

(1) UN Calls Attack ...

It urged all states to cooperate actively with the government of Afghanistan and all other relevant authorities in this regard.

Earlier, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) also denounced the terrorist bombing on the Shia cultural centre in Kabul, calling the "targeted attack" on civilians yet another despicable crime in a year marked by unspeakable atrocities.

"Crimes like today's strengthen our resolve to work with all Afghans who want peace to return to their country in 2018," Toby Lanzer, the acting head of UNAMA, said in statement.

The attack occurred in Kabul's Qalai Nazir neighbourhood, a predominantly Shi'a Muslim area, hitting the Tabayan Cultural Centre where civilians had gathered to commemorate a national day.

So far, about 100 casualties have been reported, including scores of civilians killed, according to reports. There are, however, fears the number may rise. Preliminary findings also indicate many children among the casualties.

Human rights teams from the UN Mission are on the ground to establish the facts, UNAMA said.

In the statement, Lanzer also expressed his sympathies with the families of those killed in the incident.

According to UNAMA, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da'esh), claimed responsibility for the attack. The Taliban issued a communique denying any involvement. (Monitoring Desk)

(2) Ghani Orders ...

strongest words as he offered his condolences to the families of those killed in the attack, the statement said.

ARG Palace in its statement also added that the terrorist groups must understand that the Afghan people are committed more than any other time to stand with the Afghan government as they are aware of the conspiracies of the enemies of the country.

The Afghan government reiterated that a clear strategy and will exists for the elimination of the terror groups as the Afghan forces are busy conducting operations against the terror groups across the country.

The Ministry of Interior says at least 40 people have been killed and around 31 others have sustained injuries in the attack.

However, another security official says the attack has likely left over 40 dead and around 100 others wounded.

The official further added that three back to back explosions took place in the area and it is believed two of the explosions were triggered by suicide bombers. No individual or group has so far claimed responsibility behind the attack which takes place days after a similar attack left nearly 9 people dead in Shash Darak diplomatic area of the city. (KP)

(3) Kabul Attacks ...

the cowardly suicide terror attack on the Shiite cultural centre near a media outlet.

OIC Secretary-General of Dr. Yousef A. Al-Othaimen strongly condemned the suicide bomb attacks targeting innocent worshippers and civilians as against the teachings and values of Islam. He extended his solidarity with Afghanistan in its fight against terrorism.

The OIC Secretary-General offered his deepest condolences to the families of the victims, government and people of Afghanistan on the tragic loss of lives and wished early recovery to the injured. Dr. Al-Othaimen reiterated the principled position of the OIC against all forms of terrorism and extremism and repeated his call for international solidarity in the fight against the scourge of terrorism.

India also extended heartfelt condolences to families of the victims and wished early recovery to the injured.

"Indian remains steadfast in its solidarity with the Government and the people of Afghanistan at this difficult time. India is committed to extend all possible support in their fight against the menace of terrorism and efforts to bring peace, stability and security in the country," the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

Bahraini Foreign Ministry also condemned the terrorist attacks in Kabul and reiterated the firm position of Bahrain, which rejects violence, extremism and terrorism in all its forms.

Meanwhile, The United Arab Emirates condemned the attacks in Kabul. The UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation affirmed in a statement the UAE's condemnation of these acts of terrorism, stressing the UAE's stance and rejection of various forms of violence. (Pajhwok)

(4) Govt Under

"All those who lost their lives in this attack were vulnerable people. None of them were the sons of MPs, the president or any minister. They were here to

receive training," said Mohammad Husain, a family member of a victim.

A few hours after the attack, some families of victims said they were still unaware about the fate of their relatives who had attended the ceremony in Tabayan Cultural Center in Pul-e-Sokhta area.

The mother of a young man who lost his life in the attack said: "I could not find my son. How will people make money now for bread. I hope (President) Ashraf Ghani loses his son to feel the pain of these people."

Another father who lost his 21-year-old daughter, Freshta, said his daughter was in her last year at university and was due to give a speech at the ceremony.

"What will I do now?" asked Masooma, Freshta's sister.

"My son went to the Holy Quran reciting competition. Even his hair has been burnt," the mother of another victim said.

Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack which killed 41 people and wounded 84 others.

This is not the first attack by the group. The militant group has targeted many civilian ceremonies this year which has claimed about 130 lives since October.

Meanwhile, Shahussain Murtazawi, President Ashraf Ghani's spokesman, said at a press conference on Thursday afternoon that the president has assigned a team to probe the incident.

