Eye on the News | afgtimes@yahoo.com | Truthful, Factual and Unbiased | Vol:XI Issue No:320 Price: Afs.20

AFGHANISTANTIMES

SATURDAY • JUNE 24 • 2017 -Saratan 03, 1396 HS | www.afghanistantimes.af | www.facebook.com/ afghanistantimeswww.twitter.com/ afghanistantimes

Kabul bombing sparked Afghan political crisis, UNSC told

KABUL: Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistaninfo-icon Tadamichi Yamamoto has said recent 'security and political crisis' in Afghanistan was sparked by a terrorist bombing in Kabul's centre on 31 May. Briefing the United Nations Security Council (UNCS) on Wednesday, he said the increasing political fault-lines on ethnic basis were particularly worrying at a time when the Islamic State (Daesh) was attempting to provoke sectarian strife in the country through attacks against Shia Muslims.

"During the anti-government demonstrations on June 2, we at UNAMA conducted extensive outreach to leaders on all sides, particularly leaders of political movements which were considering joining the protests."

"We urged restraint, warned of the negative consequences for everyone of loss of control, and requested them to give time to allow their grievances to be addressed without violence," he said.

Coupled with intensive efforts by government and members of the diplomatic community, he said, the immediate risk of escalation was defused.

"I remain concerned, however, that without changes in governance practices we are likely to face future crises that might be more difficult to contain."

Yamamoto said that there have been indications since last summer that Afghanistan's broad political consensus was fraying.

A growing number of political factions, some who were formerly part of the National Unity Government as well as a younger generation of political forces, have begun to criticise and demand reforms from government, he said.

"The government, on the other hand, claims that opposition groups block important reforms and stoke tension by calling for the government to be replaced."

"Each side accuses the other of acting against the national interest. It appears to me undeniable that these perceptions have contributed to tensions that characterize today's political environmentinfo-icon," he said.

"The existence of opposition is natural in any political scene, but the amount of mistrust is growing and there is an increasing resort to uncompromising slogans and statements which can fuel further violent protest.

He said fforts at inclusiveness and building consensus for political stability were critical and the Afghan vision for peace was premised on the fact that a stable Afghanistan would lead to a stable and more prosperous region "Achieving this vision will require the strong determination of all states concerned, particularly of the region and the neighbourhood," he said. He said however that the recent series of security incidents has demonstrated the urgent need for reforms in the security sector.

He said Afghanistan was facing numerous internal challenges in addition to fighting an insurgency that appears to be gaining ground.

"These include deep rooted political tension, the difficulty of integrating socially and economically the thousands of Afghan refugees who return each day, an economy that is only very slowly recovering after the international drawdown in 2014, and pervasive corruption."

(Pajhwok)

Play role in ending conflict, Khalili tells Taliban

KABULi: The new High Peace Councilinfo-icon (HPC) chief, Karim Khalili, on Friday asked the Talibaninfo-icon to play a positive role in ending the decades-long conflict in Afghanistaninfo-icon. Khalili, who recently took over as the HPC chief, told a gathering in Kabul that the Taliban were mistaken they could reach power through force. The former second vice president said it was a positive development that the Taliban not only denied their involvement in recent terrorist attacks in Kabul but also condemned them. Khalili said the recent Kabul attacks showed a lot of work was required to achieve peace and asked the government to intensify the peace process and encourage voices raised for peace. The HPC chief said politicians, parties and influential figures through their cooperation should steer the country out of the current bad situation because they had the ability to do so. He also said protests should be carried out according to the Constitution and they should not be aimed at ousting the government. "Is there any alternative if the current system is collapsed." He said the enemy wanted to divide the Afghans on ethnic lines. He said the Afghans should not return to the past and instead should learn from the past because the current situation requited harmony and unity.

Russia questions reports of unidentified helicopters sighted in Afghanistan

Russia Foreign Ministry has asked Afghan, U.S. and NATO officials to provide a "rational explanation" about reports of unidentified helicopters providing support to ISIS-K militants in Afghanistan.

"We've taken note of new reports about unmarked helicopters ferrying the fighters of ISIS Afghan branch, as well as weapons and munitions for them, in eastern Afghanistan," Russia Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova told reporters during a press briefing on Wednesday. Zakharova also pointed to the brief capture of Tora Bora, a strategic cave in Pachiragam district of Nangarhar, by IS fighters on June 14 which was recaptured by Afghan security forces during a clearing operation.

"Some reports say that shortly before this, unmarked helicopters delivered over 50 armed extremists to reinforce the fighters who were preparing an offensive on Tora Bora, as well as a container full of weapons and munitions," she added. IS militants also known as Daesh is widely active in some parts of Nangarhar province and there were reports of the group activities in some other provinces of the country as well.

"It is symptomatic that neither the Afghan authorities nor the U.S. and NATO military contingent officials in Afghanistan have offered a rational explanation for the increased number of flights made by unidentified helicopters providing support to ISIS fighters in many Afghan provinces,

Zakharova stated," Silence in this case is becoming increasingly conspicuous."

She further asked Western media to ask these questions from the Pentagon, the White House and the U.S. State Department.

Immediately there was no reaction from U.S. officials regarding the statements made by Moscow while Afghan ministry of defense have rejected the report.

Afghan and U.S. forces have conducted many counter terrorism operations against the IS fighters in Nangarhar province during the last two years.

Reports of unidentified helicopters landing in Taliban controlled areas in Sar-e-Pul and Ghazni districts of Afghanistan have also been published during the last couple of months. **(ATN)**

Police had no arms while clearing protest camps: MoI

KABUL: Police had no weapons while removing protest tents in the capital Kabul, where at least one protestor killed, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) said on Thursday.

A number of people erected several protest tents in the capital following a deadly attack on May 31 and the killing of a number of protestors in clashes with police on June 2.

Eight of the tents were removed by protestors themselves a few days ago. One camp in the upscale neighbourhood of Sherpur was forcibly cleared by police on Wednesday night.

The demonstrators claimed two of their members were killed and four others wounded in Afghan forces; firing on Wednesday night.

However, MoI spokesman Najib Dansih told reporters one protestor was killed 500 meters from the tent while police present in the area did not carry weapons.

He said police carried sticks and shields while removing the protest tents. A joint delegation of MoI, NDSinfo-icon and the attorney general office has been tasked with investigating the killing. **(Pajhwok)**

'Impartial body be appointed to probe Kabul incidents'

KABUL : Civil societyinfo-icon activists, expressing concern over increasing insecurity in the country, on Friday asked the government to appoint a commission for investigation into recent terrorist attacks in Kabul.

About three weeks ago on May 31, a massive truck bomb attack killed and wounded hundreds of people in Kabul, sparking an angry protest a day later.

Three back to back suicide bombings ripped through the funeral for a lawmaker's son who was killed during the protest, killing seven people and injuring several others. Then a large number of people erected protest tents in the main square of Kabul to demand resignation of top government officials over their failure to protect citizens. Some of the tents were removed following talks and the last one had to be removed by force. **(Pajhwok)**

Hekmatyar urges Ghani to do more for peace

KABUL: Hezb-i-Islamiinfo-icon Afghanistaninfo-icon leader Gulbadin Hekmatyar on Friday asked President Ashraf Ghani to take more effective steps for peace and choose the path of an intra-Afghan dialogue to end the conflict.

In his message in connection with religious festival Eidul Fitr, which marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadaninfo-icon, Hekmatyar urged political leaders to agree on a new effective strategy for ending the war.

He said the idea of reaching power with money and weapons from outside should be shunned. Not a single drop of blood should be shed in future power transfer, he urged.

Hekmatyar said they should ask all foreign forces to let the Afghans resolve their issues themselves. He believed the conflict in Afghanistan could be brought to an end if foreign interference in the country's affairs was stopped. "Those who think the war can be brought to an end without a judicious and realities-based agreement, they are mistaken." Hekmatyar urged President Ghani to take more effective steps towards peace and choose the path of an intra-Afghan dialogue for ending the war. He said the president should assure the opponents that their all logical demands would be accepted. He said agreeing to peace did not mean a defeat or surrender for any party to the conflict but it would be a wise and historic step to rescue the nation and the country from decades of misfortunes. He said both the government and the opposition should not let the war to be prolonged because its victims were only the Afghans.

(Pajhwok)

Afghanistan cricket receives full ICC membership status

Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) has been confirmed as Full Members of the International Cricket Council (ICC) after a unanimous vote at the ICC Full Council meeting held at the Oval today, the ICC confirmed. Alongside Afghanistan, Cricket Ireland was also confirmed as a new ICC Full Member.

The announcement is a breakthrough in the history of Afghanistan cricket. Afghans across the nation hailed the move a milestone as the country grapples with extensive security problems in the face of a Taliban insurgency. "Wowww, what good news, Tnx ACB and specially Atif Mashal and Shafiq Stanikzai for the nice efforts...very proud," an Afghan Fahim said on his Facebook Page. "Congratulations to both cricket boards especially to Afghanistan Cricket Board," said another resident Farhad Ahmad.

ICC Chief Executive David Richardson said: "I'd like to congratulate Afghanistan and Ireland on their Full Membership status which is the result of their dedication to

improving performance both off and on the field resulting in the significant development and growth of cricket in their respective countries.

Both have clearly demonstrated they meet the new criteria and as such have made the progression to Full Membership."

(ToloNews)

Previous attacks underscore dangers for Canadians in Afghanistan training mission

In recent years, Afghan military and police trainees have turned on their Western trainers

As the security situation in Afghanistan continues to slip, NATO has asked Canada to help with its Resolute Support mission by sending trainers to help build an Afghan military and police force capable of defending the country.

For the past three years, Canadian soldiers have been training and mentoring Kurdish Peshmerga fighters in Iraq with great success and only one fatality: Sgt. Andrew Doiron was killed in a "friendly fire" incident that all sides agree was a tragic but honest mistake. The Canadians have developed a relationship of mutual trust and even affection with their Kurdish hosts, according to Canadian military commanders.

So the Afghan training and mentoring mission NATO is now asking Canada to take on, might also seem to be a relatively safe assignment. But bitter experience has taught NATO that the Afghan frontline runs through every army base, police detachment and training classroom. Western soldiers have died not only on the battlefield, but on the parade ground, the firing range and even sitting down to dinner with their Afghan counterparts. "Insider attacks" have been a constant of the Afghan war, and many have taken the form of so-called "green-on-blue" shootings, in which foreign instructors are deliberately killed by their own students. Opinion: Canada should join its closest allies and return to Afghanistan In August 2012, an Afghan police commander called Asadullah sat down to a pre-dawn meal with three U.S. marines in Helmand province. The marines were there to train Afghan national police. Asadullah invited them, he told them, to discuss security arrangements. Partway through the meal, Asadullah produced a pistol and shot the three marines dead. He then fled the base in the dark. "He is with us now," Taliban spokesperson Qari Yusuk Ahmadi later confirmed to Agence France-Presse by phone.

Insider attacks

Sixty foreign advisers were killed by Afghan soldiers and police that same year, according to figures compiled by the International Security Assistance Force. The attacks prompted new measures by ISAF to protect trainers from their trainees. The changes included strengthened identity vetting for Afghan security forces members.

That's no simple matter in a country where the typical recruit is an illiterate villager with no real birth certificate and often, no family name (many Afghans use only a first name).

The Afghan military is now using biometric scans, with equipment and supervision provided by ISAF, on all new recruits. Recruits must also provide references from two trusted elders from their home district. Western trainers also instituted a system of "guardian angels," where a coalition soldier is assigned to stand guard over Afghan recruits at all times.

Afghanistan

Afghan police demonstrate their skills during a graduation ceremony at a police training centre in the Adraskan district of Herat province, Afghanistan, in March, 2011. (Reza Shirmohammadi/Associated Press)

Not getting safer

On military bases where Afghan soldiers and police mix with foreign forces, the Afghans are required to be unarmed inside the gates, or have the firing pins removed from their rifles.

It was partly because of that rule that a recent Taliban attack on an Afghan army base in Mazar-e-Sharif was so deadly, says Bill Roggio, a former U.S. soldier who today edits the Long War Journal, published by the Washington think-tank the Foundation for the Defence of Democracies.

In that incident, about 10 attackers were recently able to kill about 140 mostly unarmed recruits.

"It tells you just how the Taliban strategy of conducting insider attacks has second and third order effects that people often don't consider," said Roggio. "They just aren't being trusted right now and trust is the first thing you need when you're partnering with foreign forces.

"You have cases where Afghan soldiers have gone through the vetting process, they didn't have any problems and then after a couple years in service, or a couple of months or weeks, they've been pressured or talked to by the Taliban and recruited to conduct attacks," he said.

Roggio says the countermeasures taken by NATO forces are not the main reason for the reduction in insider attacks.

"The primary reason for the reduction over the last several years is there's been less coalition forces partnered" with Afghan forces, he says, and fewer Westerners in Afghanistan generally.

Afghanistan

Police forces clash with protesters during a demonstration in Kabul earlier this month. Hundreds of demonstrators demanded better security in the Afghan capital in the wake of a powerful truck bomb attack that killed scores of people. (Massoud Hossaini/Associated Press)

Yet three more U.S. soldiers fell victim to such an attack on June 12. The men of the 101st Airborne were killed in Nangarhar province by an Afghan National Army soldier who was immediately killed by return fire.

A week later, seven more Americans were shot by an Afghan soldier inside the Mazar-e-Sharif base. All seven survived.

An Ottawa cop remembers

Canada has been involved in training Afghan police before.

Ottawa police Sgt. Colin Stokes, who trained Afghan police in Kandahar from 2009 to 2010, operated mostly out of Camp Nathan Smith.

He says his experience was mostly positive, but remembers the precautions he and his fellow police officers took, particularly when their students were armed at the firing range.

Afghanistan police trainees

Ottawa police Sgt. Colin Stokes oversees an Afghan police trainee during weapons training in Kandahar. Stokes was posted with the Canadian Armed Forces as a trainer in 2009 and 2010. (Colin Stokes)

"When we were on the range with them, we always ensured there were other police officers, basically, very hands on and close to all the Afghan soldiers and constables that were on the line," he says.

Stokes said his Afghan trainees were mostly keen to learn, but says it's impossible to prevent all green-on-blue killings when dealing with armed recruits.

"Mistakes are made, things slip through the cracks. Everybody tries to do the best we can to vet personnel, but it's a war zone and you can't be too surprised when people get killed."

He says he'd be willing to return under certain circumstances.

"If Canada does go back, if I was to go back, I'd want to mentor Afghans that have the capacity to absorb the type of police training that we have to give." **(CBC)**

The fairy tale journey of Afghanistan's rise to glory

Nation's passion for cricket has seen them surge from when Sharjah was their home ground to now earning Test status

Dubai: Nearly a decade ago,I was reporting at a match between Afghanistan and the UAE at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium. The Afghanistan team was here to play against the UAE since they did not have a home ground to invite teams to play in their country. Abdul Rehman Bukhatir, who brought international cricket to the UAE, had come for the match, and he asked the Afghanistan team to consider Sharjah Cricket Stadium as their home ground.?"Bearing in mind the difficulties they have in Afghanistan, the cricketers deserve to have a place somewhere where they can come and feel that they are at home. Here they have huge local support and they can make full use of all facilities in the Sharjah stadium, including the gymnasium and nets," remarked Bukhatir, to the joy of the Afghanistan players.

