

Quote of the Day

Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.

Winston Churchill

Four-Nation Talks Resume on Path to Afghan Peace

ISLAMABAD - China, the United States, Afghanistan and Pakistan launched their third round of talks Saturday aimed at finding a way to get the warring Taliban to sit and talk peace with the Afghan government.

At the start of talks in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad, Sartaj Aziz, Pakistan's special adviser on foreign affairs, said there should be no preconditions to negotiations yet the Taliban have already said they would not hold direct talks with the Afghan government until they first held talks with U.S. officials.

Previous rounds of the four-



country talks have ended with a promise to meet again but Aziz said this time he wants to see the

roadmap to peace emerge by the end of Saturday's meeting. Kabul too expressed its eagerness

for results. "We are desperately waiting to see the immediate effects and re-

sults of our quadrilateral meetings and the progress we have made in the two previous meetings," Javed

Faisal, deputy spokesman for Afghanistan's Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, told The Associated Press.

A diplomat attending the peace talks said one of the biggest bumps on the road to peace is identifying those Taliban who aren't interested in peace or with whom the Afghan government considers "irreconcilable" - their crimes too offensive to be part of a peace process. Another challenge is coming up with a set of confidence-building measures that will be good enough to lure Taliban to the table. The diplomat ... (More on P4)...(1)

Pakistan Calls on World to Combat Islamophobia



UNITED NATIONS - Decrying the rise of Islamophobia worldwide, Pakistan called on Thursday for action to combat the forces of xenophobia and warned that if timely steps were not taken to check this disturbing trend, it could threaten regional and global peace and security.

Speaking at an event organized at the UN by Pakistan Mission and the OIC on "Countering Xenophobia through Interfaith Cooperation", Ambassador Maleeha Lodhi said that Islamophobic acts were unfortunately taking place in countries known as traditional champions of human rights and humanitarianism.

She regretted that some unprincipled politicians in the West had sought to build their political fortunes by spreading fear and xenophobia - promising to build walls against migrants; barring refugees, even widows and orphans; threatening to ban the adherents of a specific religion from entry to their countries' shores.

Unfortunately, she said, this campaign of hate and prejudice had received a fillip from ignorant Western media portrayals of Muslims. (Agencies)

Etisalat Signs Agreement with TIC to Strengthen Telecommunication Capabilities



KABUL - Etisalat Afghanistan on Thursday announced that the company has signed a contract with TIC, an Iranian company, to strengthen telecommunication capabilities of both parties by expanding their Fiber optic services. Subject to this agreement, the parties agree to strengthen, promote and develop cooperation in the field of Telecommunications between the two companies on the basis of equality and mutual benefit.

Dr. Salah Zerguerras, CEO of Etisalat Afghanistan said 'Etisalat has always been striving to provide its valued customers with world class telecom services. The signing of this agreement will help our customers access to new and high quality services and will broaden Afghanistan's communication with the world.'

Since the inception of Etisalat in Afghanistan, Etisalat has been committed to partner in the development of Afghanistan and facilitate country's communication with the world.

Currently, Etisalat is providing world class voice and data services for 5 million customers across the country and is striving to provide Afghans with new opportunities so that they lead a positive life and guide their country into a bright and prosperous future. (PR)

Ulomi Close to Quitting as Crisis Deepens: Sources

KABUL - Interior Minister Noor-ul-Haq Ulomi has offered his resignation to President Ashraf Ghani after mounting criticism of the worsening security situation over recent months, people familiar with the matter said. The resignation offer, which the sources said had not yet been accepted, deals a further blow to Ghani's struggling government, which is without a permanent defence minister and which recently lost the head of its intelligence service just as the Taliban has stepped up its insurgency. It also highlights the deep



fractures in the national unity government which gave Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, the two rival candidates in the disput-

ed election of 2014, a share in power.

Three separate government and diplomatic sources, who spoke on condition of ano-

nymity, said Ulomi had offered his resignation but that Ghani was still considering a replacement before accepting it.

Asked whether Ulomi had offered his resignation, Ghani's deputy spokesman Sayed Zafar Hashemi said: "Bringing reform to government entities, including the ministry of the interior, to increase efficiency has been a government priority."

An interior ministry spokesman said he could not confirm the information.

One senior official said Ghani was ... (More on P4)...(2)

Over 10,000 ISIS Affiliates Based in Afghanistan and Pakistan: Report

KABUL - Over 10,000 loyalists of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist group are based in the remote regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan, a new project report.

The project by the UK-based Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) has been launched amid concerns that the loyalists of the terror group have stepped up efforts to expand foothold in the region, including swaths of southern and central Asia under the terror group's so-called Khurasan province.

Funded by the Smith Richardson Foundation, the research project has recently been launched, drawing on interviews with Daesh members, village elders, members of other insurgent organisations in the area - mainly Tal-



iban and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) - and local-level government officials.

