

(1) Afghan Officials ..

deaths may raise questions over the willingness of foreign technical specialists to continue to work for Afghan companies who cannot provide the high levels of security provided by the United Nations or foreign embassies.

Airlines provide a vital link between major cities in a country where travel by road is often dangerous and unreliable.

"Many Ukrainian air technicians work in Afghanistan and all those killed worked for the Afghan airline Kam Air and lived in the Intercontinental Hotel," Ukraine's Ambassador to Afghanistan, Viktor Nikityuk, who is based in neighboring Tajikistan, told Ukrainian television.

He confirmed that seven Ukrainians had been killed and said a consular official would be visiting Kabul to organize repatriation of their bodies.

Many details of what happened in the attack, which began at around 9 p.m. on Saturday, remain unclear and interest is likely to focus on the private security company which took over protection duties three weeks ago.

According to a security official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, the five gunmen got through an initial checkpoint on the approach road to the hotel before reaching a second checkpoint close to a car park near the hotel entrance.

At that point, the official said they appeared to have shot the checkpoint guards and made their way around the back of the building and into the kitchen before beginning the attack.

Once inside, they went through the ground and first floors, opening fire on staff and guests before moving quickly to the upper levels of the six-floor building.

Hassibullah, who was working in the hotel bakery, said he ran upstairs to a fifth-floor room and barricaded himself in with around 12 people, including guests, when the firing started. He survived a jump to the ground, suffering two broken legs, a broken back and internal injuries. Speaking from a hospital bed, he said the attackers began firing into the door, which the guests had blocked with piled-up furniture when the lights went out and he took his only chance.

"The only thing I could do was open the window and jump out," he said. (Reuters)

(2) US Considers ...

he approved sending an additional 4,000 troops to the country.

The United States has been in Afghanistan since October 2001. During this campaign, 2,35 thousand of US servicemen were killed, and more than 20,000 were injured. As of September 30, 2017, there were 15,282 US soldiers in the country, as well as 1,202 civilian employees of the Defense Ministry. (Sputnik)

(3) New Afghan Ambassador ...

to hold several meetings so that he could better know the people as well as government officials.

He also declared his hope that Afghan students get more opportunities to study in Turkey.

"We have so many students here. I will try to make this number of students increase."

Health, anti-terror fight

Jan said the people of Afghanistan needed help in the health sector because of a lack of high quality hospitals.

Some Afghans also come to Turkey for treatment, the ambassador said, adding Afghans want to have the same quality in health sector in Afghanistan, and they want Turkish doctors to go and work there.

About efforts to bring peace in Afghanistan, he said Turkey through the "good office" of Turkish president could encourage Pakistan to assist Afghanistan in bringing peace and stability to his country.

He called for more cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani recently visited Turkey to attend a summit on the Palestinian issue in Istanbul during which he held a "very good" discussion with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"Our relations are very good and, hopefully, we will increase these relations. We are both trying to cooperate with each other and enhance the relations between the two brotherly countries," Jan said.

"We always support each other on international issues," he added noting Afghanistan remained thankful to Turkey, which is a member of NATO and also a part of the international assistance forces that are helping Afghanistan.

"Besides that Turkey is training our military people," he said.

The ambassador went on to note that Turkey was also fighting terrorists in its region and terrorism was a common enemy for everyone.

"Turkey and Afghanistan are in the frontline. So, the exchange of information is very

"Unfortunately, this phenomenon is the enemy of humanity and they [the terrorists] should be eradicated from the world," he said. (AA)

(4) Govt Slammed...

also said these elements had worked on President Ashraf Ghani's electoral campaign and that now they are employed in government departments.

Former Jihadi leader Mohammad Akbari said the attack on the hotel had been an attack on human values, and that the brazen attacks by militants in the country shows the weakness of the Afghan government to the world.

Joining Akbari, meanwhile other Afghan politicians also claimed they believe elements within government institutions, especially in the security institutions, plotted the attack on the hotel.

"Gentlemen why don't you spend the money to foil the plots of the enemies instead of using it against Noor, Ismail, general Raziq of Kandahar, Humayoun-Humayoun and other parties," said the ousted governor of Balkh Atta Mohammad Noor.

Fifth Pillar Elements Within Govt Blamed for The Attack

"This is the work of the fifth pillar which creates problems for the people and the government at a sensitive time. There is some sort of cooperation and collaboration between high level government profiles with Pakistan's ISI (Pakistan's military intelligence Inter-Services Intelligence). The government is weak," said Daud Kalakani, member of Dawat-e-Islami party of Afghanistan.

But, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar-led Hizb-e-Islami party has said that the involvement of intelligence services of regional countries and also the ignorance of the security forces led to the attack.

"Without having the support of intelligence agencies of the regional countries, no one is able to take up arms and resort to terrorism," said Hashmatullah Rashid, spokesman of Hizb-e-Islami.

Saturday's coordinated attack on the Intercontinental Hotel, which left 43 people dead, marks the second deadly attack on the property by militants. The previous attack happened in June 2011, when a suicide bomber killed 21 people, including 10 civilians.

Saturday's attack by the Taliban claimed 43 lives including foreigners. (Tolnews)

(5) New Balkh ...

not allowed to enter until 2:30pm. Javid Wak, a reporter with Shamshad TV channel, told Pajhwok that he was invited by the new governor's secretary to the airport.

He said journalists from many media outlets had come to the airport but they were not allowed to enter there.

He said Eng. Daud entered the airport around 2pm and they were informed half an hour later that the governor was not allowed to speak to the media. (Pajhwok)

(6) Gates Says...

was a big mistake."

He said that a decision by Trump to deploy more troops in an open-ended engagement could eventually prompt the Taliban to negotiate.

In his 2014 memoir, "Duty," Gates noted that Obama was much criticized by conservatives for disclosing that the Afghanistan surge that began in 2009 would end in 2011 and that combat troops would leave in 2014.

But "I believe Obama was right in each of these decisions," Gates wrote. Gates also writes that the policy "finally forced a narrowing of our objectives to those obtainable in that time frame."

"I was convinced that we could dramatically weaken the Taliban and strengthen the Afghan army during that period — and if not, then we probably never could."

Asked about the difference between the book's account and his remarks to The Seattle Times, Gates said the book reflected his public policy statements while leading the Pentagon. "I think you defend things in public that you may disagree with in private," Gates said.

As a wartime defense secretary from 2006 to 2011, Gates served under Republican president, George W. Bush, and Democrat Obama and had the difficult duty of sending service members off to war. (Pajhwok)

(7) Insurgents Breached...

said he had walked past some of the attackers in a hotel corridor earlier in the day.

"We came to the hotel on a ministry of communication program at two o'clock and from the very first gate to the last one our luggage was not searched and we were searched very basically," said Hamdard.

During the 17-hour siege, the hotel also caught fire — causing serious damage. However, on Tuesday, security forces kept journalists away and would not let them enter the building, citing investigations as the reason.

TOLnews reporter Sharif Amiry said that a day after the attack, ambulances were still removing bodies from the hotel. The Ministry of Interior (MoI) said that initial investigations indicate that the attack on the hotel was conducted by Haqqani Network, which has links to the Taliban

— this despite Taliban's claims regarding responsibility.

"Our initial intelligence reveals that the attack was carried out by the Haqqani Network and organized outside the country," said Najib Danish, MoI spokesman. Meanwhile a number of people who had been staying at the hotel on Monday went to retrieve their luggage — but they were also turned away.

"I saw one of the attackers who came from the hotel's main entrance gate and began shooting," said Nasar Ahmad Haidari, Badakhshan's head of Telecom Regulatory Authority of Afghanistan (ATRA).

"After 40 minutes the security forces reached the hotel and helped us," said Abdul Ghani Bahishti, head of Telecom Regulatory Authority of Afghanistan (ATRA) from Bamian.

Strict security is in place around the hotel and only a few people are being allowed inside.

"I've been a resident in the area for forty years, but so far I have not seen the second floor of this hotel, so how do these suicide bombers know all about this hotel? Be sure there is something else," said Sayed Shafiqullah a resident.

During the operation on Sunday, security forces found the explosive-laden vehicle, which they later detonated in a controlled environment.

This comes after gunmen stormed the hotel at about 9pm on Saturday night. By 8.30am on Sunday the situation still had not been brought under complete control. Heavy gunfire and explosions were heard throughout the night as special forces, including the Crisis Response Unit, tried to end the siege. (Tolnews)

(8) Pakistan Calls...

ministry spokesperson Mohammad Faisal.

Widespread condemnation poured in on Sunday after at least 43 people were killed when six Taliban attackers went on an overnight rampage through the Intercontinental Hotel in Afghanistan's capital Kabul on Saturday.