Kabir Khan, the then coach of the Afghanistan team, said: "We are thankful to Bukhatir for this gesture. This is a huge step because nobody has offered us anything like this. Our players will fully utilise the facilities and our cricket board and players are very thankful to him."

None fathomed then that Bukhatir was opening the doors for a nation that would rise quickly to become a Test playing nation. It has been a fairy tale journey for Afghanistan to attain Test status.

Their journey reflects the passion of a cricket-loving nation and determination among their players. Watching the passion of this cricketing nation, the UAE's telecommunications company etisalat stepped forward as their main sponsors and also backed their Inter-Provincial Cup and T20 tournaments, which was named 'Etisalat Sixes T20 tournament'.

Cricket was played in Afghanistan from 1839 when the British troops played the game in Kabul. But it was only from 1900 that the local people started to take a liking for this sport. It was Afghanistan refugees, who fled the wars in Afghanistan to Pakistan, who played the game. In fact, many of the senior players in the team got their first taste of cricket while living as refugees in Pakistan.

Incidentally, some of the players do not even know their date of birth since they were born while living as refugees.

Despite cricket becoming popular, Afghanistan could never host international matches in their country due to security threats. Yet people loved the game and watched their naturally-talented players play the sport. It was through such hardship that the Afghanistan cricket team went about playing the game to ultimately reach the biggest stage in world cricket.

The Afghanistan Cricket Federation was formed in 1995. They became an International Cricket Council Affiliate member in 2001, and were elevated as Associate member in 2013, and have now become a full member on Thursday, June 22, 2017. Today they also have a home ground in Greater Noida, New Delhi, in India, with the Board of Control for Cricket in India's support.

Despite a lack of experience and exposure, Afghanistan challenged the best teams with their aggressive style of cricket. Their national team was formed only in 2001, but through sheer hard work they played in Twenty20 World Cups in 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016. Today they have players like Rashid Khan, who is one of the finest leg spinners in the world. Their players are even in demand for Twenty20 leagues with Khan and Mohammad Nabi being picked for the Indian Premier League.

Speaking to Gulf News soon after Afghanistan earned Test status, team coach Lalchand Rajput, who has shaped them into a formidable side, said: "It is a great movement for Afghanistan cricket and the sports-loving people of Afghanistan. Now the players can be called 'Test players', which is the real test of a player."

(GULFNEWS)

Educating Afghanistan's young people is the only true solution to the scourge of terrorism

Last month, a US government agency issued an assessment of the United States' efforts to help Afghanistan recover from the devastation of 16 years of war. Its findings were grim. Six out of every 10 dollars since 2002 had been spent on Afghan defense forces, yet problems were rampant. Widespread illiteracy was found to be a "corrosive" challenge, undercutting progress not only in establishing security but also in carrying out civilian projects. The quality of leadership was also identified as a major stumbling block. "If leadership [in the defense force] is poor," the author of the report said, "the people below don't care, and they wonder why they have to die."

At the root of the problem is the state of education. More than six out of every ten people cannot read or write. Nearly four million children aren't in school, and more than three quarters of all children drop out of school by the ninth grade. Overall, opportunity is extremely limited, making hope for the future impossible for many families to conjure. Not only does this lead to the significant obstacles to progress that the US assessment points to, it is a situation that gives extremism and terrorism–and the warped meaning and sense of purpose it can provide–an evergreen appeal. Millions of Afghans, including children, are clear-eyed to the fact that their future is simply without hope. The state of education in Afghanistan today actually represents progress compared to ten years ago, since there was virtually no ability to improve education during the many years my country was embroiled in war, starting with the Soviet Union's 1978 invasion. Yet if we fail to make radical progress in our education system, the Afghan people's ability to shape a more sophisticated economy, and a country in which war and terrorism are not tolerated, looks bleak.

Make no mistake–it is ultimately up to Afghans, not the US, and not the international community. While foreign aid dollars can provide meaningful support, local communities will ultimately have to produce and support the leaders of tomorrow who will help counter the twisted appeals of terrorist recruiters, fight to find ways for communities to prosper, and bring forth a future in which Afghanistan offers more of its people the promise of a better life for their children.

As Malala Yousufzai said, "I don't want to kill terrorists. I want to educate the children of terrorists." That is the true way to eradicate extremism in my country.

It is also why I launched Teach For Afghanistan, a program that is part of the Teach For All network and adapts the approach of Teach For America, here in Nangarhar Province along the Pakistani border, where 80 graduates from Afghan universities are teaching 23,000 girls and boys in 21 schools with the support of USAID and The Asia Foundation. Afghanistan has the one of the youngest populations in the world and I believe that it could be our greatest asset. But too many who make it through our higher education system, or have the opportunity to study abroad, choose not to return to their homes to work for a better future for our country. Through Teach For Afghanistan, we provide a supportive pathway for young graduates to do so, while also helping to bring motivated new teachers into our overcrowded classrooms.

In 44 similar programs around the world, which include not just those well-known in the US, but in countries from India to Malaysia to Peru to Bulgaria, roughly 70% of young people who finish the programs stay committed to working to improve education for disadvantaged children in some way, even if they initially planned on following a completely different career path. I'm hopeful that, over time, our program can help produce and inspire a new generation of collective leadership not just in communities in Nangarhar, but all across Afghanistan–leadership that is singularly committed to creating a future of opportunity and promise for each and every child.

Claiming that education is the answer might sound like a cliché, but it doesn't make it any less true. If our future is to improve, today's children must learn to read. They must learn to write. They must learn to question dominant ways of thinking. They must learn that no child is inherently worth more than another. If we can start down that journey today, we can all have hope for tomorrow. **(QZ)**

KABUL MUNICIPALITY TO REMOVE T-WALLS FROM THE CITY

The Kabul Municipality announced on Thursday that it will start removing T-walls from the city with the help of Kabul Police Headquarters, Kabul Garrison and the Attorney General's Office.

The acting Kabul mayor Abdullah Habibzai said the campaign would start from the Hamid Karzai International Airport's road on Friday.

Some key roads in the city, including Wazir Akbar Khan Road in downtown Kabul, will be closed to traffic and only certain vehicles will be allowed to pass through the road, Habibzai said.

He said that Bremer walls will be removed from 173 sites and roads across the city.

Initially the campaign will cover areas in Kabul's PD1, PD2, PD3 and the airport road, he added. "In the first step, the T-walls will be removed from around the houses of cabinet members and government institutions," Habibzai said at a press conference on Thursday.

"We are also planning to close down some sites, for instance, Wazir Akbar Khan road which is part of this campaign. During the campaign, we will remove all barriers, but the roads will remain open mainly for the people, cyclists and public transportation," he added.

At the same event, the Kabul police and garrison officials vowed to cooperate with the campaign.

"We are ready to implement government's order and to address the demands of the Kabul residents," acting Kabul police chief Haq Nawaz Haqyar said.

(ToloNews)

Notification of the intention to contract award

The Ministry of energy and water of Afghanistan (MEW)is supposed to award the contract,**Rehabilitation of Deh Daraz and Panj Meara Canal Irrigation Scheme in Obeh District of Herat province**under the contract No, NPA/MEW/96/W-1678/ NCB **MEW/PCU/IRDP/H518/HRT/NCB**with **(Bright Pearl Construction Company JV Afghan Broadway Construction),12, University Road Near Silo, KBL, Afghanistan, license ID, D-04-460license ID, D-34060**in the amount of **82,437,255. Afs (Eighty Two million Fourhundred thirtySeven thousand and Two Hundred Fifty FiveAfghanisonly).**Bidders who appeal reconsideration or have any objection, they can submit their application within oneweek totheMinistry of Energy and Water from the date of announcement.

Afghanistan's 'hill of widows' live in a world apart

© AFP

The first women settled on this stony slope outside Kabul in the 1990s hoping to escape the stigma those like them are forced to endure. Today it is known as Afghanistan's 'hill of widows', home to a cluster of women who have eked out independence in a society that shuns and condemns them as immoral. The rocky summit 15 kilometres south-east of the capital has gradually been swallowed by the city, becoming a distant Kabul suburb. But for its residents, it remains "Zanabad", the city of women.

The matriarch of Zanabad, Bibi ul-Zuqia, known as "Bibikoh", died in 2016. Her eldest daughter, 38-year-old Anissa Azimi, has a husband -- but in a rare step for married women in conservative Afghanistan, has taken up the matriarchal torch.

Their house is one of the first when you arrive in Zanabad by a broken track, at the bottom of a passage barred with a tarp to protect privacy.

"My mother arrived here 15 years ago" with her five children, Anissa says, sitting on carpets and assaulted by a swarm of children.

Bibikoh lost a first husband, killed by a rocket, before being remarried to a brother-in-law, who then died from an illness.

She was scratching a living doing laundry for others, but found Kabul rents too expensive.

In Zanabad, Anissa says, land was cheap. The first widows had already begun to lay down their belongings and their grief in the largely deserted suburb to form a tightly-knit community -- though no one any longer knows exactly who began it, and when.

- 'Safe and cheap' -

"They encouraged the others (widows) to join them," says Anissa. "The main idea was to get a cheap and safe place ... a permanent address."

Anissa recalls policemen coming to tear down the houses the women had painstakingly built together in Zanabad. The only way to put them off was with bribes.

"They destroyed our house like eight or nine times," says Anissa, who is now herself a police officer. "The only option at the end was to give them little money."

It is estimated there are as many as 2.5 million widows in Afghanistan today. Often uneducated and cloistered at home, the women have few options if their husbands die.

At best, they receive $150 a year from the government if their husband was killed in fighting. They survive by doing household chores, a little sewing, or by sending their children to beg in the bazaar. - Misery and solidarity -

"In Afghanistan, men usually provide financial support for women, so it is hard for women to lose this support," says women's ministry spokeswoman Kobra Rezai.

A policy providing aid for poor women was approved in 2008 but never ratified, she adds. A few non-governmental programs help the widows find a little autonomy.

In front of the former royal palace in Kabul, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) created a small gardening cooperative where some 100 particularly poor women learned to work the land. Eighty percent of them are widows.

Their destinies have been invariably cruel: Marghooba Jafary, a widow at 35 with four children, had to marry her 13-year-old daughter to a forty-year-old man as she was unable to feed her. He has since abandoned his teen bride.

As Marghooba tells her story to AFP, she bursts into tears. The other women sitting around her -- many depressed and unused to having someone listen to their woes -- join in. **(DAILYMAIL)**

President opens first Citizen-Arg debate in Kabul

KABUL: President Ashraf Ghani on Thursday opened the maiden session of a debate titled "Citizen and Arg (Presidential Palace)" aimed at ensuring good governance and citizenship.

The Citizen and Arg debate attended by university professors, university students, Kabul residents and a number of government officials was held for the first time at the Presidential Palace. Addressing the audience, the presidents said unity could not be established until there was a common thinking. "Open debates develop good thoughts and good citizenship and governance," he added.

The president said people have to support inclusion of qualified and professional individuals in the government for a better performance. "If people follow pragmatism, they would find strongmen in the government," the president said. The Citizen and Arg debate was called an effective process for fundamental changes in governance and determination of citizens' status and a responsible government. A senior advisor to the president in the United Nations, Farkhunda Zahra Naderi, said the debate would turn the government from a traditional style of power to a citizen-oriented and accountable institute. **(Pajhwok)**

President names Roshan as higher education minister

KABUL : President Ashraf Ghani has nominated Abdul Latif Roshan as his minister of higher educationinfo-icon (MoHE), the Presidential Palace said on Thursday.

In statement from the palace, Ghani said he was glad to nominate Roshan for the ministerial slot in line with his constitutional discretion. "Under Article 6 of Afghanistaninfo-icon's constitution, I have approved the nomination of Abdul Latif Roshan as new minister," the president said.

The parliamentary affairs minister will introduce the nominee for a trust vote to Wolesi Jirgainfo-icon under Article 91, according to the statement.

Roshan, a resident of Kabul, obtained a PhD from an America university. He is currently the chancellor head of the Bakhtar University. **(Pajhwok)**

A good year for Farah's watermelon farmers

Officials at the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) on Wednesday said farmers have reported a five percent increase in watermelon harvests, which will generate an estimated four billion AFs in revenue for the province.

The ministry said it is estimated that this year the watermelon crops in Farah will total 578,000 tons which shows an increase of five percent compared to last year.

The ministry said that due to favorable climate conditions and high yielding farms in Farah it is estimated that crops will average 34 tons per hectare. **(ToloNews)**

Bodyguard kills Taliban shadow district chief in Jawzjan

SHIBERGHAN : A Talibaninfo-icon-designated district chief for Darzab district was gunned down along with five of his friends by his own bodyguard in northern Jawzjan province on Thursday, an official said.

Jawzjan deputy police chief Col. Abdul Hafiz Khashi told Pajhwok Afghan News that Qari Aman aka Shamsullah was a notorious Taliban commander and shadow district chief for Darzab.

"Qari Aman was killed by his bodyguard in Qazal Qushlaq village today morning, five of his friends were also killed in the incident," he said. He said it was unclear why the bodyguard killed Aman.

A resident of the area, Abdul Jalil, said Aman was killed days after a Daesh militant belonging to Commander Qari Hekmat joined him.

"The Daesh fighter who joined Aman was a relative of the Taliban commander. Aman later appointed him as his bodyguard, but he killed the commander while heading to Tapa-i-Bala area to meet his colleagues," he said.

He said one of Qari Aman's injured body shared the story of the incident with other Taliban fighters. **(Pajhwok)**

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Malalai Maternity Hospital
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Banks

Da Afghanistan Bank
2100302, 2100303

Bakhtar Bank
0776777000

Azizi Bank
0799 700900

Pashtany Bank
2102908, 2103868

Air Services

Safi Airways
020 22 22 222

Ariana
020-2100270

Kam Air
0799974422

Hotels

Safi Landmark
020-2203131

SERENA
0799654000

New Rumi Restaurant
0776351347

Internet Services

UA Telecom
0796701701 / 0796702702

Exchange Rate

1.00 USD
67.60AFN

1000.00 IRR
17.90AFN

1.00 UAE
18.40AFN

1.00 EUR
74.20AFN

1000.00 INR
1030.00AFN

1000.00 PKR
635.00AFN

Presidential Election 2017: Opposition chose Meira Kumar to divide Dalits, says Yogi Adityanath

New Delhi: Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath said on Friday that the Opposition parties fielded Meira Kumar as their presidential candidate to divide Dalits to "save their skin". Only after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah picked Ram Nath Kovind, a Dalit, as the NDA's presidential candidate, the Congress decided to field Kumar, Adityanath told reporters after Kovind filed his nomination papers.

