

Quote of the Day

Never be afraid to sit awhile and think.

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US Has no Plans to Increase Mideast Forces: Pentagon Chief

TOKYO - U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Saturday the U.S. cannot afford to ignore destabilizing moves by Iran, but has no plans to respond by increasing American military forces in the Middle East.

Mattis spoke at a joint news conference in Tokyo with his Japanese counterpart, Tomomi Inada. Mattis held a series of high-level meetings in Seoul and Tokyo this week on his first overseas trip as Pentagon chief. He was returning to Washington Saturday.

Asked about U.S. concern about China's militarization of artificial islands in the South China Sea, Mattis was critical of China's moves but said U.S. military action was not appropriate.

In an opening statement at his news conference, Mattis also explicitly stated that the Trump administration will stick to the previous U.S. stance that the U.S.-Japan



security treaty applies to defending Japan's continued administration of the Senkaku islands in the East China Sea, which are contested by China.

In response, China's Foreign Ministry reiterated its claim of sovereignty over the tiny, uninhabited islands and called on the U.S. to cease "making wrong remarks"

over the issue. Saturday's news conference was Mattis' first since taking office Jan. 20. He is the first career military officer to serve as defense secretary since

George C. Marshall, a former Army chief of staff, in 1950-51 during the Korean War. Mattis served 41 years in the Marine Corps, including a stint on Okinawa. (AP)

Issues over the Word 'Afghan' Reportedly Behind E-NIC Delay



KABUL - The electronic National Identity Card (e-NIC) department said the politicization of the word "Afghan" is the reason for the suspension of the identity card roll out process.

According to the department, at least \$70 million USD has been spent on the process so far.

"There is no issue in administrative affairs of the e-NIC. The absence of the word Afghan on the identity cards is the main problem which has created an obstacle for the e-NIC rollout," head of the e-NIC department Zemarai Bahir said.

Meanwhile, the CEO's office

said there is no technical issue in this respect.

"The e-NIC rollout is one of the political issues within government. There is no technical or legal issue in this respect. People's concerns have delayed the process," the CEO's deputy spokesman Jawed Faisal said.

Head of a civil society association Aziz Rafiee meanwhile criticized government over the delay in the process.

"How can the issue of e-NIC be non-political in a country where language, ethnic groups and religion are political?" Rafiee said. (Tolonews)

Police Impose 'Illegal Taxes' on Truck Drivers on Key Highways

KABUL - An investigation by TOLONews has found that some police force members appear to be charging "illegal taxes" on truck drivers along the Kabul-Kandahar-Herat Highway.

Video footage shows that in some instances police are accepting food and other goods instead of money.

One truck driver said that money was demanded at many check posts.

"When we drive from Farah, check posts charge us 5,000, 4,000, 2,000 and 1,000 Afs," said driver, Rahimullah.

Another driver, Abdul Khaliq, said: "We are tired of this. They [police] speak badly to us and take money from us."

"From Abkhurma to Tah Toot (in Farah) we are charged by police all along the way," said Rahmatullah, a driver.

Meanwhile, a number of MPs criticized the MoI for not paying police their salaries on time, which they say has led to this new trend.

"Corruption starts in ARG (the Presidential Palace) with ministries, deputy ministries; therefore, police commit illegal actions. It is concerning, but it is the common masses who mostly bear the brunt of this problem," said Obaidullah Barikzai, an MP from Uruzgan.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) acknowledged the problem and said they take legal action against those who violate the law in such instances.

"We will take serious action against those who have a hand in this issue. We hope that we receive more documents (evidence) in order to address the problem," MoI deputy spokesman Najibullah Danish said.

Late last year, the transportation union protested against illegal ... (More on P4)...(4)

UN Removes Hekmatyar's Name from Blacklist

KABUL - The United Nations has removed the name of a former Afghan warlord from its Islamic State group and al-Qaida sanctions list.

According to a statement posted Friday by the Security Council, a U.N. committee removed Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's name from the sanctions list. The statement said Hekmatyar, leader of Islamist organization Hezb-e-Islami, would no longer have his assets frozen, be subject to a travel ban or to an arms embargo.

Amin Karim, the group's chief negotiator told reporters on Saturday "The removal of sanctions proved that the solution is Afghan-owned negotiations inside the country and coming to a national consensus. If Afghans come to such a conclusion the international community is supportive of the peace process and it is good news for peace and



the Afghan nation." Hekmatyar, a former warlord who battled U.S. forces after the 2001 invasion and nursed bitter rivalries with other Afghan factions, agreed to lay down arms last year. Karim had earlier told The Associated Press that he would return to the capital in "a matter of weeks, not months."