"President Ashraf Ghani has assigned the relevant officials to assess the incident and address the situation of the wounded," said Shahussain Murtazawi, spokesman for Ghani.

"We accept the shortcomings. I mentioned that if our colleagues in the police neglected to do their duty, we will punish them," said Najib Danish, spokesman for the Interior Ministry. (Tolonews)

(5) Russia Voices ...

recalled a meeting on the sidelines of the General Assembly between Russian and Pakistani foreign ministers. He said they discussed Afghanistan and counter-terrorism. Both countries were trying to bring about peace in the region, he concluded. (Pajhwok)

(6) Threats Against ...

the city. They have disturbed the security of the city. No one cares," said Ajmal Rahmani, chairman of businessmen union of Nangarhar.

The forex dealers protested the incident in Kabul, Herat and other cities in Afghanistan. They said they will not get back to their business until government pays "serious attention" to their safety.

"We fear the day when no investor will remain here. All will leave the country if this continued," said Amin Jan Khosti, member of forex dealers union in Kabul. "If this is an Muslim country, then there are certain punishments for thieves, murderers and kidnappers," said Haji Zeerak, member of union.

Officials of Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACI) meanwhile said the ignorance by the security forces has led to the rising threats against forex dealers in the country.

"The security situation is worse. It fully undermines investment, especially in Jalalabad, Kabul, Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif cities as well as in Kunduz," Khan Jan Alokozai, the deputy head of ACCI told TOLONews.

"The Ministry of Interior has assigned a team to talk with forex dealers. We are ready to leave no stone unturned in ensuring the safety of investors," the Interior Ministry spokesman Najib Danish told reporters at a press conference on Thursday.

According to ACCI, so far this year five forex dealers have been killed only in Nangarhar while two other dealers from Kabul are still in the custody of the kidnappers. ACCI notes that so far this year, over 98 cases of kidnappings, murders and theft against forex dealers have been recorded in the country. (Tolonews)

(7) Afghanistan

of Mines and Petroleum, told TOLONews.

Economic commentators meanwhile asked government to define more inclusive and working strategies so that the people can access sufficient gas from the project.

"The provinces where the pipeline goes through must be the number one beneficiaries of the project. They will not cooperate with the safety of the pipeline if they are not benefited from the gas and other privileges of the project," said Qais Mohammadi, an economic affairs analyst.

Based on the statistics, practical work on the project will start in 2018 and the project will be put into operation in 2019.

What is TAPI?

The 1,814-kilometre pipeline will run from gas fields in Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan to India. It starts from the Galkynysh gas field.

In Afghanistan, TAPI pipeline will be constructed alongside the Kandahar-Herat Highway in western Afghanistan, and then via Quetta and Multan in Pakistan. The final destination of the pipeline

will be the Indian town of Fazilka, near the border between Pakistan and India. Afghanistan is expected to get \$500 million in transit duties annually from the project. (Tolonews)

(8) Govt to Release ...

previously accused the government of delaying tactics in the release of its prisoners and not fully implementing the peace agreement.

Abdul Hai Faqiri, head of the HIA Judicial Commission, assured some HIA prisoners would be freed soon and reunited with their families.

This he told prisoners while distributing winter clothes to them. Faqiri said some circles within and outside of the government had been trying to prevent the HIA-government peace deal from being fully enforced, thus delaying the release of prisoners.

President Ghani took the decision of releasing some HIA prisoners in a high-level meeting at the Presidential Palace on Tuesday (26th December.)

The government had in May this year released 55 HIA prisoners under the peace agreement. (Pajhwok)

(9) New Policy Reflects ...

After the announcement of the South Asia strategy, NATO allies and partners had ramped troop contributions to the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, the White House added.

According to Dawn, it also characterised the joint US-Pakistan operation to rescue a North American couple from Taliban custody as a major achievement.

Based on US intelligence, Pakistani troops rescued Caitlan Coleman, her husband Joshua Boyle and their three children during an operation in the Kurram region October.

Before being freed, the US woman and her Canadian spouse had spent nearly five years in Taliban hideouts in Pakistan and Afghanistan. All their three children were born in captivity. (Pajhwok)

(10) Female Afghan ...

trained female Afghan police cadets in 2016. Since 2011, more than 2,600 Afghan policemen and women have been trained by the Turkish police academy. (AA)

(11) Watchdog Labels...

which was released on Thursday, states that 141 cases of violence against journalists have been registered this year while the figure was 415 incidents last year.

