



Afghan Official

Afghan-US Ties to Further Improve Under New U.S. Administration

KABUL - Afghanistan has strategic ties with the United States and under the new U.S. government, the relations between Washington and Kabul will further improve, said Afghan chief presidential spokesman Thursday.

"Afghanistan has strategic and firm relations with the United States. We are confident that Afghanistan's ties with the United States will further strengthen under the new U.S. administration," Mohammad Haroon Chakhansori told a press briefing.

In 2012, Afghan former President Hamid Karzai and outgoing U.S. President Barack Obama signed a strategic deal in Kabul and Obama



declared Afghanistan as a major non-NATO ally of the United States.

Chakhansori said that Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and U.S. President-elect Donald Trump

had already discussed relations between the two countries and exchanged views on different topics during a recent telephone conversation.

On Wednesday night, Ghani

and Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah offered their farewell to Obama in a phone call, the Afghan Presidential Palace said earlier on Thursday.

"President Ghani appreci-

ated continuous cooperation of the United States in the eight-year tenure of President Obama, whose strategic decisions played a key role in the fight against terrorism and development of Afghanistan," it said in a statement.

Ghani told Obama that "your role in establishing strategic relations between the two nations has founded fundamental partnerships, which will remain strong for decades. Therefore the people of Afghanistan appreciate and will always remember your leadership in this regard."

President Ghani also wished Obama and his family success in their future endeavors, the statement noted.

Trump is expected to swear in on Friday. (Xinhua)

16 Police Killed in Kandahar



KANDAHAR - Up to 16 police were killed as militants stormed police checkpoints in Maiwand district of the southern Kandahar province on Friday, a local official said.

"A group of Taliban rebels attacked some security checkpoints in Sarabagh area of Maiwand district at around 03:00 a.m. local time today triggering gun battle which lasted for a while during which 16 police personnel including commander of checkpoints Sardar Wali were martyred," the official told Xinhua but declined to be identified.

Nearly two dozen Taliban

fighters were also killed and some others injured in the fire-fight, the official said.

Meanwhile, Samim Khapalwak, spokesman for Kandahar provincial government, has confirmed the fighting in Maiwand district, saying the clash occurred in "Sarabagh locality early morning during which several enemies" had been killed. Khapalwak, however, declined to make comment on the possible casualties of security personnel.

However, Qari Yusuf Ahmadi who claims to speak for the Taliban outfit in the southern region, ...*(More on P4)...(10)*

Dyncorp Wins Contract to Provide Aviation Field Maintenance in Afghanistan

WASHINGTON - US defense contractor Dyncorp Company won a more than \$30 million contract from the US Army under its foreign military sales program to provide maintenance engineering services for aircraft to Iraq, Afghanistan and Kuwait, the US Department of Defense said in a press release on Thursday.

The contract stipulates aviation field maintenance services in support of the Army Aviation and Missile Command, according to the re-



lease.

The foreign military sales contract will cover the effort necessary to reset an aircraft to a fully mission capable condition; the installation of aircraft modifications under modification work orders; and support to various units

and combat aviation brigades, the Defense Department explained.

Work will be performed in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kuwait, with an estimated completion date of December 31, 2017, the announcement added. (Sputnik)

Taliban Seeks to Reassure UAE over Afghanistan Attack

KABUL - The Afghan Taliban has sought to reassure the United Arab Emirates that it was not behind an attack in the southern city of Kandahar that killed five UAE diplomats and injured the ambassador, senior Taliban officials said on Thursday.

More than a dozen Afghan and foreign officials were killed last week by a bomb hidden under a couch in the Kandahar governor's residence in an attack Afghan authorities have blamed on the Taliban and Pakistani intelligence services.

However the Taliban has denied responsibility, instead accusing "covert intelligence circles" close to the government of carrying out the attack to damage relations between the insurgents and a friendly Arab government.

Although the insurgents have frequently targeted Afghan government officials, the attack on diplomats from a Muslim country with which the Taliban has previously had good rela-



tions came as a major shock, prompting the insurgent movement to seek to reassure UAE authorities.

The UAE was one of the few countries to recognise the former Taliban government in the 1990s although it broke relations in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks on U.S. targets in 2001. The United States had demanded the extradition of al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden from Afghanistan for involvement in the attacks but the Taliban refused. A number of senior Taliban members live in Qatar, where the movement opened a political office in 2013. Other members are also

believed to be living as private citizens in the UAE.

A senior Taliban member based in Qatar said the movement was planning to send a delegation to mourn the slain diplomats and explain that it was not involved. "We have very cordial relations with some of the Islamic world including the UAE and we would never want to target them," he said.

"We have targeted a number of diplomats and foreign missions in Afghanistan and there were several occasions we could have attacked diplomats from Islamic countries but we didn't as they are our friends," he said. (Reuters)

Afghan Orchestra Puts Women's Rights Centre Stage at Davos

KABUL - Global leaders, who attend the annual World Economic Forum in Davos, are used to discussing women's rights on panels. On Thursday they got a chance to hear an all-female Afghan orchestra that has overcome Islamist death threats on its way to its first international performance in the elite ski resort.

Thirty young women, each wearing a matching bright red hijab, took the stage and some played traditional Afghan instruments, like the rabab, similar to the Indian sitar.

Many of the musicians, including conductors Zarifa Adiba, 18, and Negin Kholwak, 19, said they had been forced to hide their music from members of their community who they feared might react violently if they had known.

