's governing body said.

Shahzad, who has played 58 one-day internationals for Afghanistan, has five days from the notice of the positive test to ask for his 'B' sample to be tested.

He has 12 days to determine whether he will challenge the provisional suspension. If he does elect to have a hearing then the ban will not be imposed until the outcome is known.

If he does not respond within 14 days, the ICC will have deemed him to have waived his entitlement to a hearing and admitted to having committed the anti-doping rule violation. (Reuters)

(5) MPs Ratify...

for voting today.

Abdul Qayoum Sajad, a member of the house's international relations commission, said the pact was written in 22 articles and aimed to put an end to all sponsorship and support to terrorists including those who target Afghanistan and India. He said the document was earlier submitted to various commissions of the lower house for review, but central auditing and public accounts commission the panel had rejected the treaty.

Finally, the agreement was approved by lawmakers with securing 138 votes today. (Pajhwok)

(6) Taliban Using...

houses and mosques as their strongholds in Nawa but the Afghan forces try to ease the operation and let the people start their normal life, he said. Hussain, an Afghan National Army (ANA) soldier in Ainak area of Nawa district, said the Afghan forces had significant advancements in their operation in the past three days.

"We can reach to the district center if the operation is going successful like now," he said.

Abdur Rashid, another ANA soldier, said that they did not face any serious problems during the operation.

Taliban did not comment about the offensives. Nawa, once the most stable districts of Helmand, was fallen to Taliban militants about a year ago. (Pajhwok)

(7) Azizi Bank ...

and also praised the efforts of Azizi Bank towards its achievement and wished all the success.

Azizi Bank is the largest banking group in Afghanistan having its presence in 30 provinces of the country and is committed towards world class banking experience to its

customers. (PR)

(8) Inquiry ...

and led to people accusing Khan of blasphemy against Islam.

A crowd gathered at the dorm and soon it grew to several hundred people, eyewitnesses reported.

The mob reportedly kicked in the door, dragged Khan from his room and beat him to death, witnesses and police said.

Police say they have arrested 20 suspects involved in Khan's murder and have found no evidence to substantiate blasphemy allegations.

Crimes related to blasphemy are a serious offence in Muslim-majority Pakistan, and penalties range from small fines to the death sentence. (Tolonews)

(9) Petrol Price...

who owns a grocery store in Taimani neighborhood, said a 49kg bag of Kazakhstani flour sold for 1,210afis and the same quantity of Pakistani sugar for 2,420afis.

He sold a 16-litre tin of ghee for 1,200afis, a 24.5kg sack of Pakistani rice for 1,900afis, a kilogram of green tea for 270afis and the same quantity of African black tea for 290afis -- higher than wholesale prices.

According to the moneychangers' union in Sara-i-Shahzada, one US dollar accounted for 67.60afis and 1,000 Pakistani rupees for 631afis against last week's rates of 67.30afis and 627afis. (Pajhwok)

(10) US Drone...

another missing youth from Indian Kerala province who was also killed by drone strike in Afghanistan.

Though Murshid was killed a couple of days before the US dropped the MOAB on IS-infested caves in Nangarhar, Indian agencies were trying to ascertain the fate of the other 'missing' Keralites, the report said. (Pajhwok)

(11) Pence Aims...

about North Korea this week, he told reporters: "North Korea is a problem. The problem will be taken care of." He has repeatedly declared that if China, North Korea's dominant trading partner, isn't willing to do more to squeeze the North, the U.S. might take the matter into its own hands. The remarks came with a show of military might, as an aircraft carrier head to waters off the Korean Peninsula. However, military officials have said the U.S. doesn't intend to use military force against North Korea in response to either a nuclear test or a missile launch. (AP)

(12) Ready for...

Australia, and U.S. satellite imagery suggests the North could conduct another underground nuclear test at any time. Pyongyang recently tested a ballistic missile and claims it is close to perfecting an intercontinental ballistic missile and nuclear warhead that could attack the U.S. mainland. (AP)

(13) Boat with

children and 8 women were among the passengers. The alleged smugglers are Turkish. Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency says 43 migrants were also rescued from a sinking rubber dinghy off Turkey's coast while trying to cross to the Greek island of Lesbos. (AP)

(14) Japan Says...

that the country may take action on those occasions."

