

Quote of the Day

Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.
Abraham Lincoln

Modi to Ghani India will Stand with Afghan People

NEW DELHI - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday asserted that India would always stand with the people of Afghanistan notwithstanding the terror attack on Indian Consulate in Mazar-e-Sharif as President Ashraf Ghani called him up to brief him on the incident. Ghani also strongly condemned the "cross-border" terrorist attack in Pathankot and extended condolences at the loss of lives in it. During the telephonic call, Ghani briefed Modi about the terrorist attack in Mazar-e-Sharif, a PMO statement said. The Indian Prime Minister expressed deep appreciation for the exemplary



bravery and courage shown by the Afghan National Security Forces in thwarting the terrorist attack in Mazar-e-Sharif and ensuring security and safety of the Indian Consulate and personnel, the statement said. "Prime Minister conveyed that India would always stand with the people of Afghanistan," it added.

The Afghan President also expressed support at the loss of lives and property in the earthquake in India. The Prime Minister thanked President Ghani for his message of support at the cross border terrorist attacks and the earthquake. (Monitoring Desk)

Germany Calls on Saudi Arabia, Iran to Resume Dialogue



BERLIN - The German government called on Saudi Arabia and Iran on Monday to resume dialogue in light of the recent souring of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

"We call on both countries to use all opportunities to improve their bilateral relations," said German government spokesman Steffen Seibert.

Seibert noted that the relationship between the two countries was of fundamental importance in resolving the crises in Syria and Yemen, as well as the stability of the entire region.

Seibert said the German government believed that "the door to diplomacy must remain open" in the current situation. The relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran have deteriorated dramatically in the past few days.

Angry Iranian protesters stormed the Saudi diplomatic mission in Tehran on Saturday to protest Saudi Arabia's execution of 47 individuals on terrorism charges.

Also on Saturday, Saudi Arabia announced it would sever diplomatic ties with Iran, and asked all Iranian diplomats to leave the kingdom within 48 hours. (Xinhua)

CSTO Reportedly Work Out Measures to Strengthen Tajik-Afghan Border



DUSHANBE - Russia does not plan to deploy a full-fledged military contingent in Tajikistan for protection of its common border with Afghanistan in connection with Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)'s threat, but it does not rule out the use of collation group of [armed] forces of Moscow and Dushanbe in case of necessity, the Director of the Russian MFA 3rd Department of CIS nations, Alexander Sternik, was quoted as saying by Russian news agency Interfax.

Russian official reportedly noted that the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was working out measures to strengthen the Tajik-Afghan border.

"These measures were discussed at a session of the CSTO Security Council that took place in Moscow on December 21. We admit the possibility of using the coalition group of troops of Russia and Tajikistan in case of necessity," Sternik was quoted as saying.

The Russian military base deployed in Tajikistan is Russia's largest non-naval military facility outside the country. It was officially opened in Tajikistan in 2004 under a previous agreement, which was signed in 1993, and hosts Russia's largest military ... (More on P4)...(4)

US Urges Mideast Leaders to Take 'Steps to Calm Tensions'

WASHINGTON - The United States on Sunday urged Mideast leaders to take measures to soothe tensions in the region after Saudi Arabia executed a Shiite cleric, provoking outrage from Iran.

The execution was followed by an attack on the Saudi embassy in Tehran, prompting Riyadh to sever ties.

"We're aware that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has ordered the closure of Iranian diplomatic missions in the kingdom," US State Department spokesman John Kirby said about the diplomatic rift.

"We believe that diplomatic engagement and direct con-



versations remain essential in working through differences and we will continue to urge leaders across the region to take affirmative steps to calm tensions." The diplomatic fallout came as Iran's su-

preme leader said Saudi Arabia would face "divine revenge" for Saturday's execution of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, and as Western nations voiced concern about escalating sectarian tensions between Sunnis and Shiite Muslims.

Nimr, 56, was a force behind 2011 anti-government protests in oil-rich eastern Saudi Arabia. He was put to death along with 46 other people, Shiite activists and convicted Sunni militants who the Saudi interior ministry says were involved in Al-Qaeda attacks that killed dozens in 2003 and 2004.

After his execution, a mob attacked ... (More on P4)...(1)

135 Journalists Killed in 2015: PEC



GENEVA - The Geneva based press watchdog Press Emblem Campaign (PEC) on Monday said 135 journalists were killed in 33 countries last year, warning the risks remain very high for 2016. PEC Monday updated its 2015 annual report, which published on Dec. 14, due to five more journalists were killed at the end of the year.