In a commentary, Dr. Antonio Giustozzi, Associate Fellow, RUSI, has written there are around 7,000-8,500 Daesh members based on Afghan soil and 2,000-3,000 based in Pakistan, citing different sources (Daesh cadres themselves, Afghan security sources, Pakistani security sources and Iranian Pasdaran sources).

These figures are inclusive of all active Daesh members, both fighters and support elements, according to the commentary piece, adding that the loyalists of the terror started popping up in the second half of 2014 all over Afghanistan as a result of commanders of the Taliban, Hizb-i Islami and other armed groups switching sides.

As the loyalists of the terror group ... (More on P4)...(4)

Deep Rift Exposed Among World Powers on Syria Peace Talks Adjournment

UNITED NATIONS - The adjourning of the peace talks mediated by the United Nations to end the years-long Syrian conflicts has exposed a deep rift between world powers as a blame game is heating up over the suspension of the much-anticipated diplomatic efforts.

On Friday, tensions were running high after the UN Security Council met for closed-door consultations with Staffan de Mistura, special envoy for Syria, over who was to blame for the halt of the third round of Syria peace talks. Commenting on Mistura's briefing, French Ambassa-

dor to the UN Françoise Delattre told reporters that the UN envoy "confirms what we already knew -- the Syrian regime and its allies have made no concessions."

"On the one hand, the Syrian regime claims to discuss peace in Geneva, and on the other hand, it intensifies its military offensive against opposition groups with which it is supposed to discuss," said Delattre.

On Wednesday, Mistura announced "a pause" of the intra-Syrian peace talks that had only lasted three days, saying the talks are to resume in Geneva on Feb. 25. Analysts said there were no

tangible results achieved amid a still wide disagreement between the Syrian government led by President Bashar al-Assad and the opposition.

"A peace process for the sake of process is meaningless," Delattre said. "It must produce results and be credible to all Syrians."

In a clear response to the French envoy's remarks, Russia's ambassador to the UN Vitaly Churkin said Russia was upset that the talks that started on Monday did not continue, while accusing the opposition group of lacking sincerity in the peace talks. (Xinhua)

Government Given 10 Days to Conduct Operation in Kunduz

KUNDUZ CITY - Residents, provincial council members, youth and civil society activists on Saturday gave the government a 10-day ultimatum to launch a clearing operation against insurgents in northern Kunduz province.

Over 150 individuals warned the authorities of a storm of protest and expulsion of local officials if an anti-militant offensive did not kick off in the next 10-day in the province.

The protesters claimed hundreds of people had lost their lives in the battle for Kunduz City, the provincial capital, some months back and they did not want recurrence of the tragic incident.

Ghulam Rabbani Rabbani, a provincial council member, said the president had pledged to launch a clearing operation against the guerrillas in the province in three weeks but the promise was yet to be kept.

He added Kunduz City was once again under threat from the Taliban but the security forces had not made any preparations for any kind of operation.

Raids had been conducted in far-flung areas of Takhar province, but the government was not concerned about the worsening situation Kunduz, the public representative observed. Acting Governor Hamdullah Danishi said the president had pledged an offensive in Kunduz, but the spread of the insurgency in Helmand caused a delay in a clearing offensive in Kunduz.

He said the operation would be launched once the insurgents were defeated in Helmand. However, Danish did not say when the military push in Helmand would end.

The ... (More on P4)...(5)

1st Polio Case of the Year Detected in Kandahar

KANDAHAR - A 60 months old boy in southern Afghanistan has diagnosed positive for polio, the first case to be detected in the war-torn country this year, a media report said on Saturday.

The child, who was twice administered polio drops, belongs to Kandahar, bordering Pakistan's southwestern province of Balochistan. At least 80,000 Afghan children were missed during the last few campaigns.

Dawn quoted the National Emergency Operation Centre head as saying Pakistan and Afghanistan were the only countries in the world transferring the poliovirus to each other.

The main reason is that the two countries share a 2,500km long border. Dr. Rana Safdar Children were vaccinated at legal entry points at the border but ... (More on P4)...(3)

Clinton Hints at Reviewing Troop Numbers if Elected As President



WASHINGTON - Former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton who is the Democratic presidential front-runner on Thursday indicated that if elected she would review the number of US troops present in Afghanistan.

"I would have to make an evaluation based on the circumstances at the time I took office as to how much help they continue to need," Clinton said participating in a Democratic presidential debate with her rival Bernie Sanders, the Senator from Vermont.

Clinton believed that despite the Taliban the newly emerged Islamic State (IS) was posing huge threat and more fighters from the Taliban have joined with IS.

She said more attention was needed to be paid to the region from North Africa to South Asia where some elements continued to spread instability and lawlessness.

The top presidential runner stressed the need for building and strengthening of coalition against terrorist which will ... (More on P4)...(6)