Hekmatyar is seen as a potential rival to President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdul-

lah, who have governed the country through a shaky, U.S.-brokered power-sharing agreement since the disputed elections of 2014. His return could stir up new political uncertainty as the government struggles to confront a reinvigorated Taliban that has been advancing on several fronts.

In September, Ghani signed a peace treaty with Hekmatyar in which Ghani pledged to lobby ... (More on P4)...(2)

21 Hydropower Dams in the Pipeline



KABUL - Using its hydel, solar, gas, wind and coal resources, Afghanistan could become self-sufficient in electricity production and irrigation, an official said Saturday. Amanullah Ghalib, deputy energy and water minister, told Pajhwok Afghan News the government had completed the feasibility study of 21 small and medium size dams. He said the government had formulated a five-year plan aimed at controlling the water flow and producing electricity in last two years.

In addition during this time, the public participation law was also completed, with efforts underway to towards self-reliance in power generation.

He said basic studies of large dams in Bagh Dar in central Kapisa province and the Kokcha River in Takhar and Badakhshan provinces, in Sagi area in eastern Kunar province and Sarobai-2 had been completed. Ghalib said work on the Kajaki-2 in Halmand province where, ... (More on P4)...(5)

Justice Ministry Opens Legal Advice Center

KABUL - The Justice Ministry on Saturday opened a legal advice center for members of the public.

The center also launched its advice hotline number - 188 - which is toll-free and operational during working hours. Speaking at the event, Deputy Minister of Justice Sayed Mohammad Hashemi said prisoners will also be provided with legal advice services by the center.

"Our countrymen who need legal advice will benefit from our services. We will give them legal advice from 8am to 4pm during working days," he said.

"Those who need legal advice can benefit from our services," said Asadullah Wahdat, general director of legal assistance department at the ministry. According to the ... (More on P4)...(6)

ARG Advisor Welcomes UN's Move to Lift Sanctions on Hekmatyar

KABUL - A senior advisor to President Ashraf Ghani on Monday welcomed the United Nations' move to remove Hizb-e-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's name from the sanctions list and said it was a historical day for Afghanistan.

Speaking at a joint press conference on Saturday afternoon in Kabul following the UN's announcement earlier in the day, Akram Khyalwak said government is currently focusing on securing the release of Hizb-e-Islami prisoners and paving the ground to take in return Hizb-e-Islami refugees. In addition, he called on all



other insurgent groups to join the peace process - as did Hizb-e-Islami last year.

In turn, Hizb-e-Islami's chief peace negotiator Amin Karim said the removal of Hekmatyar's name from the sanctions list is a result of the peace dialogue with Afghanistan.

Karim also thanked the Afghan government for delivering on the commitments made during the signing of the peace deal.

He stated that commissions from both sides were currently working on implementing all ... (More on P4)...(1)

Foreign Ministry

Russia Concerned Over Growing IS Influence in Afghanistan

MOSCOW - Russia is concerned over the situation in Afghanistan, related to the spreading influence of the Islamic State terrorist group (IS, outlawed in Russia) and growing combat activities of the opposition in the country, the Foreign Ministry said in a commentary published on the eve of the working visit by Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani to Moscow, due on February 7.



"We watch closely the situation with security in Afghanistan, and we are concerned about the growing combat and terrorist activities of the

armed opposition," the Foreign Ministry said. "Great concerns are caused by the spread of influence of the Islamic ... (More on P4)...(3)

World Cancer Day Observed in Kabul

KABUL - Officials from the only Cancer Treatment Center in the country said at an event to mark World Cancer Day on Saturday that at least 6,000 patients have visited the center in the past year.

According to the center, 55 percent of their patients are men while 45 percent of their patients are women. "45 percent of the patients who visit the center are women and 55 percent are men. The most common cancer among men are digestive system cancers but breast cancer is most common among women patients who visit the center," said Abdullah Himmat Bahir, a surgeon at the center. Freba, 40, who suffers from esophageal cancer, ... (More on P4)...(7)

Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan Meet on Drugs War



KABUL - The three countries bearing the brunt of the global war against drugs - Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan - have met in Vienna. The three sides discussed joint border management on the sidelines of an international session on fighting narcotics. From Vienna, Press TV's Homa Lezgee reports. (PressTV)



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