File image of Yogi Adityanath. PTIFile image of Yogi Adityanath. PTI

"Intentions of the Opposition are not honest towards Dalits, otherwise they would had fielded Kumar last time," Adityanath said. The Opposition parties have fielded her only to divide Dalits in the country, he added. Echoing the Uttar Pradesh chief minister's views, senior BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi said that Opposition parties have made Kumar a "scapegoat" by naming her as the Opposition's presidential candidate.

"They thought about Dalits for the top post only after the BJP announced Kovindji as presidential candidate. And why didn't Congress nominate her last time when it was in a position to get her elected to the highest office," Modi said. Praising the choice of the NDA, Jharkhand chief minister Raghubar Das expressed confidence that Kovind would be victorious. Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar described the BJP's choice for the top constitutional post as a step towards empowering the lower sections of society. Kovind hails from humble background and is a committed person for social cause and his personality suits the stature, Khattar added. Speaking highly about Kovind, Union minister Uma Bharti said Kovind was a successful member of Parliament and a committed worker towards social causes.

(Hindustan Times)

Rehman Malik to appear before JIT today

ISLAMABAD: Following the appearance of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, his two sons and Punjab Chief Minister Shehbaz Sharif, former interior minister Senator Rehman Malik will be appearing before the joint investigation team (JIT) probing the Sharif family's assets today (Friday).

Malik will record his statement regarding the ruling family's global money trail before the JIT.

According to sources, Malik is likely to tell about the Sharif's family involvement in the Hudaibiya Paper Mills case before JIT. Earlier, he was asked to appear before the team on June 17 but he requested to reschedule the date as he was not in the country.

Malik will be appearing today at 2:30pm at the Federal Judicial Academy, at the 45th meeting of JIT. Malik had claimed earlier in a press conference that he will record his statement with full freedom before the JIT. Moreover, the JIT has also summoned Nawaz Sharif's son-in-law, Captain (retd) Muhammad Safdar, on June 24, according to sources.

In its probe, the JIT has recorded statements of several members of the Sharif family, including Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, his brother Punjab Chief Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his sons; Hassan and Hussain.

The JIT will submit its complete investigation report to the Supreme Court's special implementation bench on July 10.

(Tribune)

PM Hasina urges another term for Awami Leaguea

Bangladesh will prosper only if voters return the Awami League to power for another five years, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said. The ruling party president made the remark urging support for the 2019 national election at a ceremony for the party's 68th founding anniversary on Friday.

"People shouldn't forget that the Awami League brought all the achievements the country boasts of today. Bangladesh and Awami League complement each other." "To keep the pace of progress steady, please let Awami League serve you again," Hasina said. Awami League, one of Bangladesh's oldest political parties, returned to power for a second consecutive term following the 2014 election.

It kept celebrations simple this year for Jumu'atul-Widaa, last Friday of Ramadan, and Lailatul Qadr, the highly revered 27th day of Ramadan. Hasina unveiled the foundation stone for the party's new office building at Dhaka's Bangabandhu Avenue. She paid floral tributes before a mural of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation, at his old house in Dhanmondi road No. 32.

She was accompanied by Awami League advisory council members Amir Hossain Amu and Tofail Ahmed, presidium members Matia Chowdhury, Sahara Khatun, Mosharraf Hossain and General Secretary Obaidul Quader. National flags and party flags were hoisted at the Bangabandhu Bhaban in Dhanmondi road No. 32, at Bangabandhu Avenue and at party offices across the city. Hasina urged leaders and activists of the ruling party to follow the ideology of Bangabandhu and not bother only about personal gains. She also slammed people who criticised Bangbandhu.

"They said Bangabandhu was a revolutionary, a leader but not a good ruler. These critics themselves opposed Bangladesh's independence," said Hasina, daughter of Sheikh Mujib.

"There are many who follow an anti-liberation sentiment. These people will always conspire against good."

(BDNEWS24)

Opposition wants to divide Dalits by fielding Meira Kumar: Yogi Adityanath

Only after the NDA picked Ram Nath Kovind, a Dalit, as its presidential candidate did the Congress decide to field Meira Kumar, said Yogi Adityanath

New Delhi: Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath said on Friday that opposition parties fielded Meira Kumar as their presidential candidate to divide Dalits and to "save their skin". Only after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah picked Ram Nath Kovind, a Dalit, as the NDA's presidential candidate, did the Congress decide to field Kumar, Adityanath said after Kovind filed his nomination papers. "Intentions of the opposition are not honest towards Dalits, otherwise they would had fielded Kumar last time," Adityanath said. The opposition parties have fielded her only to divide Dalits in the country, he added. Echoing the UP chief minister's views, senior BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi said that opposition parties have made Kumar a "scapegoat" by naming her as the opposition's presidential candidate. "They thought about Dalits for the top post only after the BJP announced Kovindji as presidential candidate. And why didn't Congress nominate her last time when it was in a position to get her elected to the highest office," Modi said. Praising the choice of the NDA, Jharkhand chief minister Raghubar Das expressed confidence that Kovind would be victorious. Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar described the BJP's choice for the top constitutional post.

minister Captain Amarinder Singh

Punjab assembly speaker shows his ruthless side: Dal Khalsa

CHANDIGARH: Taking a dig at Congress government in Punjab for the happenings in Punjab assembly, Dal Khalsa said that two 'blunders' have been committed in the on-going session under chief minister Captain Amarinder Singh. The first blunder is paying tribute to 'butcher of Punjab' former Punjab DGP K P S Gill and second, dishonouring the religious symbol of Sikhs and disrespecting the dignity of womenfolk.

Party president Harpal Singh Cheema said that Congress had reverted to its original character-mocking, insulting and challenging the Sikhs in particular and people of Punjab in general.

Taking a jibe at Vidhan Sabha speaker, Dal Khalsa spokesperson Kanwar Pal Singh said that Rana Kanwar Pal Singh paid 'ultimate tribute' to KPS Gill in Congress-style by maltreating AAP MLAs, tossing turbans of Sikh MLAs and disrespecting women MLAs in the assembly.

Dal Khalsa leaders said, "What KPS Gill did with Sikhs at interrogation centres, Rana KP Singh did the same at Vidhan Sabha. Rana KP, KPS Gill and ruthlessness are synonymous words",

"The power-drunk Congress was insulting sentiments of people and suppressing the voice of their representatives in assembly. The video clips showing women MLAs being dragged and their screaming in pain leaves no one in doubt that Congress with all its tentacles is back this time with more vengeance to haunt the people of Punjab," they said.

(BBC)

9 Bangladeshis return after languishing in Indian jail

Nine Bangladeshi women and children returned home after languishing in an Indian jail there for nearly four years.

Indian immigration police handed them over to Bangladesh authorities through Benapole check-post yesterday.

The returnees are Zohura Khatun, Rina Bibi, Jannatul Ferdous, Rozina Khatun, Sagarika, Salma Khatun, Josna Begum, Rabiul and Shamim.

All of them hailed from different parts of Jessore, Narail, Sunamganj, Chuadanga, Satkhira, Khagrachhari and Chittagong districts.

Omar Sharif, officer-in-charge of Benapole check-post immigration police, said all the nine had gone to India illegally in search of job four years back.

Later, they were arrested from Mumbai and Alipur and sent to jail. The decision to return them was taken following an intervention of the home ministries of the two countries.

(AP)

Strong Sri Lankan sales wins Gestetner best performance in RICOH Asia Pacific

Building on its winning legacy, Gestetner of Ceylon PLC once again won resounding recognition for its tremendous sales performance over the past year, rising above its peers in the Asia Pacific region to win the RICOH Asia Pacific Award for Outstanding Achievement in Units & Sales Revenue FY 2016 in multi-functional products (MFP). Notably, Gestetner of Ceylon is currently the only distributor to have won this award, adding to its impressive two time win over the last three years, when Gestetner was awarded for achieving the highest units and highest value performances in the region. This year's award was presented by RICOH Managing Director, Kazuhisa (Kaz) Goto to Gestetner of Ceylon PLC Managing Director, Chandima Perera in the presence of RICOH General Manager, Business Operation Division, Tomo (Tomokazu) Ota at a prestigious distributor awards night that took place in Danang, Vietnam. Commenting on the significance of this year's award, Perera said: "It has been yet another remarkable year for Gestetner during which we have been able to achieve some of our best sales performances to date. The Sri Lankan market too continues to show great potential however it is important to keep in mind that our strong results were based on the collective efforts of all our departments - from Sales and Marketing to HR, Admin, Finance, MIS, P2P, Technical, Consumables and Tender - working towards a single goal, therefore in a very real sense, our entire team is a part of this award. Similarly, our valued customers have played an equally important role and we look forward to building on these vital partnerships moving forward.

(SriAP)

Seizing 'The Belt and Road' Opportunity: Challenges for Nepal

Nepal signed China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) before the BRI Summit. During the BRI summit held in Beijing, the Nepalese Minister for Physical Infrastructure and Transport proposed to the Chinese Transport Minister to link Nepal's border with road and railways connectivity. In this context, what are the opportunities and challenges for Nepal from China's BRI?

China's Motivations for Implementing the BRI

The BRI is China's most ambitious foreign policy and economic initiative and President Xi Jinping's dream project.

Ever since he announced the BRI towards the end of 2013, over 66 countries in Asia, Africa, West Asia and Europe have become the part of the initiative.

It has two main components - the Silk Road Economic Belt connecting China with Europe through Central Asia by land, and the Maritime Silk Road Initiative connecting China to Southeast Asia, South Asia and Africa via a web of roads, high-speed rail, power lines, ports, pipelines, optic fiber lines and other infrastructure. Roughly, it comprises 70 per cent of the world's population and Chinese investment worth US$4 trillion.

There are several factors motivating the BRI. First, China wants to reduce the transportation costs of goods around the world.

Second, it has huge surplus of construction materials, and hence, is looking for opportunities overseas. Third, the infrastructure focus helps China in its quest for greater international stature for the renminbi, to achieve the status of a global reserve currency. Fourth, through the BRI, China wants to secure energy supply through new pipelines in Central Asia, Russia, and Southeast Asia's deepwater ports. Fifth, the development in infrastructure in countries along the BRI routes may increase growth in their economies which will contribute to a growing demand for China's goods and services.

(IPCS)

News-in-Brief

Morocco slammed after police assault activists

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have criticised the Moroccan police's handling of the arrest of a popular protest leader who was "severely" beaten and verbally abused. Nasser Zefzafi, leader of the Popular Movement (PM), which has been behind the large demonstrations that have taken place daily since last month, was detained in a village 50 kilometres from the city of Al-Hoceima along with two activists. According to Zefzafi's lawyer, police officers broke down the door of his house in the early hours of the morning. The police broke furniture and windows, and assaulted the three men even though they offered no resistance the rights groups' statement said. "He said he had a 1.5 centimetre cut on his scalp, another one below his left eye, and bruises on his back."

Police also insulted the men, forced them to shout "Long live the king!" and referred to them as "separatists". The activists were then transported to the northern city of Al-Hoceima before they were flown, hooded and handcuffed, to Casablanca. "There, the police took Zefzafi for medical care, including stitches to his scalp, and gave him clean clothes to replace his blood-stained ones," the statement added.

(Mirror)

Turkey will stop teaching evolution in schools, education ministry says

urkish schoolchildren will no longer be taught about evolution, a government official has said, in another sign of the conservative direction the country is heading in under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Alpaslan Durmus, the head of curriculum for the ministry of education, said that Charles Darwin's theory of evolution was "controversial" and would be removed from school programmes by 2019. "We have excluded controversial subjects for students at an age unable yet to understand the issues' scientific background," Mr Durmus said. "As the students at ninth grade are not endowed with antecedents to discuss the 'Origin of Life and Evolution' section in biology classes, this section will be delayed until undergraduate study." Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, centre left, his wife Emine Erdogan, center, his son Bilal Erdogan, right, and other family members arrive for a ceremony at a school in Istanbul Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, centre left, his wife Emine Erdogan, center, his son Bilal Erdogan, right, and other family members.

(BBC)

Daesh bombers kill 9 in Iraq's Anbar: Army source

At least nine people, including one soldier, were killed on Friday in a suicide bombing in Iraq's western Anbar province, according to a local military source.

"Four Daesh suicide bombers managed to infiltrate into the Al-Shohadaa area of the Al-Baghdadi district," Army Colonel Walid al-Deleimi told Anadolu Agency.

"Security forces surrounded three of the bombers who were holed up in a building before killing them," he said.

"The fourth bomber, however, managed to detonate his suicide vest near a group of soldiers and civilians," al-Deleimi added.

According to the army officer, at least nine people -- including one soldier -- were killed by the blast, while about a dozen more were injured.

Located just west of the provincial capital Ramadi, Anbar's Al-Baghdadi district -- which continues to see sporadic attacks by the embattled Daesh terrorist group -- is currently under the control of Iraqi security forces and local tribal volunteers.

(CNN)

Arab Nations issue demands on Qatar to end crisis

BEIRUT, Lebanon — Saudi Arabia and several other Arab countries that recently cut off diplomatic ties with Qatar issued a harsh list of demands on Friday, insisting that the wealthy but tiny Persian Gulf nation shut down the news network Al Jazeera, abandon ties with Islamist organizations and provide detailed information about its funding for political dissidents.

The demands, which were presented to Qatar through mediators from Kuwait, also called on the country to downgrade its ties with Iran — a difficult task given that the countries share a large gas field that provides much of Qatar's wealth. The demands signaled an escalation in the deepest political crisis among Arab Gulf countries in years, after Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates cut economic, diplomatic and travel ties with Qatar this month, accusing it of supporting terrorism. Qatari officials did not immediately respond to the demands on Friday, but they have denied supporting extremists and said they would not negotiate while under a blockade, nor submit to demands that undermine the country's sovereignty. All of the nations involved are allies of the United States and most — including Qatar — host large American military bases. But analysts have accused the Trump administration of sending mixed signals, exacerbating the rift.

After the four nations announced that they were cutting ties with their neighbor this month, Mr. Trump tweeted his support and even claimed responsibility for the move. But that did not stop his administration from signing a previously approved deal for Qatar to buy $12 billion worth of American F-15 fighter jets.

As the crisis has dragged on, American diplomats have complained privately that Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were taking too long to present their demands, and Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson said that they must be "reasonable and actionable."

Qatar has historically played a maverick role in the Gulf Cooperation Council, a regional group that also includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. It maintains ties with a range of Islamist groups throughout the region, relationships that other countries have found useful when negotiating hostage releases but that have complained about it when those groups challenged their rule. Qatar has also opened its doors to members of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is banned in Egypt and other countries; Hamas, the Palestinian militant group; and the Afghan Taliban.

It has also financed Al Jazeera, one of the Arab world's most watched satellite news channels, which is often critical of Qatar's rivals. These stances have often rankled neighbors like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, who see political Islam as a threat to their monarchies. Qatar's support for the Arab Spring uprisings and the Muslim Brotherhood have also angered countries including Egypt. More broadly, the list of demands called for Qatar to conform politically and economically with the other nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which is often divided by disagreements.

