

(1) Sunday...

declared a national day of mourning in compliance with directives from President Ashraf Ghani. The Afghanistan flag would fly half-mast on government offices and foreign missions to pay respect to the martyred soldiers. A special memorial service would be held at the mosque in the Presidential Palace to pray for the departed souls and early recovery of those wounded in the terrorist attack, the statement quoted the president as saying.

The announcement from the government comes moments later the Afghanistan Ulema Council asked the government to declare a national day of mourning and build a memorial commemorating the martyred soldiers of the attack on their base in Balkh province. The death toll from the Friday's brazen Taliban attack on the 209 Shaheen Military Corps dramatically soared to at least 100.

A statement from the Government Media and Information Center (GMIC) quoting the Ulema Council as saying: "We regret again witnessing the real face of the enemies of Islam and Afghanistan."

The cleric body called the attack as a huge crime because the troops were offering Friday's prayer when they were attacked in the mosque on their base.

The council condemned the attack as un-Islamic and against humanity. "This act of the insurgents was against Islamic teachings and humanitarian norms because attacking Muslims in mosque while they are busy performing prayers has no Islamic justification."

The council requested the government to declare a 'public mourning day' and construct a memorial for keeping alive the memory of the martyred individuals. (Pajhwok)

(2) Afghanistan, ...

by the World Bank.

"It is very difficult to cross the cable through this way (Wakhan port), but the project is funded by the World Bank and up to \$50 million USD is allocated for this project," said Ikramuddin.

According to Ikramuddin, good internet services at cheaper prices and promoting internet services in 34 provinces of the country are other benefits of expanding the fiber optic network.

Reports say that currently Afghanistan has been connected to five neighboring countries through fiber optic networks, but technical problems in Afghanistan are blamed for slow internet services and high consumer prices. (Tolnews)

(3) Wolesi Jirga ...

to appear in the house, otherwise their membership of the lower house would be suspended.

MP Farida Hamidi from Nimroz province said some colleagues had been absent for a long period of time without providing any reasons.

She said today's house session should serve as a warning to those who had been absent from the house.

"Most of the lawmakers do not attend sessions due to security threats, but we have to brave the same and attend the house because people have trusted us and it is our responsibility to hear and resolve people's problems," she said.

Two weeks back, the Wolesi Jirga suspended membership of Ahmad Behzad, a lawmaker from Herat, Parwin Durani, a Kuchi tribe representative, Bashir Ahmad Tayanj from Faryab and Fareshta Anwari from Nangarhar province due to their long absence.

Some days back, lawmakers complained about prolonged absence of some colleagues.

Then the Administrative Board decided to suspend those staying absent for 20 days in a row under Articles 73 and 119 of the internal regulations. (Pajhwok)

(4) UN Chief ...

Commissioner Jean-Claude Juncker, Stephane Dujarric, spokesperson for Guterres, said at the daily news briefing.

The UN chief stressed that "the best and most necessary investment is an investment in prevention and in addressing the problems of fragility before it turns into conflict," said Dujarric.

"It is absolutely essential to find a way to divert the massive use of resources in managing crises to what is necessary to do to prevent them and to build the capacity of societies to solve their own problems," Guterres was quoted as saying. The UN chief also said that the

international community must combine the peace and security approach with the sustainable development and human rights approaches, according to Dujarric. (Xinhua)

(5) 211 Helmand ...

duty properly.

The Maiwand Military Corps former commander, Maj. Gen. Moeen Faqir, was also recently referred to the attorney's office, Ahmadzai said.

He said due to the negligence of the mentioned officials the security situation in Helmand deteriorated and casualties to Afghan soldiers increased. First trial of the accused had been held and their next trial would also be conducted soon.

"Had these officials performed their duty sincerely, the insurgents would not have made much progress," the military official said. He added currently anti-insurgent operations have been ongoing in various areas of the province.

Meanwhile, Helmand provincial council deputy head, Abdul Majid Akhundzada, said everyone having committed corruption and negligence should be introduced to the attorney's office.

He said police personnel should also be punished for negligence in duty order to ensure security was strengthened.

Helmand Governor Hayatullah Hayat had said about 150 security posts were left to the Taliban without any resistance. (Pajhwok)

(6) Afghanistan,...

Afghanistan besides support to repatriation of Afghan refugees and other topics.

Meanwhile, Hakimi and Wade Warren, the acting administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), talked about the recent visit of McMaster, the US national security advisor, to Kabul.

They discussed effectiveness use of foreign aid in Afghanistan, USAID role and transparency in upcoming elections.

The World Bank CEO spoke about development, economic empowerment of women and assured of the bank's long term cooperation with Afghanistan. (Pajhwok)

(7) Ghani Makes ...

the exact number of casualties has not been ascertained so far but reports indicate dozens of people were killed or wounded in the attack.