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India, US and the UN were quick to condemn the attack, which was "one of the biggest" attacks to hit Kabul in recent months.

"I condemn in the strongest terms last night's heinous attack on the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul. Such violence has no place here or anywhere in the world. I extend my heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of the victims. I also commend the bravery and quick response of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces.

The US Embassy is in close contact with Afghan authorities, who are continuing to investigate the incident," the US embassy in Kabul said in a statement.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) strongly condemned the attack on the Intercontinental Hotel that left dozens of people dead and wounded.

"The Intercontinental Hotel was scheduled to hold a technology conference on Sunday, organized by Afghanistan's Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. Also at the hotel, guests had gathered for a wedding ceremony," said UNAMA in a statement.

"There is simply no justification for this egregious attack, which is specifically prohibited by International Humanitarian Law and may amount to a war crime," said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan.

Indian foreign ministry has also condemned the attack.

"We express our sincere condolences to the families of those killed in this heinous attack and wish speedy recovery to the injured," the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), said, in a statement.

"Reports about attack having been carried out by terrorists of internationally proscribed Haqqani Network are a matter of serious concern and bring to fore once again the need to effectively deal with safe havens and sanctuaries that these terrorists find in our shared neighbourhood," the statement added.

This comes at a time that Pakistan has been under mounting pressure by the international community over its controversial role in the fight against terrorism. On January 1, US President Donald Trump also criticized Pakistan over its support to terrorism.

"The United States has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!" Trump said via twitter.

On January 15, a high level delegation from the UN Security Council arrived in Kabul where it held discussions with the Afghan political leadership on the situation in the country.

Ghani shared evidence with the UN Security Council members over training, financing and activities of terrorist groups,

including Daesh, outside Afghanistan, according to a statement by the Presidential Palace.

At the meeting Ghani said he wants more pressure put on Pakistan to ensure stability in Afghanistan. He said joint efforts are required to move forward with the Afghan peace process.

The president said efforts are underway to improve relations with Pakistan but "there has been no sign of cooperation from Pakistan's side", the statement read. The Taliban claimed responsibility for Saturday's attack on the hotel.

The Intercontinental Hotel was attacked once before by the Taliban, in June 2011, when a suicide bomber killed 21 people, including 10 civilians.

The raid on Intercontinental Hotel was the latest in a long series of attacks by Taliban insurgents which have underlined the city's precarious security situation and the ability of militants to mount high profile operations in the capital. (Tolnews)

(9) Serbia Ready...

and future.

Zakiullah Shahzad a 17 year-old Afghan is one of them. More than two years ago, together with his sister Lida, he left Afghanistan, hoping to settle in Austria.

But both of them have been stuck here for the last 14 months after traveling through several countries and paying smugglers thousands of US dollars. The chances of their reaching Austria are slim at best. So Shahzad decided to settle down in Serbia instead, Reuters reported.

"It is better than the other countries. I've decided to live here. It's a good country, good government, good rules and good people here. So, I decided to live here. Look, I have everything here. Good room, good people, good migrants and it's good for me," said Shahzad.

According to Reuters, Shahzad is one of the 618,000 migrants who have requested asylum protection in Serbia since 2015, as they crossed the country to head west.

But most of them have already moved on to other EU countries, and only 4,000 of the applicants are currently in Serbia.

Because refugees applied for asylum in Serbia, the opposition claims there's a possibility of hundreds of thousands of them returning, if the EU decides to expel them.

"I think that credible doubts exist — that in one moment in time, Serbia may serve to the EU as one big center for asylum seekers. We truly are in a bad situation — with the constant blackmails from Brussels that we need to do one thing or another in order to proceed with our EU integration process. One of it is the idea that 'excess' migrants whom the EU doesn't want to accept, should permanently settle here in Serbia," said Bosko Obradovic, a member of Parliament of the Serbian Movement Dveri.

However, Serbian Internal Affairs Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic said Serbia is ready to accept migrants as per eventual EU quotas, even though it is not an EU member, Reuters reported.

"If the EU decides that the migrants have to be distributed according to EU quotas, Serbia is of course ready to participate in that. We are not just ready to participate in the future — we are participating in it right now. We already have 4,000 migrants on our territory and we are providing them with all the humane treatment which one country can deliver for migrants and refugees," he said. (Agencies)

(10) 'Lack of Political...

Counter-Narcotics Minister Salamat Azeemi said there was a direct link between the surge in poppy cultivation in Afghanistan and its demand in international markets. She called for 'strict measures' to tackle the menace.