"When I go home, somebody could come and kill me," said Kholwak. "I am so worried about my security. I'm scared."

She said only her father supported her participation in the orchestra back in her home province, Kunar, 230 km (140 miles) west of Kabul, where Islamist Taliban militants have resurfaced, claiming responsibility for suicide bombings and attacks.

Zohra was founded in 2014 with five original members as part of the Afghanistan National Institute of Music and has since faced death threats and intimidation.

Adiba, who lives in Ghazni in east-central Afghanistan, said that with music and the arts banned for an extended period under the Taliban's 1996-2001 rule, her relatives couldn't shake their conservative views on women performing in an orchestra.

"But I am confident that music is nothing bad that I should feel shy of," she said proudly. "Music is my profession. Music is something beautiful. I should be proud to be a musician." Adiba and Kholwak each took turns in the conductor role during Thursday's performance, which had a Swiss orchestra join with Zohra to perform Afghan songs. (Reuters)

ARC and RCO Delegation Visits those Injured in Kandahar Attack

ABU DHABI - A delegation from the Arab Red Crescent (ARC) and Red Cross Organisation (RCO), visited those injured in the recent Kandahar terrorist attack in Afghanistan. Several Emiratis were killed while on a humanitarian mission to carry out projects in that country.

Dr. Saleh bin Hamad Al Suhaibani, Director-General of ARCO, who headed the delegation, said, "The injuries are a badge of honour for the UAE nationals. And the martyrs who fell for the sake of humanity or those get injured as a result of such tragic incidents will be witnesses of the UAE's humanitarian mission."

The UAE will remain a plat-

form for humanitarian action, given its excellence in relief work worldwide, he added.

Al Suhaibani praised the high spirit of the injured who are receiving treatment at Al Mafraq Hospital in Abu Dhabi. He also expressed his deep sorrow and offered condolences on the martyrs on behalf of the organisation.

Al Suhaibani praised the efforts of the UAE humanitarian agencies whose humanitarian activities would not be deterred by the incident. He was accompanied by Dr. Ali Qehais, editor of the journal 'We Are with You.' (WAM)

134 More Pakistani Families Return from Afghanistan

PESHAWAR - Over 130 more Pakistani refugee families have returned from Afghanistan to North Waziristan, a newspaper reported on Thursday.

On Monday, 200 families entered Waziristan through the Ghulam Khan border, where the political administration has set up a registration point for the returnees.

The News said North Waziristan authorities facilitated the return of two batches of 334 families that had migrated to Afghanistan after the launch of a military offensive. It added the livestock owned by Pakistani refugees had already been brought back to North Waziristan through the Saidgi border town. The families had taken their livestock to Afghanistan in the summer of 2014.

The returning families were registered at the border before being transported to the Bakakhel relief camp in Bannu for necessary background checks and security clearance. An army officer was quoted as saying that elaborate arrangements had been made at the Ghulam Khan border to receive the Pakistani families returning from Afghanistan.

"We have moved truckloads of beddings to the border. If returning families get late, we keep them at Ghulam Khan. They are provided bedding, tents and food and washrooms ...*(More on P4)...(11)*

Denied Entry into Pakistan, Afghan Truckers on Strike

PESHAWAR - Pakistani guards at the Torkham border have once again slapped restrictions on the entry of Afghan truckers without valid travel documents, a security official said on Friday.

The official, who requested not to be named, confided to Pajhwok Afghan News the curbs had been imposed under the new border management policy to check the movement of militants.

Under the policy, he said, all Afghans, including truckers, were required to produce valid travel documents while crossing into Pakistan. The

drivers with road passes, however, will continue to be allowed entry.

Irrked by the stringent controls, the transporters' union went on strike and parked their vehicles on the Afghanistan side of the British-era Durand Line, which Kabul does not recognise as a formal border. Representative of Afghan transporters, Haji Qasim and Khushal, later held talks with Pakistani officials, who promised taking up their grievances with higher-ups. The truckers could not meet visa formalities, they said. (Pajhwok)

Turkmenistan Eyes to Export Electricity via Afghanistan

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan says there is a plan to build a powerful transmission line along the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, which is being constructed since December 2015.

"In addition to providing electricity to all the infrastructural facilities of the trunk line, it

will enable exporting electricity to other countries via Afghanistan," the Turkmen government said in a message on Thursday.

Turkmenistan also said that increasing the export of electricity presents prospects, primarily in Afghanistan, where creation of an appropriate infrastructure will make it pos-

sible to open new jobs.

Turkmenistan has been supplying electricity to Afghanistan at a reduced price for the last 20 years.

Turkmenistan plans to start producing 27.4 billion kilowatts hour of electricity by 2020 and bring this volume to 35.5 billion kilowatts hour by 2030. (Trend N Agency)

Spy Services can Help Remove Af-Pak Mistrust: Gen. Raheel

PESHAWAR - Pakistan's former army chief Raheel Sharif says intelligence services need to play an effective role in removing mistrust between Kabul and Islamabad.

During his three-year tenure as army chief, he claimed making progress in boosting relations with Afghanistan.

His successor Gen. Qamar Bajwa would work to cement bilateral cooperation, he hoped. Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland, the retired general said: "Pa-



kistan wants peace with all its neighbours but with dignity and honour."

He added: "With positive and solid approach one can

move forward and this is the approach which helped me in maintaining good relations with China, Afghanistan and Gulf countries." (Pajhwok)