If Qatar were to comply, it would be audited once a month for the first year, the four countries said, and less frequently after that.

(WP)

Messi to pay Spanish tax fine, avoid jail time

Argentinian football star Lionel Messi agrees to pay €252,000 ($281,000) fine instead of serving 21-month prison sentence

Football superstar Lionel Messi and his father have agreed to pay fines instead of serving jail time for tax fraud, Spanish media reported on Friday.

According to Spanish news agency EFE, a public prosecutor in Barcelona ruled Messi will pay €252,000 euros ($281,000) instead of serving a 21-month sentence.

His father, Jorge Messi, will pay €180,000 ($201,000) instead of a 15-month term.

Last year, a Barcelona-based court had found the Argentinian striker and his father guilty of using tax havens to hide the star's earnings and defraud the Spanish government of €4.1 million ($4.5 million) worth of taxes between 2007 and 2009.

In the Spanish justice system, it is common for judges to suspend prison terms for first-time offenders who are sentenced to less than two years.

In 2013, when a formal investigation began, Messi and his father made a voluntary €5 million ($5.6 million) payment to the Spanish tax authorities as a "corrective" measure.

Messi is the world's fourth-highest paid athlete, and in 2015 earned $73.8 million between contracts and endorsements, according to Forbes.

(AFP)

London Grenfell Tower fire: Police say manslaughter charges possible

LONDON -- London's Metropolitan Police said Friday that manslaughter charges were possible in last week's devastating apartment tower fire, and investigators are focusing on an appliance as the cause. At least 79 people were killed when flames quickly engulfed the 24-story building. Materials on the exterior may have helped spread the flames. British authorities are racing to examine other buildings across the country.

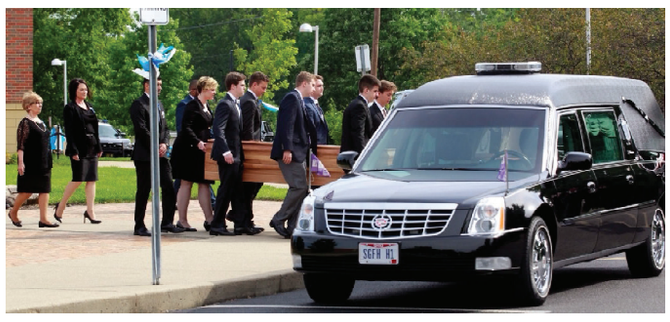
Investigators are continuing their work inside the building, and police say the fire was not deliberately set, but key questions remain about whether enough was done to prevent it. The fire that engulfed the Grenfell Tower started in a refrigerator in one of the apartments, according to police, reports CBS News' Jonathan Vigliotti.

"I can confirm that the numbers that we have of presumed dead, confirmed dead, or missing still remains at 79, with 9 people being formally identified as dead," Detective Superintendent Fiona McCormack said on Friday. The search for bodies could take until the end of the year, and investigators fear they may never find everyone who died in the blaze.

They are closely examining the buildings siding -- or cladding, as it's known in the U.K. -- and how those tiles and the insulation underneath them were installed. The cladding failed investigators' tests for combustibility. British authorities are now aware of at least 11 other buildings that have combustible cladding that will now need to be removed. Known in the trade as aluminium composite material -- or ACM -- the cladding encases a polyethylene core that is flammable. Fire tests have shown extreme heat can melt the cladding, allowing fire to ignite the polyethylene core underneath, and spreading flames quickly. The material is banned in the U.S., and in some parts of Europe on any building higher than 40 feet, as firefighters can't reach those extremities by ladder. But the U.K. hasn't followed suit. When she returned to Grenfell Tower, residents booed Prime Minister Theresa May over the government's handling of the disaster, which many experts say was avoidable. She's called for a full review, which could take weeks. New York-based company Arconic, whose product was used as one of the components in the cladding system, has said it will fully support the investigation.

In its brochure, they say the type of cladding in question should never be used on buildings more than 32 feet high.

(WP)



North Korea calls US student's death a 'mystery,' casts itself as 'biggest victim'

BEIJING — North Korea said Friday that the death of American tourist Otto Warmbier was a mystery, denying that he was tortured and casting itself as the "biggest victim" of the affair. In its first public reaction to Warmbier's death, a Foreign Ministry spokesman also tried to shift blame onto the administration of President Barack Obama, blaming it for refusing to have a dialogue with Pyongyang and claiming it had never officially asked for Warmbier's release. "The fact that Warmbier died suddenly in less than a week after his return to the U.S. in his normal state of health indicators is a mystery to us as well," the spokesman was quoted as saying by the official Korean Central News Agency. "To make it clear, we are the biggest victim of this incident." The 22-year-old American university student was arrested while visiting North Korea as a tourist, accused of stealing a propaganda poster and sentenced to 15 years in prison with hard labor. He was returned to the United States last week with brain damage and died Monday. North Korea said the sentence was appropriate and called speculation that he died as a result of beating or torture "groundless." "Although we had no reason at all to show mercy to such a criminal of the enemy state, we provided him with medical treatments and care with all sincerity on humanitarian basis until his return to the U.S., considering that his health got worse," the spokesman said. North Korea said Warmbier slipped into a coma after contracting botulism and taking a sleeping pill. But officials at the University of Cincinnati Medical Center, where Warmbier was treated after his return, said they had found no trace of the disease. Instead, they said it appeared he had suffered severe neurological damage, possibly as a result of cardiopulmonary arrest. Pyongyang's statement Friday appeared to support that possibility, saying that North Korean doctors had "brought him back alive" after his "heart had nearly stopped." The North Korean statement said the country was a victim of a "smear campaign" by the United States as a part of a "frantic effort" to impose "heinous sanctions," the NK News website reported. "Why the U.S. government which claims to care about the welfare of its citizens had not even once made an official request for the release of Warmbier on humanitarian basis during the Obama administration?" the statement said. "The answer should be given by the U.S. itself."

(WP)

Nigeria deploys troops amid ethnic violence in Taraba

Local media have said nearly 100 people have been killed in the latest wave of ethnic clashes

The Nigerian government on Thursday deployed troops to the northeastern state of Taraba where clashes between local farmers and herdsmen have resulted in multiple deaths and displacements.

"Acting President Yemi Osinbajo condoles with the victims of the recent violent attacks in a number of communities in Taraba State, where deaths have been reported," presidential spokesman Laolu Akande said in a statement.

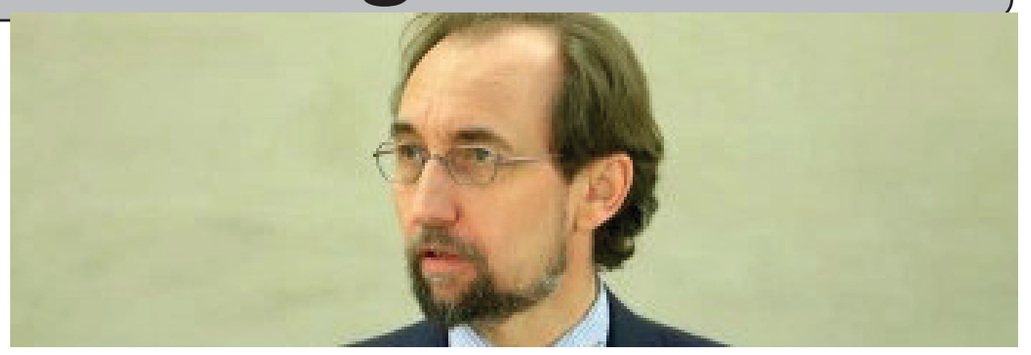
"Acting President Osinbajo has therefore ordered the deployment of an extra military battalion, police reinforcements and also a deployment of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps to the areas affected," the statement added. This came hours after Fulani communities wrote to the president alleging genocidal killings and calling for more security. Local media have said nearly 100 people have been killed in the latest wave of violence in Taraba. There is no official confirmation for the death toll. Nevertheless, the president condemned the violence and directed that relief materials be sent to all the affected villages, according to the statement. "The Acting President summoned and held an emergency meeting with top security officials of the Federal Government and Governor Darius Dickson Ishaku," the statement added.

Taraba, like other agrarian Middle Beltan states, has been a hotbed of ethnic clashes often between farmers and herdsmen. Experts say the crises are a fallout of the climate change, struggle over scarce resources and grazing rights.

(CNN)

UN begins investigation of Congo atrocities

The United Nations Human Rights Council opened an investigation on Friday into killings and other atrocities in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The 47-member Geneva forum adopted by consensus a resolution brought by African countries that also called on the government of President Joseph Kabila to cooperate with the team of international experts. U.N. rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, who is to name the fact-finding experts, had called repeatedly for the inquiry into events in Kasai, an opposition stronghold. "We fully support the establishment of an international investigation by the Human Rights Council as a step forward in identifying the perpetrators of gross violations and bringing them to justice," Zeid said in a statement. His office counted on the "full cooperation" of the government and on the experts having unfettered access to all sites, files, people and places. "The team will conduct investigations in a fully independent manner, in accordance with international standards, as mandated by the Council," he declared. Zeid told the Council on Tuesday that a militia linked to government has committed a string of ethnically-motivated attacks. **(Reuters)**



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AFGHANISTAN TIMES

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Mailing address: P.O. Box: 371, Kabul, Afghanistan

Our Bank Accounts: **Azizi Bank:** 000101100258091 / 000101200895656

Printed at Afghanistan Times Printing Press

The constitution says

Article 154:
Article One Hundred Fifty-Four: The wealth of the President, Vice-Presidents, Ministers, members of the Supreme Court as well as the Attorney General, shall be registered, reviewed and published prior to and after their term of office by an organ established by law.

EDITORIAL

Increasing violence

The people of Afghanistan have recently experienced an increasing surge of attacks by the insurgent groups.

Explosions, suicide attacks, attacks on security forces and killing civilians have been almost happening every day in different areas of Afghanistan that was expected to be at least calm during the holy month of Ramadan like other countries, the month, in which Muslims feel themselves closer to the almighty God by taking fast, praying more than the other times and try to stay away from the bad things from which, they are prohibited. One of these bad things is harming or annoying people by your hands and tongue. But those individuals, groups and their masters who claim to be Muslims, do not observe and respect this holy month of worshipping. They continue killing poor civilians in their work places, houses, on their ways to work, in the shopping centers and any other crowded areas, where civilians gather to gain their livelihoods through legal Islamic way.

The question is that how will they stand in front of the God's justice on the doomsday? What will they response when they are asked that "why did you kill this innocent civilian without any charges and without any reasons, just by the order of their masters.

On May 31st, 150 people were killed and more than 500 injured in the truck bomb in Kabul city. The attacks went on in different areas including the one against the Al-Zahra mosque in which at least four Shiite Muslims were killed while worshipping and eight more were wounded.

The attack on the people next to a private bank where they were to take their salaries on the eve of the Eid festival as most of them were government civil servants, showed once again the devil face of terrorists who are satisfied by seeing the blood of helpless people shedding.

Some 34 civilians while taking fast were killed Wednesday in the Lashkar Gah city, the provincial capital of Helmand and more than 50 were injured.

Our people are getting victims of the undeclared war launched by our enemies who employ unfortunately our Afghans as their proxies. They are fighting and killing people under different names and titles; such as Taliban, al-Qaeda, Daesh, etc.

Our families hold mourning for their dears, ladies become widows, children lose their fathers at the end of the month of Ramadan and the eve of Eid festival, while people in other Islamic countries prepare to celebrate the end of the fasting month and enjoy happy lives.

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Is North Korea really a 'hollowed out' state?

Thanks to its official state ideology 'Juche' North Korea is in rude health.

By Sven Jurschewsky

In 1994, just five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) signed the Agreed Framework, which was aiming to suspend the latter's nuclear programme,

Although the agreement eventually failed, US policy became predicated on the belief that the Democratic People's Republic, like the communist states of Eastern and Central Europe just before 1989, is "hollowed-out" and on the verge of collapse. However, North Korea has manifestly not collapsed.

A "hollowed-out" state is no longer capable of sustaining itself. In common-sense terms, a "hollowed-out" state cannot or does not provide its citizens with basic necessities. Alternatively, for a state to be considered "hollow", the belief system on which it has based itself on has to be meaningfully called into question. Of course, even a state that exhibits these characteristics can still continue to be effectively operational, as long as it has functional instruments of repression.

The state organs of control continue to function with robust health in North Korea, but that is not the reason for the state's persistence. Surviving astonishing difficulties

Back in 1994, it was not irrational to believe that North Korea was on the verge of collapse. North Korea was in the grips of a famine that eventually claimed the lives of more than five percent of its population. The floods that had ushered in the famine had also destroyed much of the country's production infrastructure. Yet at no subsequent point were there reliable reports of protests or riots against the government. The stoicism and stalwartness of the North Korean people in the face of astonishing difficulties throughout this period deserve explanation.

When I first went to North Korea in 1999 to try to arrange for Canada's recognition, I was hoping to gain a better understanding of the country. I had one particular question on my mind: how had North Korea survived a crisis that involved a famine that had killed a million people and destroyed its production infrastructure, as well as a military confrontation with the world's leading power and the death of a revered leader, who had presided over the country since its inception? I cannot think of another state that had survived such challenges. So how can we understand North Korea and the reasons behind its persistence?

North Korea is increasingly unlikely to collapse. It is increasingly capable of defending itself and, given its abiding fear of US aggression, it is unlikely to cede its missiles or warheads as bargaining chips.

Understanding North Korea

A state can be analysed along three dimensions: governance, economy and belief system.

North Korea is politically organised on standard Leninist Democratic-Centralist principles. When it comes to its economy, North Korea, despite some leakage of authority to the country's constituent counties and cities during the famine and in the course of its reforms, remains centrally planned. Regarding its belief system, the usual answer is that, ideologically, North Korea subscribes to Marxist Dialectical-Materialism.

Nevertheless, can we be sure that this is correct? What evidence is there to sustain this contention? For example, my first conversation with one of China's leading North Korea scholars elicited the curious observation that they "don't understand the DPRK very well any more," because "[North Koreans] broke their links with Marxism long ago".

At the moment, one of the most popular discussion topics regarding North Korea is its nuclear ambitions. Everyone is focused on the capacity of the country's nuclear project. But, actually, questions about the size of North Korea's prospective nuclear stockpile and means of delivery should be only secondary to the question of the country's intentions and North Korea's intentions, nuclear and otherwise, can only be derived, with some degree of assurance, by an examination of its "Juche".

The Juche, which is usually translated as "self-reliance", is the official state ideology of North Korea. The Juche is regularly dismissed as a simple exhortation to self-sufficiency, but in fact, it is so much more than that.

Observations on trips around the country, conversations with North Koreans of widely differing social, political and economic status and discussions with scholars and functionaries of what was then called the Juche Studies Institute helped me produce the following insights.

Members of the Korean People's Armed Forces react after doing a test-fire of new cruise rocket [Reuters]

Conceptualisation of the Juche

The Juche was conceptualised by Kim Il-sung when he was in exile in the USSR during the Japanese colonial period. At the time, it was a nationalist variant of Marxism-Leninism, along the lines of Albania's Hoxhaisim or Romania's Ceausescuism, and had a strong Stalinist component with its emphasis on the cult of personality.