Afghanistan remains world's biggest drugs producer where poppy cultivation surged by 87 percent this solar year, producing 9,000 tons compared to 4,800 tons of drugs the previous solar year. (Pajhwok)

(11) Kabul Police ...

further added that the man had killed four members of a single family in Ghorband district of Parwan nearly three weeks ago and had fled to Kabul.

According to the CID officials, the culprit was held based on intelligence coordination between the Parwan and Kabul police.

This comes as there has been a sharp rise in criminal-related incidents in Kabul city and other key cities

The CID officials had earlier said a man and a married woman have been arrested in connection to the murder of another man.

The officials further added that the incident took place last week in the vicinity of the 7th police district of the city.

According to the CID officials, the couple were busy in illicit sexual activities when the husband of the woman returned to his home and caught the couple red handed.

A clash broke out between the husband of the woman and the intruder which resulted into his killing, the officials said. (KP)

(12) US Applauds ...

Tillerson said the US was in contact with Afghan authorities regarding their investigation of the incident.

"We have seen the Taliban's claim of responsibility and condemn terrorist groups for their violent campaign against Afghan and foreign personnel working to improve Afghanistan," he said.

"We mourn all those who lost their lives in the attack, whether Afghans or citizens of other countries. We offer our deepest condolences to the families and friends of those who were killed and wish for the speedy recovery of those wounded," Tillerson added.

The foreign secretary said the US stood with the government and people of Afghanistan and remained firmly committed to supporting Kabul's efforts at achieving peace, security and prosperity. "Violence like what we witnessed yesterday has no place in Afghanistan, or anywhere else in the world," he remarked. In a statement, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also denounced the attack. He extended his condolences to the families of the victims and wished a speedy recovery to those injured.

He also expresses his solidarity with the government and people of Afghanistan. (Pajhwok)

(13) Ulemas Council ...

Council also warned the anti-government armed militant groups that the enemies of the country will never achieve their goals through acts of savagery.

The Taliban militants group claimed responsibility behind the attack.

However, the ministry said their preliminary findings show that the attack was plotted by the Haqqani terrorist network which has safe havens outside Afghanistan.

No further details were given in this regard but the Afghan officials have long been insisting that the terror network has safe havens and their leadership councils are based in the key cities of Pakistan.

The Ministry of Interior said eighteen people were killed in the attack including fourteen foreigners and four Afghan nationals.

According to the ministry, at least nine people including six personnel of the Afghan national police Special Operations Forces were also wounded. (KP)

(14) 7 Police Killed as ..

seven security men were killed and one more was wounded in the overnight assault.

Omar Zwak, the governor's spokesman, confirmed the attack which he said was repulsed reinforcements arrived at the site.

On the other hand, Qari Yousaf Ahmaid, a Taliban's spokesman, said the assault left eight policemen dead, five wounded and their nine weapons seized. (Pajhwok)

(15) UN, India...

to respect International Humanitarian Law at all times.

"There is simply no justification for this egregious attack, which is specifically prohibited by International Humanitarian Law and may amount to a war crime." Meanwhile, India also denounced the attack, expressing its condolences to the families of those killed and wishing speedy recovery to the injured.

The External Affairs Ministry said reports about the attack having being carried out by the proscribed Haqqani Network were a matter of serious concern.

It added the incident had brought to fore once again the need to effectively deal with safe havens and sanctuaries that these terrorists find in our shared neighbourhood.

"We commend the professionalism and bravery of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces in saving the lives of hundreds of civilians from this gruesome attack.

"India stands in solidarity with the government and the people of Afghanistan in bringing the perpetrators of these terrorist attacks and their supporters to justice." (Pajhwok)

(16) Poroshenko ..

UNIAN, he directed the government to provide all necessary assistance to the families of Ukrainian citizens who died in Afghanistan.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kiev said six Ukrainians had been killed in the assault. At least 14 foreigners are said to be among the fatalities. (Pajhwok)

well and had reached a stage where they were playing with the best, the ACB CEO added. "So, comparatively, it is bigger. Financially, it is helping us quite a lot. It is cost-effective in comparison to playing in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), he said. Convincing other boards to come and play in India was easier, argued Stanikzai, who said BCCI had agreed to support Afghanistan's U-17 squad.

A year after becoming a full ICC member, Afghanistan are scheduled to play their maiden Test match against India in Bangalore in June. (Pajhwok)