North Korea has another big military holiday on April 25, when its army marks its anniversary.

Kishida said that Japan needs "to be fully prepared to take various measures." He did not elaborate.

He said Japan's government has routinely coordinated with representatives of tens of thousands of Japanese residents in South Korea on contingency plans. (AP)

(15) Syrian Air...

and Iraq. It was formed in September 2015 with operation rooms in Syria's Damascus and Iraq's Green Zone in central Baghdad. (Xinhua)

Pope Blasts Migrant Suffering in Easter Prayer

ROME - Pope Francis deplored the suffering of migrants, victims of racism and persecuted Christians as some 20,000 worshippers gathered at Rome's Colosseum to hear his Good Friday prayer.

"Christ, our only saviour, we turn towards you this year with eyes lowered in shame," the pope told the crowds outside the former gladiators' battleground, their faces lit by candlelight.

"Shame for all the images of devastation, destruction and shipwrecks which have become ordinary in our lives," Francis said in an apparent reference to Mediterranean migrant disasters that have left at least 590 people feared dead this year.

The pope also spoke of the child abuse scandals that have rocked Catholicism in recent years, expressing "shame for all the times when bishops, priests and the religious have scandalised and hurt" the Church.

"Shame for the innocent blood, spilt daily, of women, children, migrants, people persecuted for the colour of their skin or for their social or ethnic group -- or for their faith in you," he said.

The Easter holy week commemorating the last days of Jesus's life had a bloody beginning last Sunday with attacks claimed by the Islamic State group on two Coptic churches in Egypt that left 45 people dead. (AFP)

Japan, China Remain on U.S. List

WASHINGTON - The Treasury Department said Friday it has retained Japan, China and four other nations on a list of countries it monitors over potentially "unfair" currency practices.

The department, however, concluded that no major U.S. trading partner is manipulating its currency to gain an unfair trade advantage, suggesting that President Donald Trump has backed away from his campaign pledge to label China a currency manipulator. In a semiannual report to Congress, the department kept Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, Germany and Switzerland on the "monitoring list," saying the six nations warrant "close attention to their currency practices."

Although the yen rose 6.3 percent versus the dollar last year and 1.0 percent in the first two months of this year, the report referred to the weakness of the currency. "There is little evidence that the yen is overvalued," it said. "The real effective yen is 20 percent weaker than its 20-year historical average." (AP)

UN Calls for Probe into Killing of 3 Aid Workers in S. Sudan

UBA - The UN top relief official in South Sudan on Saturday condemned horrific killing of three aid workers in the country's second largest town of Wau and called for urgent investigations.

The Humanitarian Coordinator for South Sudan, Eugene Owusu said the killing of the aid workers involved in the delivery of vital food aid in Wau comes less than one week after he called for an end to all attacks against aid workers in South Sudan.

"I am appalled by this abhorrent act and demand an urgent investigation to identify those who are responsible and bring them to account," Owusu said

in a statement issued in Juba.

The three porters were killed while making their way to a World Food Programme (WFP) warehouse in the midst of security operations in Wau town on April 10.

The deaths bring the number of aid workers killed in South Sudan to 82 with 14 aid workers having already been killed in 2017, compared to 24 in all of 2016.

"There are no words left to explain the level of frustration and outrage I feel regarding the continued attacks against humanitarians in South Sudan who are simply trying to help the civilians who are suffering as a result of this conflict," Owusu said.

"I join WFP in sending my deepest condolences to the families and friends of the three brave men who lost their lives this week in the service of the vulnerable people in this country."

The escalation of violence follows recent fighting in Pajok (near the border with Uganda) that caused 6,000 to flee across the border as well as in Wau that displaced many civilians and also claimed the lives of three workers contracted by the WFP.

According to UN, some 60 humanitarian workers have had to relocate from multiple locations in Jonglei between Friday and Saturday, including Waat and Walgak, due to intensified conflict in the area.

Early indications are that the civilian population is also fleeing, though the number of people displaced has been unable to be verified due to the highly fluid situation.

Owusu called on the parties to the conflict to uphold their responsibilities under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and ensure the proportionality of their actions.