NAI report states that government was involved in 44 percent of violence against journalists, insurgents 33 percent, unknown people 18 percent and owners of media outlets were involved in eight percent of the cases.

"In total we have registered 141 cases of violence against journalists this year. Unfortunately, it included 14 incidents of murder and according to NAI figures, 23 were injury cases, 14 cases of arrest and stopping freedom of speech, 21 cases of assault and 69 cases of insulting and threatening," said Abdul Mujib Khalwatgar, CEO of the organization.

"The sharp increase in violence in the current year has been a big blow to freedom of speech which is the biggest achievement of the people of Afghanistan in the past 17 years," he added.

Meanwhile, President Ashraf Ghani's spokesman Shahussain Murtazawi said government supports media outlets and journalists.

"For the first time, the mechanism of journalists' safety has been approved and there is strong support to media organizations and journalists by government and a joint committee for the first time has created coordination among different institutions which is comprised of justice, security and other organizations.

They hold sessions under the leadership of Mr. (Second Vice President Mohammad Sarwar) Danish," he told a press conference.

NAI has asked the international community to put pressure on the Afghan government to draw up a proper mechanism to overcome the problem. (Tolonews)

(12) Experts Eye New...

in the region as well as in the Afghanistan peace process. The two countries accuse each other of providing militants groups with safe zones to launch attacks across the border. Skirmishes between their forces at the border areas were also on media reports.

"Afghanistan and Pakistan agreed to improve bilateral relations as soon as possible and to realize harmonious co-existence, promising to resolve their concerns through comprehensive dialogue and consultation," Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told reporters after the trilateral meeting on Tuesday.

The three countries also reaffirmed their commitment to pushing forward the reconciliation process in Afghanistan, calling on the Taliban to join in the process. China and Pakistan expressed support for peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

Another focal point being regarded as a success of the meeting is that the three parties have agreed to discuss to extend the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan.

"In the long run, through Afghanistan, we will gradually connect the CPEC with the China-Central and Western Asia Economic Corridor," said Wang.

As an important neighbor of China and Pakistan, Afghanistan has an urgent desire to develop its economy and improve people's livelihood, and it is willing to integrate itself into the process of regional interconnection, according to Wang. Pakistani analysts think China's efforts of hosting the meeting and offering the extension of CPEC are an active move to improve the current scratched ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Speaking to Xinhua, Aamir Ghauri, a veteran editor of Pakistan's influential daily The News in Islamabad welcomed the trilateral meeting and termed it as a positive development.

"Extension of the corridor to Kabul offers Afghanistan a chance to be part of a global tomorrow rather than remain a bombed and battered yesterday," said Ghauri.

"China's economic strategy in South and Central Asia is based on the fact that building up economic prosperity in the region will help reduce threat posed by radical groups," said Mustansar Abbas Klasra, an Islamabad based security expert.

In the trilateral meeting, Pakistan and Afghanistan reiterated their willingness to synergize their own development strategies with China's Belt and Road Initiative, in which CPEC is a flagship project, and to explore the possibility of trilateral partnership under this initiative.

Sohail Iqbal Bhatti, an Islamabad-based foreign policy expert, termed the trilateral meeting as an excellent step to the prosperity in the region.

"China has taken another excellent step by bringing Pakistan and Afghanistan across the table. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan need to improve bilateral ties and China has provided them with a platform," Sohail said.

He was of the opinion that China has invested heavily in Pakistan on CPEC and wants to make it a great success. It is trying to bridge the gap between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

China knows that the uneasy relationship between the two neighboring countries would sabotage the progress CPEC brought to the region. That's the reason China is trying to bring the two closer, Bhatti told Xinhua, adding that China will be successful in this venture. (Xinhua)

(13) Sayyaf Warns ...

to the world.

"What happened yesterday (Thursday) is not only a crime, but is a type of panic, madness and an inhuman act. Unfortunately, some groups have been created to damage the image of Islam and humanity," Sayyaf added. "Between 10,000 to 15,000 families are mourning for those who were killed and wounded on Thursday suicide attack."

He said civilian casualties in militants' attacks are shocking and that it should be stopped.

The speakers of the ceremony meanwhile talked on issues around modernism, intellectuality and traditions.

"You do not accept the creation of a pen without its creator, then how do you accept a human without someone who has created him? You do not accept the creation of a needle without a factory, then how you say that there is no one behind the creation of the sky and the universe," Sayyaf said. (Tolonews)

(14) China to Create ...

the right to do so," Member of Parliament, Ghulam Hussain Naseri, said. (ATN)

(15) European Union...