The Ministry of Defense confirmed the attack was carried out by a group of at least ten insurgents who had disguised themselves in the Afghan army uniform to infiltrate inside the base.

The defense officials are saying that one of the suicide bombers was arrested while the other one managed to detonate his explosives, opening the way for the other insurgents to start firing on the soldiers.

The explosion and shooting appears to have taken place inside the mosque and the dining hall of the base. (KP)

(8) Details Begin ...

also said that one of the insurgents ordered a large number of soldiers into the canteen. After closing the door he opened fire on them.

He also said that most of the soldiers in the canteen and in the mosque had been unarmed at the time of the attack.

Officials have however still not given the exact number of soldiers killed in Friday's incident but leaked reports indicate the death toll is at least 135.

Amiry also reported that dozens of bodies of fallen soldiers were handed over to family members on Saturday while many more were airlifted by helicopter to various provinces.

He said helicopters ferried bodies to Kabul, Kunduz, Badakhshan and Takhar provinces.

Again officials would not disclose how many bodies had been flown out of the base or handed over to families that had gathered outside the camp on Saturday. Amiry said the process was slow and that it had continued throughout the day.

He also reported that one official from inside the base said a number of bodies had been badly burned in the attack which was slowing down the identification process.

The ten insurgents stormed the base on Friday afternoon at about 1.30pm. They had been driving official army vehicles and managed to penetrate multiple layers of security barriers.

The Taliban immediately claimed responsibility for the incident.

The attack comes just days after former president Hamid Karzai spoke out in support of the Taliban and said "the Taliban is a major reality in today's Afghanistan."

While defending Russia's stance on talks it had with the insurgent group he likened the Taliban to a "force" and said countries have no option but to talk to them.

Meanwhile, Balkh governor Atta Mohammad Noor strongly condemned the attack and said President Ashraf Ghani held an emergency meeting at the base on Saturday afternoon. He also said he had formed a task team to probe the incident.

Noor said the team would investigate claims that insurgents had received help from inside the base and that it had been planned outside the country.

Noor called on all security agencies to take the necessary precautions to prevent a repeat of such a deadly attack.

Meanwhile, Ghani ordered a national day of mourning Sunday and said a prayer service would be held at the presidential palace in honor of the soldiers killed.

He also ordered all Afghan flags to be flown at half-mast on Sunday. (Tolnews)

(9) Attack on ...

our valuable friends and partners in the fight against terrorism," said NATO Commander Gen. Nicholson.

"I want to praise the Afghan Commandos who brought today's atrocity to an end. Our thoughts are with the brave soldiers martyred today and their comrades, families and friends," he added. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted: "Strongly condemn the cowardly terror attack in Mazar-i-Sharif. Our prayers and condolences to the families who lost loved ones."

The Turkish Foreign Ministry said "We strongly condemn this heinous terror attack. We wish Allah's mercy upon members of the Afghan National Army who lost their lives and wish speedy recovery to the wounded, and convey our condolences to the brotherly Afghan people and the government," it said, adding Turkey would continue to remain in solidarity with Afghanistan in its fight against terrorism.

Separately, Pakistan extended its heartfelt sympathies and deepest condolences to the government and the people of Afghanistan as well as to the bereaved families and prayed for the early recovery of the injured. A statement from the Pakistani Foreign Office said: "Pakistan reiterates strong condemnation of terrorism in all forms and manitate inside the base.

The defense officials are saying that one of the suicide bombers was arrested while the other one managed to detonate his explosives, opening the way for the other insurgents to start firing on the soldiers.

The explosion and shooting appears to have taken place inside the mosque and the dining hall of the base. (KP)

He also said that most of the soldiers in the canteen and in the mosque had been unarmed at the time of the attack.

Officials have however still not given the exact number of soldiers killed in Friday's incident but leaked reports indicate the death toll is at least 135.

Amiry also reported that dozens of bodies of fallen soldiers were handed over to family members on Saturday while many more were airlifted by helicopter to various provinces.

He said helicopters ferried bodies to Kabul, Kunduz, Badakhshan and Takhar provinces.

Again officials would not disclose how many bodies had been flown out of the base or handed over to families that had gathered outside the camp on Saturday.

Amiry said the process was slow and that it had continued throughout the day.

He also reported that one official from inside the base said a number of bodies had been badly burned in the attack which was slowing down the identification process.

The ten insurgents stormed the base on Friday afternoon at about 1.30pm. They had been driving official army vehicles and managed to penetrate multiple layers of security barriers. The Taliban immediately claimed responsibility for the incident.

amounted to some 280,000, compared to 890,000 arrivals in 2015. The majority of asylum seekers arriving in Germany are from Syria or Afghanistan. (Sputnik)

(12) Confusion, ...

a major blow to the country's struggling security forces as they prepare for what is expected to be a year of bloody fighting against the Taliban, as well as other smaller militant groups like Islamic State. The base is the headquarters for the Afghan National Army's 209th Corps and also hosts foreign troops from the NATO-led mission to advise and train Afghan forces. No international troops were caught up in the attack, according to coalition officials.