But in the 1960s, Kim Jong-il, with some help from his philosophy professor, Hwang Jang-op, reshaped the Juche into something entirely different. The recast version of the Juche rests on three pillars.

Confucianism: for its emphasis on hierarchy and family. There are from 50 to 54 levels in North Korean society. One's place is determined by heredity, but talent can still provide for a rise in status.

Christianity: for its tradition of submission, divine intervention, and the Marian devotion that must have been useful in the rehabilitation of Kim Jong-il's mother, Kim Jong-suk as a revolutionary mother to the North Korean state. Chondoism: for its nationalism, shamanism and roots in Korean traditions. Chondoism is a syncretic religion based on Ural-Altaic shamanism. There are, it is claimed, some four million adherents of Chondoism in North

Korea and, when I met with their leaders in Pyongyang, one remarked whether I had noticed the strong affiliation between Chondoism and the Juche.

The cultural acquis of Korea's unfortunate history is also subsumed into the Juche. The frequent invasions during the Joseon Dynasty, the economic and cultural aggression of the Japanese during Korea's colonial period and the extraordinary brutalities of the Korean War laid the basis for xenophobia, a strong tendency to autarky, ultra-nationalism and militarism that define North Korea's sociopolitical reality in the Juche.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un poses with participants during the 8th Congress of the Korean Children's Union [Reuters]

Preserving the Juche

In North Korea, which is essentially isolated from the rest of the world, the coordinated operation of all means of mass communication ensures the perpetuation of the Juche and, with that, support for the government. Indeed, isolation is the requirement for the ideological control of the population. The way the education system functions in North Korea also ensures the inculcation of the Juche's precepts in the population. Juche Studies is a major curriculum item in the school system. The children of senior military officers are removed from their families and educated in institutions such as the Mangyondae Revolutionary School between the ages of two - seven. The children of senior Workers Party of Korea officials are similarly schooled in special Party creches. It is this generation of Juche-imbued soldiers and party officials that has come to power since Kim Jong-un succeeded his father.

Far from being hollowed out, North Korea is ideologically united and more radically committed to the Juche than ever before. North Korea is, in fact, in rude health. The state ideology is sustained and reinforced by the country's isolation and the continued effective operation of its mass media and state institutions. The economy is growing and sufficient surplus is being generated to support an expensive programme of developing a nuclear arsenal and the means of its delivery.

REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK: Trump's North Korea dilemma - are sanctions the way to go?

North Korea is increasingly unlikely to collapse. It is increasingly capable of defending itself and, given its abiding fear of US aggression, it is unlikely to cede its missiles or warheads as bargaining chips.

North Korea constitutes a threat. At the very least, its missiles and nuclear weapons fuel proliferation in the region. The range of rational policy options has narrowed to negotiations. But what is going to be negotiated and how will these negotiations come about? The risks of confrontation and misjudgements by all parties to this longest running crisis increase day by day.

Sven Jurschewsky is a retired Canadian Foreign Service officer who has specialised in political-military affairs, international security and intelligence, and nuclear arms control. He was head of political section at the Canadian Embassy in Beijing during which he was responsible for the establishment of Canada's diplomatic relations with the DPRK.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial policy. **(Al Jazeera)**

Why is Netanyahu trying to disband the UNRWA?

Israel wants to dismantle the UNRWA because the agency keeps Palestinian's right to return to their homeland alive.

By Hanin Abou Salem

On June 11, 2017, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called for the dismantling of the UN agency that aids millions of Palestinian refugees, accusing it of stoking anti-Israeli sentiments and perpetuating the Palestinian refugee problem. Netanyahu, after a meeting with the US ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, in Jerusalem, said, "It is time the UNRWA be dismantled and merged with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees". The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established by the UN General Assembly in 1949 after hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled or were expelled from their homes in the war that followed Israel's creation.

Since its establishment, the UNRWA has provided education, healthcare, and social services to those meeting its definition of "Palestine refugees".

The organisation defines a Palestine refugee as someone whose place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948 and who lost his/her home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict. UNRWA also provides basic services to Palestinians who became displaced as a result of the 1967 Arab-Israeli Conflict.

Today, the UNRWA aids more than five million registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

Returning to the homeland

Netanyahu wants to dismantle the UNRWA because the agency allows Palestinian refugee men to transmit their refugee status from one generation to another. This transmission of refugee status keeps the right of return for Palestinian refugees alive - it ensures that their hopes for returning to their ancestral homeland do not perish with the death of the original 1948 refugees.

Israel has accused the UNRWA of "perpetuating the Palestinian refugee problem" by allowing Palestinian refugees to transmit their refugee status to future generations. This accusation aims to shift our attention away from the fact that Israel is solely responsible for perpetuating the Palestinian refugee problem by denying the refugees the right to return to their homes.

If Israel had accepted the right of return that was accorded to Palestinian refugees in UN General Assembly Resolution 194 of 1948, the Palestinian refugee problem would not exist today and their descendants, who have inherited their parents' refugee status, would instead have inherited the citizenship accorded to their parents in historic Palestine.

As a consequence of Israel's unwillingness to allow Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, the UN General Assembly had to repeatedly extend UNRWA's mandate because its mandate can only end when a just and lasting solution is found for the Palestinian refugee problem. While the UNRWA does not prescribe a particular solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees, UNRWA's spokesman Chris Gunness, in 2011, implied that he was against resettlement when he wrote in an op-ed that the problem cannot "be made to go away by dispersing [Palestinian refugees] around the globe."

UNHCR does not insist on repatriation

Unlike the UNRWA, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has a specific mandate to aid refugees by eliminating their refugee status through the medium of local integration in the host country, resettlement in a third country or repatriation when possible. Netanyahu wants 1948 Palestine refugees to fall under the scope of the UNHCR because it does not insist on repatriation.

The UNRWA should continue to exist until a just and fair solution for the Palestinian refugee problem materialises.

If the UNRWA is dismantled and merged with the UNHCR, Palestinian refugees scattered all over the Middle East will effectively lose all hope of returning to their homeland. Since the possibility of repatriation is effectively being blocked by Israel, the UNHCR will either integrate them in host countries or resettle them in a third country.

Furthermore, if the UNRWA is dismantled, Palestinian refugees registered with the agency will no longer be excluded from the scope of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons, which calls upon contracting states to facilitate the assimilation and naturalisation of refugees.

This exclusion clause was added to the convention by Arab states who wanted to make sure that the principle of naturalisation within the 1951 Convention did not affect the right of return for Palestinian refugees. But if the UNRWA is dismantled, Palestinian refugees will automatically lose their exclusive status.

Arab countries hosting UNRWA camps are not parties to the 1951 Convention, but they still can be affected by this text. Without the UNRWA, Palestinian refugees will fall under the UNHCR mandate which bases its work on the 1951 Convention. This means that Arab countries hosting Palestinian refugees will find themselves under pressure to either integrate Palestinian refugees or agree to their resettlement in a third country. And Palestinian refugees who could not be integrated or resettled will find themselves facing a legal limbo.

Waiting for a just and fair solution

If the UNRWA merges with the UNHCR, Palestinian refugees and their descendants will either be integrated or resettled and as a result will no longer be recognised as refugees and lose all hope for repatriation. This is what Netanyahu wants - ending the Palestinian refugee problem by dissolving their refugee status and alongside their right to return to their homeland.

The UNRWA receives its mandate from the UN General Assembly and the assembly members have long been supporting of the agency. But UNRWA's current mandate ends on June 30, 2017, and Netanyahu will try his best to influence the next UN General Assembly vote on the future of the agency.

The UNRWA should continue to exist until a just and fair solution for the Palestinian refugee problem materialises. When members of the UN General Assembly are voting on UNRWA's mandate, we hope that they will remember the words of the UN Security Council Mediator, Folke Bernadotte, who in 1948 noted that "No settlement can be just and complete ... if these innocent victims of the conflict were denied the right to return to their homes."

Bernadotte was assassinated by a Zionist group in 1948 for defending the right of return for Palestinian refugees. The innocent victims he died defending continue to suffer a grave injustice by not being able to return to their homes. In the middle of this injustice, the UNRWA is the only UN agency that can continue to protect and serve Palestinian refugees without stripping them of their right of return. Therefore, saving the UNRWA means saving Palestinian refugees.

Hanin Abou Salem is a political analyst and researcher. She holds an MA (Hons) in International Relations, a BA (Hons) in Social Sciences and a second BA (Hons) in International Relations. She is currently completing a PhD in International Law focusing on the right of return for Palestinian refugees under International Law.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial policy.

(Al Jazeera)

The world has abandoned South Sudanese refugees

Despite receiving only limited funds from international organisations, Uganda has given a warm welcome to refugees.

By Khairunissa Dhala

At just 37 years of age, Joyce has seen it all. She's stared into the abyss of human cruelty and lived to tell the story. In September 2016, soldiers stormed her home in Kajo Keji, South Sudan, which she shared with her husband and their children. They tied her husband's arms behind his back and stabbed him multiple times until he lay dead.

A single mother with nine children to feed, Joyce decided to run away - to escape the violence in her native land. So she joined the hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese people fleeing southwards to Uganda.

But although the trek to Uganda by foot has reduced her risk of being shot dead or raped by soldiers or rebels, her life is still a painful daily struggle. She still lacks basic supplies, including food, water or shelter.

And she's not alone, thousands upon thousands of South Sudanese refugees in Uganda - nearly two-thirds of them children - are living in despicable conditions due to a shameful failure by the international community to fund refugee efforts in Uganda, a country that has continued to welcome refugees, despite its limited resources.

The world's wealthiest countries are not doing enough to support these refugees.

UN funding appeals for refugees remain grossly underfunded, leaving millions of refugees in destitute conditions, and dismally few resettlement places are being offered, contrary to international obligations for responsibility-sharing among states. The international community must step up and show its support to Uganda and the refugees it has given a warm welcome. Their lives depend on it.

With more than 900,000 South Sudanese refugees already on its territory, and with thousands more arriving each day, Uganda is facing one of the world's biggest refugee crises.

Known and praised for its progressive refugee policy, Uganda has kept its doors open to refugees against financial odds, but it is buckling under the pressure and needs global support.

Under this policy, refugees are given pieces of land to live on and farm, and have equal access to basic services as citizens, including healthcare and education. They also have the right to work and own businesses.

The authorities aim for refugees to be self-sufficient within five years - and to no longer have to rely on aid agencies.

And yet the international community has still failed to provide Uganda and its refugees with adequate support. By May 2017, the South Sudan Refugee Response Plan for Uganda was only 15 percent funded. In 2016, it was funded up to 51.4 percent.

Not only does this lack of funding risk the sustainability of Uganda's progressive refugee policy, it also has a direct and devastating impact on refugees' lives.

Amnesty International spoke to more than 80 South Sudanese refugees in settlements across four districts of northern Uganda, as part of a recent report, all of whom gave harrowing accounts of the human rights abuses they had fled from, including killings, rape and torture. Some of them, like Joyce, saw their loved ones being killed.

But instead of full support to live in dignity in Uganda, they have been left struggling to cope. Even the most vulnerable, such as trauma victims with urgent mental health needs, have been neglected.

Over 64 percent of the refugees from South Sudan in Uganda are children under the age of 18. Many are at risk and in need of urgent support.

Yet appeals by the Ugandan government, the United Nations and aid agencies have fallen on deaf ears. But it is not too late.

Donor countries, including the United States, the European Union and its member states, Australia, Canada, China and Japan, have an opportunity to change this tomorrow at the Uganda Solidarity Summit on Refugees in Kampala. The international community must step up and show its support to Uganda and the refugees it has given a warm welcome. Their lives depend on it. Khairunissa Dhala is a researcher on refugee and migrant rights at Amnesty International.

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(Al Jazeera)

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Religious scholars' role in society

Afghan society is an Islamic society. Ulema or religious scholars are among important individuals of this society. They can have good impact on people.

Afghan people expect much from religious scholars and want them to show their opposing stance against any unfair act in the country, particularly terrorist attacks which are carried out by anti-government elements including the Taliban insurgents. TheUlema Council is responsible to raise its criticism against deadly attacks of militants.Suicide attack is inhuman and nefarious act and is against teachings of Islam.

The Ulema Council should launch different awareness campaigns and gatherings in a bid to deliver the message of Islam to insurgents and tell them to stop training militancy.

Ramin Khan,Kabul, Afghanistan

Letter to editor will be edited for policy, content and clarity. All letters must have the writer's name and address. You may send your letters to: afghanistantimes@gmail.com

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On ISIL, Arab TV and post-ideological politics

By Jamil Khader

Saudi-owned TV channel MBC finally caved in to the barrage of scathing criticism of its Ramadan series, Black Crows, pulling it off air after only 20 episodes.

MBC has marketed the Black Crows series as the stories of women who join the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, known as ISIS) group for different reasons. These women (a former Egyptian belly dancer in search for her son, a Syrian refugee, an undercover journalist who happens to be Christian, a fugitive Saudi woman convict who bludgeoned her husband to death for cheating on her, and two Gulf women who are looking for marriage) soon realise the depth of the trap which they have fallen into and become disillusioned with ISIL after witnessing the horrors, savagery and inhumanity of its rule.

Critics have pointed out that the series trivialises the rise of the ISIL and the scope of its regional and global power. It is focusing instead on the sensational aspects of the private sphere, including sexual jihad (jihad al-nikah), personal intrigues and the power struggle between various ISIL members in its de facto capital city Raqqa in Syria, where the events of the series unfold. As such, critics contend that the series decontextualises ISIL and offers no substantive treatment of its rise.

But the main problem with Black Crows goes beyond its superficiality. The series has fallen victim to the US-led post-ideological approach Arab countries are adopting in fighting terrorism and therefore toes the line of Western counterterrorism ideas.

It is important here to note that MBC TV Director Ali Jaber participated in a meeting of the anti-ISIL coalition in Washington in March, where Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and the Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi were also in attendance. Jaber was scheduled to speak about "how to achieve victory" in the electronic fight against ISIL and its electronic jihad.

The series often reframes savage terrorist practices within a paradigm of moral relativism and shows the terrorist ISIL fighter in his humanity and suffering.

The series reflects the impasse and contradictions of post-ideological politics. Everyone is allegedly united in the fight against this terrorist pandemic, regardless of religious creed, political persuasion, or ideological conviction. But ideology and politics happened to be at the very heart of the problem.

Moral relativism

Thematically, as expected, Black Crows renounces terrorism and repackages Islamic teachings in the language of tolerance, love, and peace. But the counterterrorism aesthetics of the series is undercut by its inability to distance itself from the language of ISIL's political theology.

ISIL leaders and militants' basic theological beliefs about the main tenets of Islam are not really challenged throughout the series. Even characters who become disillusioned with ISIL are not heard condemning its ideology and instead remain silent.

