IS Emergence in Afghanistan Worries UN, Russia

KABUL - The United Nations and Russia on Wednesday voiced their concerns at the emergence of the Islamic State in Afghanistan and its efforts to unite insurgents there. UNAMA Head Nicholas Haymun expressed his apprehensions while briefing the Security Council on the current situation in Afghanistan. He also touched on renewed efforts to revitalize the peace process. Attempts were ongoing to broker an end to the 12-year conflict in the country, where a UN-mandated coalition mission ended in December 2014, the diplomat said.

Haymun informed the 15-member body: “It is UNAMA’s assessment that the group’s presence is of concern, but that ISIL’s significance is not so much a function of its intrinsic capacities in the area...” However, he explained, the group’s potential to offer an alternative flagpole to the otherwise isolated Islamist groups could rally.

In his report, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said a handful of Taliban commanders had declared allegiance to Islamic State. “There is no indication of widespread or systematic support for ISIL in Afghanistan.” UN Security Council’s Special Representative and the head of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said that significant developments in Afghanistan have brought... (More on P.14)

Obama Consulting Aides on Pace of Drawdown

WASHINGTON - US President Barack Obama is consulting his national security team and military leadership on the pace of the military drawdown from Afghanistan, the White House said on Monday.

“The president has been closely coordinating with his national security team and with his commanders on the ground about the proper pace of that military drawdown,” the White House press secretary said.

He also engaged in an effort to advise and support Afghan security forces as they have taken increased responsibility for their country. (More on P.6)

Protestors Want Kidnapped Passengers Freed

GHANA - Protestors on Tuesday staged a protest demonstration in downtown Accra province against the abduction of 31 passengers, taking the government to task over steps for their safe release. The passengers were snatched from two buses on the road between southern Ghanaian town of Teshie and the capital of 1.6 million residents.

The men were returning from lunch when masked gunmen, believed to be members of the so-called Islamic State group, kidnapped them at gunpoint. The demonstrators vowed to continue... (More on P.6)

Iran, Afghanistan Sign MoU on Cultural Cooperation

KABUL - Iran and Afghanistan have signed a memorandum of understanding to expand their cooperation in cultural affairs. The MoU was signed by Iranian Cultural Attache in Kabul, Hamid Sharif, in the presence of Head of Higher Education and Research Institute in Daryakhyan Province, Mohammad Hashemi. According to the MoU, the two... (More on P.6)

Security Up in Mazari-Sharif for Nawroz Festival

MAZAR-I-SHARIF - Security officials on Tuesday assured that tight security measures would be put in place for celebrations of the Nawroz festival commencing on March 21 in Mazari-Sharif, the provincial capital of northern Balkh. Security chief of Balkh police office General Abdul Manzoor Waziri vowed to deploy a security unit at the entrance of the Nawroz festival. The security measures were... (More on P.6)

700 Arrested on Drug-Related Charges in a Year

KABUL - During the outgoing year, 7,400 litres of alcoholic beverages and 31 tons of other narcotic substances were seized and 780 people arrested on charges of trafficking drugs, a special anti-drug unit said. The special unit, which is a part of the Criminal Justice Task Force (CTF) Director Yar Mohammad Razi, and Husein Khalif told a news conference that 1,700 cases had been registered... (More on P.6)