The incident raised immediate questions over how such a mass killing could occur in a heavily defended headquarters frequented by foreign soldiers.

In the early afternoon on Friday, two army vehicles bearing men in Afghan army uniforms rolled up to the base's gate, claiming to have wounded soldiers in need of urgent medical care.

Two guards at the first checkpoint waved them through, according to Ahmad Saboor, a soldier who was on guard duty further inside the base that day.

At the second checkpoint, the guards told the men in the trucks they had to leave their weapons behind, as is standard procedure at the bases, Saboor said.

After a brief argument, the attackers shot and killed the two guards and sped toward the third and final checkpoint, which they hit with a rocket-propelled grenade before racing into the base itself.

"The first vehicle had a light machine gun mounted on it and started firing at dozens of soldiers and officers coming out of the mosque," Saboor recalled. "The second vehicle went towards the dining hall and started shooting." Wielding machine guns and rocket-propelled grenade launchers, the attackers sprayed heavy fire into groups of soldiers gathered to eat at a dining hall and leaving afternoon prayers at the mosque. Several other attackers detonated suicide vests packed with explosives.

Photos circulating online showed the inside of the mosque pockmarked with bullet holes and strewn with shattered glass.

"I had just finished my prayers and was outside the mosque when an army pickup sped towards us," said another wounded officer, who asked not to be named as his family had not been notified.

"I stood still and did not know whether to run or stay, then a gunman from the back of the truck opened fire with a machine gun and hit the side of my abdomen and my left leg."

Other unarmed soldiers were dropping dead and wounded around him.

"One of the attackers blew himself up, and others went and took up positions in a small room next to the mosque," he said.

The confusion in the base was compounded by the fact that the attackers wore army uniforms.

"At first there was a call on the radio not to shoot because they thought it could have been a misunderstanding," said the guard Saboor, who reported that some base officials initially thought it might have been a disagreement between soldiers.

Afghan commandos from elsewhere on the base arrived and engaged the attackers, eventually killing or capturing all of them, Zabihullah said.

A Taliban spokesman said at least four of the attackers were longtime members of the army who worked with the insurgent group.

Afghan officials are investigating that claim, but Zabihullah said he had no doubt that the gunmen had inside help. (Reuters)

(13) Survivors....

claimed that circles from within the army base helped the attackers enter the compound.

"We are soldiers from the Corps but we cannot enter the base easily, but it is unfortunate that suicide bombers managed to enter the base easily. My foot was wounded in this incident," he told TOLnews.

Meanwhile health officials said most of the wounded were being treated at the base and that only eight patients were taken to the Mazar-e-Sharif hospital.

"Eight of the wounded were taken to a public hospital in Mazar-e-Sharif. Six of them are in good condition but two others are in critical

condition," Balkh Public Health Director Mirwais Rabe said.

Sources said more than 135 soldiers were killed in the attack and at least 60 wounded. However, government has still not released official figures.

Just hours after Friday's incident, the Taliban claimed responsibility. (Tolnews)

(14) MoAB Attack

was not allowed to see the scene of the massive explosion.

In a telephone contact from the Shadal village of Achin, Amirzada said: "We come here daily despite serious security threats. But we are not allowed to enter the area to dig out facts about the attack."

Zabihullah Ghazi, a Voice of America reporter, was part of the group of journalists who once again traveled to Achin today to collect information regarding the strike -- roundly condemned by ex-president Hamid Karzai and others.

He told Pajhwok the security forces stationed in the area not only barred them from covering the incident, but also mistreated some journalists.

A few days ago, soldiers turned their weapons at the journalists trying to visit the area. Via a walkie-talkie, one military commander told his unit he is hiding from journalists who should also not be allowed entry into the area," he alleged.

Rafiq Sherzad, a reporter with Khyber TV, also grumbled about being barred from visiting the area. Journalists Protection Association (JPA) head, Shershah Hamdard said access to information was the right of every citizen and journalists were authorized to collect information.

He alleged the access to information right had been snatched from journalists in Nangarhar, particularly when it comes to covering important incidents, such as the MOAB attack in Achin.

"If they (authorities) think journalists will encounter security threats in the area, then they should explain it. If this is not the case, then why are journalists not allowed? They say the bomb can destroy everything in 11 kilometers radius, so security could not be an excuse," he argued.

The governor's spokesman, Attaullah Khogyani, said journalists were not allowed to visit the area due to security concerns. "Afghan forces are busy clearing the area, where militants have planted bombs. Reporters would be allowed once the landmines are cleared."