TOLONews this week.

In response to the European Union's stance on the rift between President Ashraf Ghani and Atta Mohammad Noor, the ambassador said: "What you are referring to is typically a domestic issue on which the European Union has no say. When we have a say, as a partner and friend of Afghanistan, is that we consider that this domestic matter should be handled by both parties involved."

He said the matter should be solved through negotiations and that "at all cost violence should be avoided."

"That is perfect. They said what exactly we are doing. No interference no intervention. We are just encouraging the parties to find solution through dialogue. This is not interference," he said in response to Jamiat's call on the international community to avoid interference in the Ghani-Noor saga.

Mr. Mayaudon said peace is the only way to end the crisis in Afghanistan.

"One of the defining parameters for political trajectory of Afghanistan will be the peace process... Nothing significant will happen until and unless peace be-

comes a reality in your country (Afghanistan)," he said.

On December 18, President Ashraf Ghani said in statement that he has approved the resignation of Balkh Governor Atta Mohammad Noor. The statement said that the president has appointed Engineer Mohammad Dawood as the new governor for the province.

Later in the day, Atta Mohammad Noor, who is also the CEO of Jamiat-e-Islami Party of Afghanistan, rejected the decision and said he will remain in his post as Balkh governor.

On Thursday, Zabi Fetrat, a spokesman for Jamiat-e-Islami said government has called for talks with Jamiat to resolve tension between the two sides.

However, Noor's close aides have warned that they will not allow government to implement its order and dismiss Noor until a political settlement has been reached.

The Presidential Palace so far has not commented on possible talks with Jamiat. But a source within government has said the decision about the dismissal of Noor is final and that engineer Mohammad Dawood will be the new governor. (Tolonews)

(16) Daesh Abduct ...

with each passing day and could create serious problems for people and the government, he said.

On the other hand, Col. Abdul Hafiz Khashi, provincial deputy police chief, said Daesh had killed their own two fighters in Darzab district.

He said the two men were killed after people complained they were involved in armed robberies in the district. (Pajhwok)

(17) SDF Conducted ...

2017. Counterpart Agencies i.e. focal points of SDF in SAARC Member States also participated in the meeting. During the meeting, the Implementing Agencies were briefed on SDF's policies and procedures and reporting requirements, and proposed changes to the project documents since its approval.

The objectives of the meeting were to evaluate the progress made by Implementing Agencies, to facilitate the exchange of experiences between IAs, to discuss the issues/problems being faced by different IAs and agree on solutions to solve the same and to review and discuss the sustainability plan/revenue generation model for the project.

SDF funded project SABAHA with an approved budget of US\$ 21.075 Million has participation from all SAARC Member Countries except India. The project objectives are to strengthen the livelihoods of poor HBWs living in the region primarily through awareness and exposure to development, capacity building, intensive training and gaining a fair share of mainstream market and the project is benefiting the Poor/marginal HBWs from informal sectors. (PR)

(18) 41 Militants

were killed in Maiwand district of Kandahar province.

Nine Taliban were killed and six others wounded in operations in Alingar district of eastern Laghman province, three were killed in Shah Joy district of Zabol province and one in Qarah Bagh district of Ghazni province and three others were wounded, the statement said.

Three motorcycles and some weapons were also destroyed in these operations, the statement said, but provided no information about casualties among the security forces. (Pajhwok)

(19) Farah Drug

He added the owner of the house could not be arrested because he was absent, but a manhunt to capture him along with his arbiter was underway. He said the operation would continue until all drug sellers were detained.

Sharafudin, a resident of Bagh-i-Kafi area, said all drugs sellers had fled the houses where told drugs after police launched the operation against them. (Pajhwok)

(20) Actions Taken ...

the importance of taking action against all terrorist and extremist groups," the report said.

It further added that the Department of Defense will be a part of a whole-of-government, regional strategy to isolate the Taliban from sources of external support and to mitigate any malign influence from outside actors.

"Our military-to-military relationship with Pakistan remains critical to the success of our mutual interests in the region. To move forward, we must see fundamental changes in the way Pakistan deals with terrorist safe-havens in its territory," the report said.

According to Pentagon "To induce that change, we will work across the U.S. Government, using a range of tools to expand our cooperation with Pakistan in areas where our interests converge and to take unilateral steps in areas of divergence." (KP)