In 2014, PEC registered 138 journalists killed for the whole year. The figure for 2015 is only a small drop of three casualties, which is a decrease of 2 percent.

Two thirds of the victims were killed in ten countries this year. The most dangerous country was Syria with 13 journalists killed, followed by Iraq and Mexico where ten journalists were killed in each country.

Nine journalists were killed in France and eight in Libya, Philippines and Brazil. Seven journalists were killed in each of the following countries: India, South Sudan and Yemen. South Sudan and Yemen are new this year among the most dangerous places for media work.

PEC said the past four years have been the deadliest for journalists in ten years. However, PEC concerned that terrorists acts and the fight against terrorism all around the world may rise further in 2016 and lead to more journalists killed, wounded, kidnapped, detained and harassed. ... (More on P4)...(2)

Afghan CEO on Officials Visit to Iran



TEHRAN - Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah on Monday has reached Tehran for an official three-day visit.

He is expected to meet several senior Iranian officials to discuss the expansion of bilateral ties between the two neighboring countries as well as regional issues, IRNA news agency reported. According to IRNA, he is the second senior Afghan official who has paid a visit to Tehran over the past year.

Heading a high-ranking delegation, Abdullah is expected to visit the Port of Chabahar in southern Iran to explore its transit capacities.

Iran and Afghanistan are expected to sign several MoUs on tourism, culture, youth and sports during Abdullah's visit. Earlier it was reported that Iran and Afghanistan plan to sign contracts worth \$100 million in near future.

Iran's export to Afghanistan stands at \$3 billion, comprising 40 percent of Afghanistan's total import. The exported goods include consumer goods such as detergents, food, construction material, fuel, drugs, wood, and plastic.

Afghanistan's major exports to Iran are fresh and dried fruits, herbs, and saffron.

Iran and Afghanistan signed a trade contract worth \$50 million last year. ... (More on P4)...(3)

Taliban Gaining Ground in Afghanistan: Former CIA Chief

KABUL - The former acting director of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has said the Taliban group has made major geopolitical gains in Afghanistan last year.

Michael Morell has also predicted that Afghanistan will re-emerge as a pivotal foreign policy during the current year amid rampant insurgency by the Taliban group.

"I think one big challenge is going to be the reemergence of Afghanistan as an issue," Morell told CBS' "Face of the Nation" program on Sunday.

He said "The Taliban have made major gains over the last year. I would expect major gains going forward. They control more territory than they have in a number of years."

Morell further added that the debate on



how many troops to keep in the region will take center stage in Washington. "I think the debate on how many troops we keep in Afghanistan is going to reopen," he said, adding that "General Campbell already last week said we need upwards of 10,000 troops, which is double the number the president is ... (More on P4)...(5)

List of New Commissioners to be Submitted to President



KABUL - The selection process of new commissioners for the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Independent Electoral Complaint Commission (IECC) on Monday commenced by the selecting committee.

Officials in the Selection Committee said that of the all applicants they will select 35 qualified candidates for the position of commissioners for the electoral institutions. "One of the main issues that we have always emphasized on is selecting those candidates that are not affiliated with political parties," said Muhammad Naeem Ayoub Zada, member of the selection committee. According to officials, the list of new commissioners will be submitted to President Ghani in the near time. Meanwhile, a number of former members of election commissions urged for transparency in selection of electoral commissioners. (ATN)

All Consulate Officials in Mazar-I-Sharif Safe: Jaitley



NEW DELHI - Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on Monday asserted that all consulate officials were safe post the terror attack on Afghanistan's northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

He also said that firing was still going on and the security forces were trying to gun down the terrorists.

"All consulate officials in Mazar are safe, latest reports say firing still going on," Jaitley told ANI.

"The National Security Council was chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at 11 a.m. and three main issues were raised-Mazar-i-Sharif attack, Pathankot and the northeast earthquake," he added.

Meanwhile, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani called up Prime Minister Narendra Modi and briefed him about the terror attack in Mazar-i-Sharif.

The Prime Minister on his part thanked President Ghani for his support.

Firing continued for the second day today near the Indian mission in Afghanistan as the final assault by Afghan forces began in Mazar-i-Sharif.

"Clearing ops in Mazar on by special forces. Heavy fighting going on. GOV Atta personally monitoring. All safe in consulate," Ambassador of India to Afghanistan Amar Sinha tweeted.

While Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) officials handled the militants initially on their own, ... (More on P4)...(6)