In an interview with NPR, Ali Jaber hints at the difficulty of representation of ISIL in the series: "We are fighting against a very formidable enemy because it is using the words of God". He also adds that "ISIS did not come out from emptiness," adding, "It came out from some of the wrong religious teachings that have been going on in our societies for a very long time." The most the series could do was try to renounce terrorism and preach that ISIL does not represent the true Islamic faith. But even the condemnation of extremism in the series does not rest on solid ground. The series often reframes savage terrorist practices within a paradigm of moral relativism and shows the terrorist ISIL fighter in his humanity and suffering. In the larger context of the moral and discursive ambiguity of the series, however, these techniques can muddy matters even more and undermine the demonisation of ISIL as an evil terrorist organisation. For example, the handsome emir of the ISIL cell in Raqqa is presented as both a sociopathic monster and a compassionate, charismatic, romantic man, who is a victim of family psychodrama. In one scene, the emir is seen cuddling with his lover Malika, who offers to help him in his rule over the cell. The emir answers in the negative, saying that "if you wish to help me, let me feel that I'm a human being," adding, "Outside this room, I'm not a human being; I am a monster, I do horrible things, horrible". The moral complexity and humanity of the evil terrorist is reduced to a caricature for the pleasure of international liberal audiences, for whom the series provided English subtitles. Ignoring Palestine The impasse of post-ideological politics is also seen in the series' attempt to condemn ISIL's position on Palestine. In one of their communiques, ISIL states that jihad in Palestine, is just one dimension of world jihad, rejecting the idea that it should "take precedence over jihad elsewhere".

(Al Jazeera)

Germany's BSI says company executives being targeted by cyber attacks

Germany's federal cyber-security agency, BSI, said on Friday the private email inboxes of German executives and government employees were being targeted by professional cyber attacks. Selected executives are being sent deceptively real-looking "spear-phishing" emails. They claim to have noticed irregularities in the use of the inbox or offer new security functions, the BSI said in a statement. Germany is heading for elections in September, and security experts have warned that officials might face cyber attacks like those that occurred before elections in France and the United States over the past year. The attacks identified by BSI ask users to click on a link and put their passwords into the website that then opens. If they do, the attackers can get access to their personal inbox.

Yahoo and Gmail accounts were targeted in the attacks. The BSI said it had prevented an attack on the government networks.

BSI President Arne Schoenbohm said the BSI generally could detect such phishing attempts, but private email inboxes were beyond its remit, which made them an attractive target.

"The attack infrastructure used is similar to that used in the attacks on and resulting leaks from the Democrats in the U.S. and against the French En Marche movement," the BSI said.

U.S. intelligence agencies have concluded Russia orchestrated a wide-ranging influence operation that included email hacking and online propaganda, in an effort to discredit presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and help Donald Trump win the White House in November. The German government has warned political parties to step up their defences against hacking after emails from the campaign of Emmanuel Macron were leaked just before he was elected president of France.

(AP)

Britain and US 'already have Plans A, B and C for taking out the entire North Korean leadership'

Elite special forces would most likely parachute in and eliminate Kim Jong-Un and his regime as they did with Osama Bin Laden, believes former Navy SEAL Brandon Webb

Britain and the US already have 'Plans A, B and C' for how they would take out the entire North Korean leadership, the Mirror can reveal.

Elite forces are already being trained for a scenario in which they are ordered to eliminate Kim Jong-Un and his military advisers, former Navy SEAL Brandon Webb said.

The 43-year-old spent 13 years in the US Armed Forces and later took charge of the SEAL's Sniper School which trained Chris Kyle whose exploits the film American Sniper were based on.

"I think it would be very easy for the UK or the US to, if they wanted, swiftly take out the entire North Korean leadership," said Mr Webb.

"Very quickly, with a special operations unit.

"The intelligence capability and the special ops capability we have today is incredible. "Most people have no idea really how effective the US and the UK are at conducting these missions." The 105-storey Ryugyong Hotel, the highest building under construction in North Korea

The rhetoric between the United States and North Korea has been heating up for months - especially since the election of Donald Trump. Kim Jong-Un has defied international sanctions and continued to develop a nuclear programme - regularly testing ballistic missiles by sending them into the sea. Last month, North Korea accused the US and South Korea of plotting to kill Kim Jong Un with a biochemical substance and demanded several "terror suspects" be handed over to face punishment.

And tensions increased again this week when a 22-year-old student who had been arrested and jailed in North Korea for stealing a propaganda poster died upon his return to the US .

Otto Warmbier was returned with severe brain damage and died just days later.

His family claim he suffered "torturous mistreatment" while locked up and President Trump branded North Korea a "brutal regime". Mr Webb, who is now retired and runs a media company for veterans, said the US would most likely model an assassination mission on the killing of Osama Bin Laden.

In 2011, a team of around 20 US Navy SEALs flew into Pakistan and took out the terror leader as he was holed up in a compound. An image of then-President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton watching Operation Neptune Spear unfold from the White House became one of the most iconic of all time. Barack Obama and members of the national security team watch the raid which killed Osama Bin laden (Photo: Getty Images)

"There are probably already Plans A, B, C in place," said Mr Webb. "For when the situation dictates, that's part of what military and special ops community do. "They constantly rehearse scenarios, to deal with modern day threats. "It would come completely with the element of surprise like how they orchestrated the OBL raid. "They flew into Pakistan, completely undetected, and really didn't ask permission until after the fact. "I think it would be conducted in similar fashion. "For the US it would be Delta Force - they would be the operational element. "TF-160 helicopters doing a high altitude, high opening parachute op from 20,000-plus feet from across the border of South Korea. "And then fly that under canopy, undetected because radar can't pick up the canopy. "There's all sorts of scenarios." For all the inflammatory words, experts remain divided on just how dangerous the threat is posed by Kim Jong-Un and his regime.

(MIRROR)

CENTRAL ASIA

Ilham Aliyev: Int'l community recognizes Nagorno-Karabakh as an integral part of Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan's stance on the settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is clear, President Ilham Aliyev said on Friday. Azerbaijan has repeatedly stated that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should be resolved within its territorial integrity on the basis of the norms and principles of international law, and there is no other way, said President Aliyev addressing the opening ceremony of a plant for the production of components for 40x46 mm MSGL 40-type grenade launchers in country's Shirvan city, APA reported. "Nagorno-Karabakh is our historical land. Our people have lived in these lands for centuries, and all the toponyms and all historical monuments reflect the history of Azerbaijan," he said. President Aliyev pointed out that the international community recognized Nagorno-Karabakh as an integral part of Azerbaijan. He reminded that all leading international organizations have adopted numerous decisions and resolutions that demand an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied Azerbaijani territories.

(AP)

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, under right conditions, open to deployment to Syria

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have denied that they are in talks to send troops as part of a peacekeeping mission, contradicting statements from a day earlier by Russian and Turkish officials. But another Russian official confirmed that the talks were going on, and there seemed to be enough wiggle room in Astana and Bishkek to suggest that such a deployment is not out of the question. "Kazakhstan is not negotiating with anyone about sending its service personnel to Syria," Kazakhstan's foreign minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov told media in Astana on June 23, the day after a senior Russian official said that Kazakhstan was doing just that. The response from Bishkek was less categorical. "This issue has been raised only on the level of the Permanent Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and we have not received any further proposals," said Temir Dzhumakadyrov, the secretary of Kyrgyzstan's security council. The CSTO is a Russia-led security bloc that includes Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as well as Armenia, Belarus, and Tajikistan. "Information about the possible deployment of our soldiers to Syria are not entirely correct. The issue is only a peacekeeping contingent."

(Trend)

Nazarbayev proposed to create electronic database of famous Kazakh people

President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev proposed to create an electronic database of famous Kazakh people. "The historical motherland must know its talented congeners who, despite the fact that spent their life outside Kazakhstan, made Kazakh people known with their skills and art. I order the Government to create an electronic database of famous Kazakh people," said N. Nazarbayev at the plenary session of the V world forum of Kazakh people. In his words, "it will open the way for Kazakh people who live outside their historical motherland". "Revival of public conscience is revival of all the Kazakhs. Unity is unity of all the Kazakh people. It is the main issue.

(Kazaq)

Russia, Kyrgyzstan agree to boost bilateral ties

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his visiting Kyrgyz counterpart Almazbek Atambayev agreed to develop bilateral relations, the Kremlin said Tuesday. "We coordinated new large-scale tasks on developing bilateral relations, which are reflected in the just-signed Declaration on Strengthening the Alliance and Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Kyrgyz Republic," Putin told a news conference, according to a Kremlin statement. Putin said the declaration and other documents signed during Atambayev's visit to Moscow will help promote Russian-Kyrgyz cooperation in various areas. "In the past 25 years, relations between our countries developed in all areas based on mutual respect and consideration for each other's interests and have reached the level of strategic partnership," Putin said. He added that Moscow continues to help the economy of the central Asian republic, adding: "Russia annually provides $30 million to support the state budget of Kyrgyzstan."

(AP)

EU citizens respond to Theresa May's offer to let them stay in UK: Do we have to?

Prime Minister Theresa May has announced that EU citizens currently in the UK will be granted residency after Brexit as if that's something any of them would ever actively choose to do. She made the offer to various European leaders who were faintly baffled that they had to listen to this mad old woman when they could be having their photos taken with Emmanuel Macron. "Do we have to?" asked Polish IT worker Simon Williamsz. "I mean, don't get me wrong, Great Britain is a lovely country with many, many amusing panel shows, but the people have voted to leave EU and break their economy. "It is like the old Polish proverb of the happy dog that is very happy and then one day decides to saw off his legs for no good reason." Romanian fruit picker Symon Vlliams agreed..

"No. No. There is fruit in other country. I will travel to country that doesn't always vote very, very stupid person to be their leader and have good life where people don't vote for mad things." Once again, it seems that the Prime Minister has misjudged the mood of human beings, and the EU is being urged to prepare itself for another migration crisis as millions of Europeans flee this basket-case of a country to somewhere sensible.

(AFP)

Intense fighting in Mosul as Iraqi forces close in on Islamic State

Dramatic footage has emerged of Iraqi forces battling with Islamic State fighters in the Old City of Mosul. Officers are seen moving under heavy gunfire in the video as jihadists defend their remaining stronghold. Loud bursts of gunfire echoed through the Old City's maze of alleyways and narrow streets, with US-backed Iraqi forces using hand grenades as they slowly advanced. Iraqi forces have been using guns and hand grenades as they try to drive out IS

The battle for the Old City is becoming the deadliest in the eight-month offensive to capture Mosul, Islamic State's de facto capital in Iraq. It is estimated more than 100,000 civilians - half of them children - remain trapped in old, fragile houses in the city, with little access to food, water and medicine. As fighting intensified, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al Abadi expressed confidence that the "liberation" of the city of Mosul from IS will be announced within days.

On Thursday, IS fighters blew up the historic al Nuri mosque, where leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi declared a "caliphate" in 2014.

The jihadists detonated explosives inside the structures and destroyed its iconic leaning minaret, with many Iraqis expressing shock and anger. Some analysts believe the mosque's destruction could speed up operations to drive IS out of Mosul, while Mr al Abadi said the group's actions amounted to an "official acknowledgement of defeat". The iconic al Nuri mosque lies in ruins after being blown up by desperate jihadists

Safaa al Asam, a security expert based in Baghdad, told the Reuters news agency: "(Islamic State) had said they would fight until their last breath defending the mosque. "The fact is that they are no longer capable of standing in the face of Iraqi government forces." A spokesman for the US-led coalition assisting in the Iraqi effort to defeat IS has said there are two square kilometres left in west Mosul before the entire city is liberated.

(BBC)

US urges China to pressure North Korea to rein in weapons progams

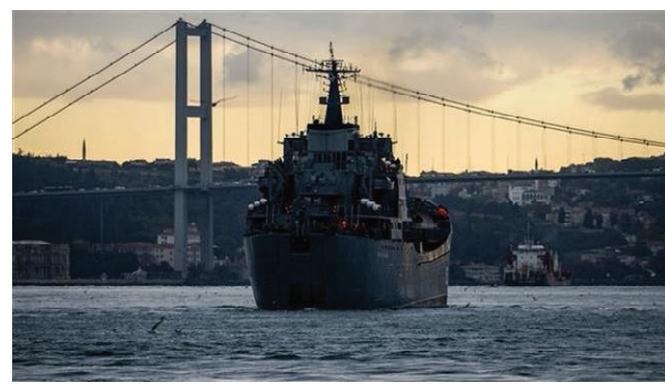
US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has urged China to help pressure North Korea to rein in its weapons programs. "[China has a] diplomatic responsibility to exert much greater economic and diplomatic pressure on the regime if they want to prevent further escalation in the region," he said in Washington. Tillerson said North Korea was the "top security threat" to the US. Tillerson made the comments at a press conference after high-level talks with Chinese officials at the State Department. Read more: Trump 'furious' over Seoul's North Korea 'appeasement' Defense Secretary Jim Mattis vowed at the same press conference to "continue to take necessary measures to defend ourselves and our allies" against North Korea, which is working to develop a nuclear-tipped missile capable of hitting the US.

The meeting of top US and Chinese diplomats and defense chiefs came just a day after US President Donald Trump said China's efforts to use its leverage with Pyongyang had failed. On Tuesday, Trump posted a tweet suggesting Chinese President Xi Jinping's efforts were ineffective, a message he reiterated before supporters in Iowa. "I do like President Xi," he told the crowd Wednesday evening. "I wish we would have a little more help with respect to North Korea, from China. That doesn't seem to be working." Trump did not elaborate on what might happen next if China fails to rein in its ally.

Complicated position

Trump's approach to North Korea was further complicated by the death of American university student Otto Warmbier earlier this week, after he was recently released in a comatose state 17.

Russia fires cruise missiles at Daesh in Syria, doesn't inform US



Russian vessels deployed to the Mediterranean have fired cruise missiles at Daesh targets inside Syria, the Russian Defense Ministry says. The missiles were fired from two Russian warships and a submarine at targets inside the western Syrian province of Hama on Friday, it said. "As a result of the surprise mass missile strike, command points were destroyed and also large stores of weapons and ammunition of the IS (Daesh) terrorists in the area of Aqirbat in the Hama Province," the ministry said. It added that Russian planes then carried out aerial strikes that "destroyed the remainder of the IS fighters and their facilities." Russia has also been conducting an aerial bombardment campaign against terrorist positions in Syria on a request by Damascus. Russia has been conducting cruise missile strikes and aerial attacks against terrorist positions in Syria on a request from the Syrian government. Russia 'nearly 100 percent certain Baghdadi has been killed'

Meanwhile on Friday, Viktor Ozerov, the head of the defense committee in the upper house of the Russian parliament, said Russia was almost 100 percent sure that the leader of Daesh, Ibrahim al-Samarrai aka Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, had been killed in an airstrike carried out by the Russian Air Force in Syria last month.

(PressTV)

Foreign direct investment in Turkey hits $765m in April

Turkey attracted $765 million in foreign direct investment (FDI) in April 2017, the Economy Ministry said on June 22.