Maj. Sherin Aqa Faqiri, spokesman for 201st Selab Military Corps, said he could not talk about the incident but he would help journalists based on his ability. He also said journalists would be allowed once the area was cleared.

The National Security Council (NSC), Ministry of Defense and National Directorate of Security earlier had promised to let journalists visit the area and protect them while covering the incident. However, the promise is yet to be kept. (Pajhwok)

(15) Fuel up,...

a grocery store in Taimani neighborhood, said a 49kg bag of Kazakhstani flour sold for 1,250afs and the same quantity of the Pakistani variety for 2,450afs.

He sold a 16-litre tin of ghee sold for 1,180afs, a 24.5kg sack of Pakistani rice for 2,200afs, a kilogram of green tea for 280afs and the same quantity of African black tea for 340afs -- higher than wholesale prices.

According to the moneychangers' union in Sara-i-Shahzada, one US dollar accounted for 67.60afs and 1,000 Pakistani rupees for 633afs. (Pajhwok)

(16) Kandahar Kochis ...

they have opted for urban life. However, they are still haunted by multiple problems.

Lack of potable water, health facilities and locals' ownership claims to the Kochi-owned lands are some of the major issues being encountered by the nomadic community in Kandahar.

Allah Dad, another member of the Kochi tribe, also listed education and health as their key problems. He asked the government to provide them with shelter and mobile health and education facilities.

Abdul Bari Kharotwal, head of the Kochi affairs, acknowledged the community was faced with different issues. Of the 64,000 Kochis living in the province, 33,000 have lost their livestock.

He said most of the Kochis lived in Kandahar City, the provincial cap-

ital, Daman, Dand, Zherai, Panjwai, Arghandab, Shah Wali Kot and Spin Boldak districts.

He added the government planned to construct five high and intermediate schools and two hostels for the community.

Education Department spokesman Nazar Mohammad Samimi said there was one special school for Kochis in Kandahar City, where children of local people were enrolled. He explained classes had been arranged for Kochis in different parts of the city.

Samim Khpalwak, the governor's spokesman, promised they would utilize all resources to address the problems facing the Kochis. He also urged NGOs to extend assistance to the tribe. (Pajhwok)

(17) Gang of ...

by the kidnappers were also confiscated, the source added.

This comes as there has been a rise in the number of hostage takings in the key cities of the country, including capital Kabul during the recent months.

The Afghan intelligence operatives last week rescued the kidnapped son of a local trader who was kidnapped from the vicinity of Wazir Mohammad Akbar Khan. (KP)

(18) 17 Taliban ...

Abdul Bashir along with his two colleagues and said Mullah Khalid was an ordinary commander. (Pajhwok)

(19) Russia, EU...

complementarity," the ministry said.

During the upcoming talks, Mogherini and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will examine key aspects of bilateral relations, the commentary said. (Xinhua)

(20) Assad Says...

tactic will do a big hand.

Asked about the Syrian air defenses, prior to the American strike against the Shayrat air base in Homs two weeks ago, Assad said the rebels' main target was the Syrian air defenses, noting that the country lost 50 percent of the air defense capacity during the war. (Xinhua)

(21) Pentagon Chief...

prosperous region are those that I'm here to discuss with the prime minister," Mattis said. (Xinhua)

(22) Russia, Iran...

2017. The fourth round is scheduled for May 3 and 4.

Russia is using the Astana process to strengthen the ceasefire regime, Lavrov said, adding, "Together with Turkey and Iran, we are developing joint mechanisms, which will not only register the violations of ceasefire agreements, but will also be able to respond to these violations, exert pressure on the violators." (AP)

(23) Pence Discusses...

USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier strike group has continued to steam toward the Korean Peninsula, after confusion from the Trump administration earlier this week as to the location of the aircraft carrier.

Earlier Saturday, the U.S. Navy confirmed reports of a pilot ejecting from his F/A-18E Super Hornet fighter jet while making an attempt to land on the aircraft carrier, which was at that time located in the Celebes Sea, just south of the Philippines. (Xinhua)

(24) Russian FM...

Bashar al-Assad, have sought to clear Damascus of blame.

During the Friday call Lavrov notably "expressed regrets about the opposition of the United States at the (OPCW) to an initiative... to send inspectors to Syria to verify reports of the use of sarin gas in the rebel-held town of Khan Sheikhun" which left 87 dead, including many children.

Lavrov and Tillerson "agreed to examine again a possibility of opening an objective probe into this incident under the auspices of the OPCW," the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), said a ministry statement. (AFP)

(25) Chinese FM ...

are of historic significance for bilateral ties.

He said Uzbekistan is ready to work with China to align their strategies and to expand cooperation in areas like trade, finance, investment, technology, and water conservancy to as to enrich their comprehensive strategic partnership. (Xinhua)