"I am deeply disappointed that, despite the assurances that we have received and the commitments that have been made, humanitarians are again having to relocate, and civilians again being uprooted, in an area where needs were already high," he said.

The killings come as humanitarian needs continue to rise, while the operating environment is becoming increasingly dangerous and difficult. In March alone, 79 humanitarian access incidents were reported. (Xinhua)

Air Strikes Kill over 100 Al-Shabaab Militants in Southern Somalia

MOGADISHU - More than 100 Al-Shabaab militants including 20 commanders are believed to have been killed in southern Somalia by U.S. air strikes early Saturday, residents and officials said.

The residents and security officers said the warplanes targeted the militants' hideouts in Wargaduud and El-Adde where several Kenyan soldiers were killed by Al-Shabaab militants in January 2016.

Among senior Al-Shabaab commanders killed are Abdirahman Fillow and Abdirahman Ben Dutie in the dawn attack that also destroyed two vehicles bound explosive devices (VBIED) at Wargaduud. Dutie is from Marehaner Dalal section.

"Yesterday (Friday) night at Wargaduud and El-Adde, U.S. airstrikes killed 20 Al-Shabaab commanders among them Abdirahman Fillow and about 85 militants," said a security official who declined to be identified.

"The strike happened at 2 a.m. The siege continues," he added. Residents in El-Adde reported hearing the sound of explosions believed to be air strikes just after Friday midnight.

"There was heavy bombardment on Al-Shabaab base near El-Adde town targeting Al-Shabaab base but we don't know the number of casualties. We heard sounds of the

jets and then bombs," said one of the residents.

The bombardment came after U.S. military officials confirmed that its soldiers have deployed to Somalia to train and equip Somali and AMISOM forces fighting extremism in Somalia.

The team is reportedly carrying out a train-and-equip mission that is expected to last through the end of September, according to American officials.

The U.S. soldiers will join the small number of U.S. special operations forces already there providing counterterrorism support to local forces battling Al-Shabaab.

The U.S. maintains a small force unit of about 50 troops in Somalia mainly to advise and assist Somalia and AMISOM troops battling Al-Shabaab militants.

Though they are not in Somalia to conduct combat operations, when called in, their helicopters, drones and manned aircraft are available for quick reaction air strikes.

U.S. President Donald Trump in March granted additional authority to U.S. Africa Command to conduct counterterrorism airstrikes against the terror group.

The bombardment came after Kenyan security agents have been put on alert following intelligence reports at least nine Kenyan terrorists who had joined Al-Shabaab terror group in Somalia could be headed back to the country to launch attacks.

The Kenyans are moving back to Kenya following sustained attacks by the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) who are part of the AU mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and Somalia National Army (SNA).

Police have urged Kenyans to be wary of the suspects and warned they could be in the country and planning an attack.

Over the past months KDF troops have killed at least 90 Al-Shabaab terrorists in attacks in Somalia, which has reportedly weakened the group's capability. (Xinhua)

Turkey's Coup Probe Expands to Senior U.S. Officials

ISTANBUL - The Turkish authorities have targeted a former CIA director and other Americans in the ongoing investigation into a network accused of masterminding a failed coup last year, state-run Anadolu Agency reported on Saturday.

The Chief Public Prosecutor's Office in Istanbul, in response to a criminal complaint filed by some attorneys, decided to launch a probe into 17 individuals suspected of being linked to the Gulen movement led by Fethullah Gulen, a U.S.-based preacher, Anadolu said.

The agency said among the suspects are former CIA director John Brennan, Senator Chuck Schumer from New York, Preet Bharara who served as U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York until last month, David Cohen who once worked with the U.S. Treasury and Henri Barkey, director of the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington D.C. Anadolu said the 17 suspects have been accused of attempting to overthrow the Turkish government and the country's constitution and being members of a terror organization. Speeches and social media messages related to the Gulen movement made by the suspects are included in the probe, the agency noted, adding Turkey may apply to Interpol for a red notice against suspects living abroad. Since the coup bid in July last year, tens of thousands of public servants, military members, police officers, judicial personnel and academics have since been dismissed and jailed. Turkey has been pushing for Gulen's extradition, a case that has contributed to strained ties with the United States. (Xinhua)