According to a statement issued by the ministry, Turkey received $3.6 billion net of FDI between January and April this year, indicating an increase of 2 percent compared to the same period in 2016.

In the first quarter of 2017, over 1,750 new companies funded by international capital were established in Turkey, while more than 60 domestic firms received capital from foreign participants from the wholesale, retail trade, property renting, and construction sectors. As of April, of nearly 55,000 companies that benefit from foreign funds or participation, 40 percent are linked to the EU member countries. Financial intermediaries have received the most foreign direct investment with $1 billion, followed by the community, social and personal service sector -- $540 million. The manufacturing industry received more than $480 million in FDI between January and April.

(AP)

Telecom Egypt to secure $720m loan to develop services

Egypt's state-owned landline monopoly Telecom Egypt will secure a loan of up to $720.22 million (13 billion Egyptian pounds) to improve infrastructure and mobile internet services, Chief Executive Ahmed El Beheiry told Reuters on Thursday. The board approved the loan conditions on Wednesday, and El Beheiry said it would be paid back over eight years.

Telecom Egypt was the first company to buy a 4G licence from the government in August last year for 7.08 billion Egyptian pounds, and expects to begin offering mobile services in September.

(BBC)

Black Sea region bank gives first ruble loan in Russia

Bank operating under Black Sea Economic Cooperation extends first ruble-denominated $17M loan to Russian bank

A regional bank under the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) is providing a loan in rubles to a local Russian bank as its first local currency loan in the country, the bank announced on Thursday. The 1 billion-Russian ruble (about $17 million) loan will be used by Center-Invest Bank (CIB), a leading local private bank based in southern Russia, to support the development and expansion of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), according to the loaning institution, the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB).

"The BSTDB is actively developing much-needed local currency financing in member countries, including Russia. We are happy to provide our first facility in rubles to the long-term partner CIB," Ihsan Ugur Delikanli, the Black Sea bank's president, said in a statement.

"This new facility will mitigate foreign exchange risks for CIB, and help increase funding for local businesses in the local currency," Delikanli added. The statement noted that CIB is ranked among top 15 Russian banks on SME lending focusing on the agriculture, manufacturing, and transportation sectors via its over 130 branches.

The BSTDB, headquartered in Greece, provides a wide range of financial services to enhance economic development and regional cooperation among its member countries with its over 3.45 billion euros (some $3.85 billion) in authorized capital. The bank operates under the BSEC, which was founded in 1992 as a multilateral political and economic initiative aimed at peace, stability and prosperity in the region. Last month, member countries met in Istanbul, Turkey for its 25th anniversary summit and inaugurated the organization's new permanent international secretariat office.

(CNN)

US economy could lose momentum with another rate hike

There is downside risks to another US rate hike this year says Fraser Lundie Co-Head of Credit at Hermes Investment Management, pointing to the effect recent Fed hikes have had on inflation. He told Daybreak Europe's Markus Karlsson that another rate hike could bolster the risk for growth slowing in the US. Lundie also weighed in on European bonds and Greek debt as EU leaders prepared to discuss Brexit in their first summit since talks began.

This is a Bloomberg podcast. To download, watch or listen to this report now, click on the thumbnail/player on the sidebar.

Singapore industrial production data rose by 5pc

Singapore Industrial production for the month of May grew for the 10th consecutive month from a year earlier, aided by strong electronics output.

Singapore Industrial production for the month of May grew for the 10th consecutive month from a year earlier, aided by strong electronics output.

The chemicals and precision engineering clusters registered output growth of 19.1% and 5.3%, respectively. The electronics segment output grew 35.1% on YoY basis in May, although a dip from the revised 48.2% annual growth from the month before. While the biomedical manufacturing, transport engineering and general manufacturing clusters contracted to 9.0%, 12.8% and 22.2%, respectively. On MoM basis and seasonally adjusted basis, industrial production fell by more-than-expected 3.5% in May.

The median forecast was for a contraction of 0.7%.

(AP)

UAE energy minister sees no need for extraordinary OPEC talks

The United Arab Emirates energy minister said on Saturday he saw no need for an extraordinary meeting of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries ahead of regular talks in November.

OPEC holds its next regular meeting in Vienna on Nov. 30.

"No one is talking about extraordinary.

We are at the beginning of the agreement, I think we need to give it a little bit of time," Suhail bin Mohammed al-Mazrouei told reporters in Dubai.

OPEC and non-members led by Russia decided on May 25 to extend cuts in oil output by nine months to March 2018 as they battle a global glut of crude.

Mazrouei also said he expected demand for oil to pick up in the third quarter of the year.

"The third quarter is coming and the holidays are coming and demand will pick up. This is typical - at the end of the second quarter every year, you have a slowdown."

(Alarabiya)

Up to 500 000 new work places to be created after transfer into "green" economy in Kazakhstan

Transfer into the "green" economy guarantees creation of about 500 000 new work places, said Maulen Ashimbayev, Majilis deputy.

"According to the calculation of Kazakhstani experts, transformation within the frameworks of green economy will increase the GDP of Kazakhstan by 3% and create more than 500 000 new work places until 2050. Thus, we believe that development of renewable energy sources is an important factor of our economy modernization," he said at the international parliamentary conference "Legislative provision of innovations' economy".

He added renewable energy sources provide only 1% of electric power in Kazakhstan.

"However, in fact 11-12% of electric power are produced through hydro-power. However, the equipment needs update," he added. He said "green" scenario of development will increase the world GDP by 16% until 2050, revenues per capita will increase by 14%. Energy demand will go down by 40%, water demand- by 22%.

(Kazaq)

India govt asks Apple to re-submit investment plan with job creation details

Indian government, in a sudden change of stance, has asked Apple to re-submit their proposed investment details, to avail tax benefits for making devices in the country.

Apple, earlier in the year, had discussions with several ministries and sectaries, in both central and state (Karnataka) government, to seek tax sops, including custom duty exemption on procurement of components for assembling and repair units, capital equipment for a period of 15 years, alter FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) norms that require 30 percent domestic sourcing, to set up single-branded Apple retail stores and permission to sell refurbished iPhones in India.

But, Indian government was not so keen on the proposal, as the government felt allowing such special arrangements for Apple would be unfair to mobile-makers in India, who assemble devices under Make-in-India initiative's Modified Special Incentive Package Scheme (MSIPS) and the Electronics Development Fund (EDF), which offers property tax holiday for a limited number of years and a few other benefits.

Despite getting a negative response, Apple, in May, gave nod to its official OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) Wistron Corporation to assemble iPhone SE at its plant in Peenya, the western industrial hub of Bengaluru.

Probably encouraged by Apple's initiative, government ministries including revenue, electronics and information technology, and industry have asked the Cupertino-based company to send a detailed proposal including investment and also job creation figures, PTI reported.

If Apple does get the tax sops from the government, it will be able to pass on the benefits to the consumers by cutting the prices of the devices.

The company need not have to pay any customs duty (around 12.5 percent on MRP) on locally manufactured devices and there will be at least around Rs.10,000 to Rs. 12,000 reduction in the price. Meaning, all Apple products' price will be in parity with US , China and other developed markets.

(IBTIMES)

Judwaa 2: Varun Dhawan, Taapsee Pannu, Jacqueline Fernandez practice for Tan Tana Tan

Don't miss Varun Dhawan, Taapsee Pannu and Jacqueline Fernandez in this new song, titled Tan Tana Tan, from director David Dhawan's Judwaa 2. The film is a sequel to Salman Khan's 1997 hit Judwaa.

Bollywood actors Varun Dhawan, Taapsee Pannu and Jacqueline Fernandez are currently shooting for their upcoming film, Judwaa 2. The movie is a sequel to Salman Khan's 1997 hit Judwaa that also starred Karisma Kapoor and Rambha. A still from Salman Khan-Karisma's Tan Tana Tan.

HT?had earlier reported that Tan Tana Tan and Oonchi Hai Building from the Salman film will be used in the new movie. A video has now emerged which shows the actors rehearsing for Tan Tana Tan:?It has the three actors grooving to the song, with choreographer Ganesh Acharya calling the shots. The sequel to 1997 Judwaa 2 will feature Varun Dhawan playing the dual characters of Raja and Prem along side Jacqueline and Taapsee.

Meanwhile, Varun shared a picture of Taapsee and him in the gym proving that the two are new gym buddies. Sources close to the stars told Hindustan Times that they spend time working out together and sharing fitness tips and regimes with each other. Taapsee, who also plays squash, even took Varun to court and played with him. Produced by Sajid Nadiadwala and directed by David Dhawan, Judwaa 2 is presented by Fox Star Studios and Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment.

(Hindustan Times)

Aneri Vajani finds support in Beyhadh co-actor Jennifer Winget

Actor Jennifer Winget says it's better to unfollow an actor, who you don't approve off, rather than trolling her on social media.

Actor Aneri Vajani was recently trolled for a bikini picture she posted on Instagram for International Yoga Day. The actor was body shamed for being skinny and for being dressed inappropriately. Following this, her Beyhadh co-actor Jennifer Winget came out in support of Aneri. Winget says that calling someone skinny is as bad as calling someone fat and should not be done. "Telling someone they're skinny is the same as telling someone they're fat – neither are nice things to say. And when you have nothing nice to say, it's best not to say anything at all. By shaming each other, we're really shaming ourselves. We work hard in our jobs, just as anyone in any other profession, and at the end of the day, the last thing we want is to bother about what people think about us. If you don't approve, just unfollow us. That's easy!" Jennifer says.

Although she has not met Aneri after the incident, Jennifer says that she is not someone who gets bothered by such things. "We're shooting as usual, but at different locations, so I haven't met with her yet. But from what I know of Aneri, I can say for sure that she hasn't let this affect her or her work, the slightest bit. Neither the post nor the comments will make, break or change her as a person. She is the energy on set and she's not one to let anybody else's opinions determine her self worth," says Jennifer.

After the incident, Aneri posted an apt reply for everyone who trolled her. Check it out:

Many television actors such as Sonarika Bhadoria, have been trolled in the past for posting bikini pictures and Jennifer says she can't understand why this happens. "The bikini has been around for eons, and I can't believe we haven't grown up and moved on from it. But then again, when was it ever about the bikini, it was always about the actress wearing it! " says Jennifer.

(Hindustan Tims)

Leaked online: Shah Rukh Khan's cameo video from Salman Khan's Tubelight out

Actor Shah Rukh Khan's special appearance in Salman Khan's film Tubelight has been in the news since fans are eager to catch the two on silver screen together after a long time. The two acted in the classic film Karan Arjun (1995) and were last seen together in one frame in the song Deewangi Deewangi in the 2007 film Om Shanti Om.

Considering the not-so-pleasant relationship between the two, when they finally appeared together on reality TV show Bigg Boss — where Salman was the host and SRK came to promote his film Dilwale (2015).

But the excitement to see the two together on the big screen is so much that a video of SRK playing a magician in Salman's forthcoming film Tubelight has been leaked online, and of course are going viral. Here's a look:

Though Shah Rukh's role was kept a secret, it was speculated that he is playing a magician in the film, who Salman's character Laxman meets, at a critical point in the story.

SRK's look, as expected, is quite that of an Indian magician with kohled eyes and an embroidered colourful waistcoat. In a recent interview to an entertainment portal, filmmaker Kabir Khan said that when he suggested Salman that SRK is best suited for the cameo, Salman agreed and phoned SRK, who eventually agreed in just two minutes, to come on board for the film.

SRK's appearance was touted by trade experts as a boost to the film's collections. As the film is scheduled to release tomorrow, June 23, what remains to be seen is how the makers do the damage control now.

(Santa Banta)

Nargis Fakhri: I don't react to online trolls, because they don't pay my bills

Actor Nargis Fakhri says that trolls trying to body-shame Bollywood celebrities are wasting their time, because the celebrities are paid big bucks for their looks and clothes, and they don't care about what trolls say.

Nargis Fakhri is perhaps one of Bollywood's best foreign imports, if not for her films then definitely for her wit. Be it her link-up rumours with actor Uday Chopra or getting trolled by body-shamers, the American model-turned-actor has always maintained a rather funny approach to how she deals with it all. "I'm just funny all the time. Ask the people who work with me. We are always laughing," says the 37-year-old. There's an undercurrent of sarcasm in Nargis' social media posts as well, which hardly go unnoticed, and are often fodder for gossip. But that doesn't annoy the actor whatsoever. "There's nothing to feel about it because I don't need to pay for PR (public relations)! I'm always in the news without doing anything," she laughs. As talks veer to frequent trolling that Bollywood celebrities go through online, Nargis has her priorities sorted. "I don't react to them because those who troll are not paying my bills, so they don't have any significance in my life. I give love back to my fans. They are the ones that mean something to me and have a space in my life. I appreciate their support and positivity towards me," says the actor, who is glad to have become "somewhat immune" to mean remarks. Commenting on recent instances of actors Priyanka Chopra, Deepika Padukone and Fatima Sana Shaikh being body-shamed for their choice of clothes, Nargis says "it's more of bullying" that happens all over the world. "Celebs don't care, because they are getting paid big bucks for their looks and for what they wear. So people [who are] trolling are wasting their time, while we laugh at them all the way to the bank," quips Nargis. The actor, who has worked in films such as Rockstar (2011), Main Tera Hero (2014) and Azhar (2016), recently made her singing debut with singer-composer Parichay and Canadian musician Kardinal Offishall.

(Tribune)

Bollywood actor Ronit Roy to lock horns with NTR in Jai Lava Kusa

Best known for his work in films such as as Udaan and Ugly, Bollywood star Ronit Roy has landed a pivotal role in NTR's Jai Lava Kusa. Apparently, he has been signed to play the antagonist and he has already started shooting. The film marks his Telugu debut and he is said to be thrilled to foray into another industry. The team is currently shooting an action sequence with Ronit in a stone quarry in Hyderabad. In the film, being directed by Bobby, NTR plays triple role and will be seen romancing Nivetha Thomas and Raashi Khanna. For one of his roles, NTR will be seen wearing prosthetic and his look is being handled by Hollywood make-up artist Vance Hartwell, popular for his work in films such as The Lord of the Rings trilogy and Shutter Island. The look of the antagonist's role has already gone viral. NTR will wear prosthetic make up for this character and he will speak with a stutter. It's going to be a very interesting character with a menacing side and audiences are in for a surprise. NTR is super excited about the role as it's something he hasn't attempted before. He has always said that he likes to be challenged by his characters and this is exactly the kind of role that gives him a high. His other two roles in the film are heavily guarded and it's not quite sure what can be expected from the film. The film is being directed by Bobby and produced by NTR's brother Kalyanram.

The age gap between Salman Khan and his heroines over the years in one graph

On Friday, the Indian public will see Salman Khan perform his commonest role.?In Tubelight, for the 96th time, Bollywood's Bhaijaan will be in love with a younger woman. Salman was just 23 in 1988 when his first Bollywood film, Biwi Ho To Aisi, came out in theatres. He played Vicky Bhandari, a spoilt brat who finds a friend in Renu Arya. They were almost the same age. His second film, Maine Pyar Kiya, debuted the following year. It made Salman Khan and Bhagyashree the nation's heartthrobs. They were 23 and 20 at the time of the movie's release. Salman's career progressed to the point of superstardom, which he reached sometime in the beginning of the 2000s. With each hit, the age gap between Salman and his heroines increased. Other than Srivedi, Salman's co-star in Chandra Mukhi (1993) and Chaand Kaa Tukdaa (1994) and two years his elder, every single one of the heroines Salman was paired with was younger than him.

(Illustration: Piyush Aggarwal) Sneha Ullal of Lucky: No Time For Love (2005) was only 17 when the film was released. She is the youngest heroine Salman Khan has ever worked with. Then there was Katrina, Sonam, and Ayesha Takia, heroines in their 20s while bhai was approaching 50. Something remarkable happened with his last release, Sultan (2016), in which Anushka Sharma played his love interest. At the time of its premier, Anushka was 28 while Salman was 50. This is the biggest gap between Salman Khan. **(Hindustan Times)**

Saba Qamar's 'Hindi Medium' all set to release in parts of South America, Africa

After a roaring success in India and Pakistan, Saba Qamar and Irrfan Khan-starrer Hindi Medium is all set to release in parts of Asian markets, rest of Europe, parts of South-America and some parts of Africa. Hindi Medium, which also marks the Bollywood debut of Saba and Tanu Weds Manu fame actor Deepak Dobriyal, has collected over INR1.02 billion worldwide, including international markets like Britain, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

I was never desperate to work in Bollywood: Saba Qamar

It is now to set foot into unconventional markets on foreign shores. "Hindi Medium is a very relevant story for the audience in the overseas market. The subject hits the right chord without being too preachy," Vibha Chopra, Head at Zee Studios International (Film Marketing, Distribution and Acquisition), said in a statement. Chopra added, "While Hindi Medium has made inroads in many traditional markets, we are keen to take it to non-traditional overseas markets too. Despite all the clutter of films that surrounded Hindi Medium in the overseas market, it becomes even more imperative that a great movie like this isn't lost."

Atif Aslam croons for Saba Qamar's Bollywood debut and we love it! Released in India on May 19, the story of Hindi Medium revolves around a couple who want to give their daughter the best education possible, so that she is readily accepted by the elite in society. After Mahira Khan's Bollywood venture, Raees, Saba's Hindi Medium will be the second movie by a Pakistani actress to have entered the 100 crore club. All we can say is… way to go!

(Tribune)

Liverpool signing Mohamed Salah says he will play anywhere

Mo Salah insists he is comfortable playing anywhere across Liverpool's attacking line after joining in a £34.3m deal from Roma.

The Egypt international is predominantly a right winger but was also used as a number 10 in Serie A last term. Salah returns to the Premier League after an ill-fated stint at Chelsea in 2014-15, in which he made just six league starts before going out on loan to Fiorentina. But he insists he is an improved, more experienced player, versatile enough to play off the left-wing as well.

"Last season with Roma we played five at the back and two strikers; I was a second striker, like a number 10," he told LFCTV.

"I have played on the right. Sometimes I go on the left. I can play anywhere up front.

"(Liverpool's front players) played so well last season. Mane played a fantastic season, (Philippe) Coutinho, (Roberto) Firmino, (Adam) Lallana - all of them had a great season last year.

"I have improved 100 percent. Everything (has improved).

Even my personality was different. I was a kid (at Chelsea). I was 20 or 21. Now I'm four years older and everything is different. I have lots of experience in three clubs."

Salah, who scored 19 goals in 39 appearances for Roma last season, insists he watched Liverpool regularly last season and believes the ingredients are there to push for trophies next term.

He said: "Liverpool haven't won the Premier League for a long time. We have a great team and very good players. I was watching the games last year and everyone was giving 100 percent to win something.

"Everyone can see the coach gives everything. I hope to see that, together, we can give everything to win something for the club, for the supporters and for us."

(Sky Sport)

Jimmy Butler traded from Chicago Bulls to Minnesota Timberwolves

The Minnesota Timberwolves swung a deal with the Chicago Bulls for Jimmy Butler on Thursday, reuniting the former first-round NBA draft pick with his former coach Tom Thibodeau. NBA commissioner Adam Silver confirmed the trade during the 2017 entry draft later in the evening. Butler was dealt for Zach LaVine, Kris Dunn and the rights to Finland's Lauri Markkanen. Also going to Minnesota are the rights to Justin Patton, who was picked at No. 16 by the Bulls.

In 2011, Butler was the 30th overall pick by the Bulls. He averaged a career-high 23.9 points last season as the Bulls were 41-41 and qualified for the playoffs as the eighth seed in the Eastern Conference. Thibodeau coached Butler from 2011 to 2015. He joined the Timberwolves last season with the titles of coach and head of basketball operations.

By obtaining Butler, the Timberwolves are taking on the final three seasons of the $95 million deal he signed after the 2014-15 season.

LaVine is coming off a torn ACL. Before getting hurt, LaVine shot 46 percent and averaged a career-high 18.9 points per game.

Markkanen averaged 15.6 points and 7.2 rebounds in his only season of US college basketball at Arizona.

(BBC Sport)

Johanna Konta loses to Coco Vandeweghe at the Aegon Classic in Birmingham

Britain's Johanna Konta fell to a heavy 6-1 6-3 defeat against Coco Vandeweghe in the second round of the Aegon Classic in Birmingham. The big-hitting American was too strong for world No 7 Konta, who will now turn her attentions to the Aegon International in Eastbourne next week ahead of Wimbledon

Konta simply had no response to Vandeweghe's power in the opening set, with the world No 30 racing through it in 24 minutes after dropping just one game.

The Brit was much improved in the second set following a mid-match pep talk with coach Wim Fissette, but she was broken in the seventh game by Vandeweghe, who took the advantage at the second time of asking. Vandeweghe broke Konta once more to win the match, and she now faces Spaniard Garbine Muguruza for a place in the semis.

World number five Elina Svitolina suffered defeat at the hands of Camila Giorgi, with the Italian qualifier triumphing 6-4 4-6 6-2.

After the match, Svitolina - who was the highest-ranked player in the tournament - conceded she may have to miss Wimbledon after sustaining a foot injury on the grass court. Earlier in the day, Muguruza enjoyed a straightforward 6-1 6-4 victory over American Alison Riske, while sixth seed Kristina Mladenovic beat Shuai Zhang 6-4 7-6 (7-3). Meanwhile, Victoria Azarenka's return to competitive was halted by Ana Konjuh, who beat the former world No 1 6-1 6-3 at the Mallorca Open.

Azarenka was playing in her first tournament since June 2016, having given birth to son Leo in December.

(Sky Sport)

Promoter Eddie Hearn fears that Deontay Wilder will reject offer of Dillian Whyte fight

Deontay Wilder could make the next defence of his WBC title in September or October, but promoter Eddie Hearn fears he will reject the offer of a Dillian Whyte fight. The unbeaten American heavyweight is yet to announce his next opponent and Hearn has tried to set up a world title defence against Whyte, who is due to make his US debut this summer. But Wilder seems to have rejected the deal in an expletive-laden rant on social media. "I've made several offers to Al Haymon's team and we are awaiting a final answer, but I think Deontay made things clear on his Instagram," Hearn told Sky Sports. "It's a great offer and a great career move - a chance to earn plenty of money but also be involved in a real fight and IF he is good enough to win then it sets up a massive fight between Anthony Joshua and Deontay Wilder. Let's hope we can all be sensible and give the fans what they want - real heavyweight match-ups.

Eddie Hearn

"What I'm seeing from these camps is a reluctance to face Dillian. They know he is a handful and it's more than likely you are going to have a roll around at the press conference as well.

"Let's hope we can all be sensible and give the fans what they want - real heavyweight match-ups." Promoter Lou DiBella, who works closely with Wilder, pointed out that the 'Bronze Bomber' still has to fulfil a mandatory title defence against Bermane Stiverne. "His immediate priority is to get the biggest fight he can get, but the Bermane Stiverne fight is a reality we have to deal with," DiBella told Sky Sports. "He is still technically the WBC mandatory and we are the WBC champion."

Yorkshire sign batsman Shaun Marsh for T20 summer Blast

Shaun Marsh will join Yorkshire for this summer's NatWest T20 Blast. Marsh replaces original signing Travis Head who was recently called up to the Australia 'A' squad for their tour of South Africa in July and August. The 33-year-old Marsh has represented Australia in all three forms of international cricket and averages 39.59 in domestic Twenty20s.

Marsh, who is an experienced T20 campaigner in Australia's Big Bash and Indian Premier League, will arrive in the UK this Sunday and will be ready to play Yorkshire's first North Group match against Notts Outlaws on July 7.

He said: "I'm looking forward to meeting up with the boys and getting started. I've only heard positive things about the club from previous overseas players and can't wait to be involved.

"I've played in a lot of T20 competitions now and hopefully I can bring most of what I've learned over the years to the group and have a really successful campaign. "I think we've got a really experienced team with a lot of talented players. Hopefully we can get some momentum going early and put some good performances on the board. "Having never played at Headingley, I'm really excited by the prospect of that too." Marsh will follow in a long line of Australians to play for Yorkshire in recent years, including Peter Handscomb who will also be available this summer. Yorkshire's director of cricket Martyn Moxon added: "It was obviously a bit of a blow to see Travis pull out, but to secure the services of Shaun is a massive coup for us.

"To get someone of his calibre, with his ability in both formats of the game - in T20 and potentially red-ball cricket as well - and at such short notice is fantastic news."

(BBC Sport)

Henrik Stenson to compete in Hero Challenge at Scottish Open

Henrik Stenson has signed up to compete in the second edition of the Hero Challenge ahead of the Aberdeen Asset Management Scottish Open next month. The Open champion will be among eight European Tour stars for the innovative one-hole knockout contest at Dundonald Links in Ayrshire, with Alexander Levy defending the title he claimed in the inaugural staging of the event at the British Masters last year. Stenson and Levy will be joined by six other professionals as television host Vernon Kay presents the action on Tuesday, July 11, and fans can secure free entry to the Hero Challenge by booking at www.lostintv.com/hero.htm

Before the professionals bid to claim the Hero Challenge title, celebrities including former Scotland rugby player and Strictly Come Dancing star Thom Evans and Westlife alum Brian McFadden will entertain the crowd with their own knock-out contest. They will be joined by a host of additional stars, who will be announced in the coming weeks.

The action at Dundonald will be take place over a specially constructed par three hole on the 18th and will be broadcast live on Sky Sports from 7.30 to 8.30pm, as well as across the European Tour's global broadcast platform and on www.europeantour.com

The exciting night golf event made its debut at The Grove last October, when Frenchman Levy upstaged the likes of Luke Donald, Shane Lowry and Andrew "Beef" Johnston as he triumphed in the sudden-death shoot-out hole under floodlights and in front of 3,000 fans. Following that successful opening event, the Hero Challenge is returning with three editions in 2017, firstly at the Aberdeen Asset Management Scottish Open, before returning to the British Masters supported by Sky Sports at Close House and then finishing at the DP World Tour Championship at Jumeirah Golf Estates.

European Tour chief executive Keith Pelley said: "The inaugural Hero Challenge proved hugely popular with players and spectators last year, and we are delighted, with the support of Hero MotoCorp, to expand the concept to three tournaments this year, starting at the Aberdeen Asset Management Scottish Open.

"We have embraced shorter formats like the Hero Challenge and the recent GolfSixes tournament to appeal to new audiences and this one-hole straight knockout contest provides fast-paced entertainment, whilst showcasing the considerable skill of our players."

The Aberdeen Asset Management Scottish Open will be the fourth event in the European Tour's new Rolex Series, a premium category of tournaments on the Race to Dubai with minimum prize funds of $7million.

As well as a world-class field competing inside the ropes at Dundonald Links, the Hero Challenge is part of a variety of entertainment options for spectators to enjoy outside the ropes, including a free American Golf show, a host of family entertainment and a wide selection of food from local suppliers.

Fans can buy tickets to see some of the world's best golfers competing on the Ayrshire coast - including official Aberdeen Asset Management Scottish Open hospitality packages - at www.aamscottishopen.com/tickets

All men's Scottish Open tickets guarantee free entry to the Aberdeen Asset Management Ladies Scottish Open just two weeks later, on 27-30 July, at the same venue.

(Sky Sport)

Chris Froome says Richie Porte his biggest Tour de France rival on course that doesn't suit

Chris Froome feels this year's Tour de France course doesn't suit him because of a lack of mountain top finishes and fewer time trial kilometres. Froome will lead Team Sky's bid for a fifth Tour success and wouldn't be surprised if a former team-mate and lieutenant - Richie Porte - turns out to be his main rival. Porte has been in fine form this year, winning the Tour Down Under and Tour of Romandie, while Froome goes into the three-week race looking for his first win of any kind in 2017. Froome told Sky Sports News HQ: "I don't think this year's course necessarily suits me as well as previous Tour de France courses have.

"I say that because of the lack of mountain top finishes and also the lack of time-trial kilometres. Having said that, it means that it's going to be a lot closer race and a lot more exciting for the fans. "Every Tour is a different race. I can't just rely on what I did the year before. I have to always try to look to improve, try and look at upping my game. "I'm going to have to make sure I'm absolutely at my best and to take advantage of any situations out on the road."

(Sky Sport)

Michael Bell reports Big Orange in top form after Gold Cup heroics

Big Orange is "bright as a button" after his Gold Cup heroics at Royal Ascot on Thursday. Michael Bell's popular stayer made most of the running under James Doyle and held off last year's winner Order Of St George in a thrilling finish. A hoarse-sounding Bell said: "We're all back at home, with no runners today at Ascot.

"He got back last night, he's bright as a button. His legs are ice cold and he looks very pleased with himself. "They didn't get back until 9pm last night so it is a very long day and an arduous race, but he's got a very good constitution and the initial signs are he's as bright as a button. "Training racehorses is a roller-coaster of emotions, the highs are huge and yesterday was a massive high. "It's the feature race of Royal Ascot. It's a massively historic race with loads of tradition attached to it. It takes a mighty horse to win over two and a half miles. "When the commentator said they'd just past halfway after a mile and a quarter you think, 'Oh my god', but James Doyle gave him a wonderful ride.

"He got the fractions absolutely spot-on." Bell believes there could still be more to come from Big Orange, who will now attempt to win the Goodwood Cup for a third consecutive year. The Newmarket handler said: "We wanted to run him in the Gold Cup last year but the ground was on the slow side. "Hopefully this time next year he'll be back at Royal Ascot defending his crown.

"He's probably peaking. This maybe is his peak, but I'm hoping he won't go downhill - he'll only be seven next year. "He's won the last two (Goodwood Cups) so he'll now go there and try to chalk up the hat-trick." When asked about the chances of Big Orange running in the Melbourne Cup. **(AP)**

AFGHANISTAN TIMES

SATURDAY • JUNE 24 • 2017-Saratan 03, 1396 H·S

Vol:XI Issue No: 320 Price: Afs.20

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