



Pakistan's female motorists push boundaries set by men
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PROBE BLAMES MIGRANTS FOR NEW YEAR'S EVE VIOLENCE

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ISLAMABAD: In this photo released by Associated Press of Pakistan, delegates from Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and United States attend a meeting hoping to lay the roadmap for peace talks with the Taliban, at the foreign ministry. — AP

PAKISTAN HOSTS FOUR-WAY PEACE TALKS

AFGHANISTAN, CHINA, US PAVE ROADS TO PEACE

ISLAMABAD: A key gathering was underway yesterday in Islamabad with four countries - Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States - hoping to lay the roadmap to peace for the war-shattered Afghan nation. The meeting comes as Afghanistan's battlefield losses are mounting and some parts of the country are under constant threat from Taliban gunmen. Taliban representatives have not been invited to the talks, vowing to talk only to the US and not to the government in Kabul.

As the gathering got under way, host Pakistan - seen as key to bringing the warring Taliban factions to the table - cautioned of the difficulties ahead. Sartaj Aziz, adviser to the Pakistani prime minister on foreign affairs, warned against prematurely deciding which Taliban factions are ready to talk, urging instead "confidence building" measures to get even the recalcitrant Taliban to the negotiating table.

But analysts and participants say much of the hope for progress toward peace rests with Pakistan, which is accused of harboring some of the fiercest factions of the Taliban, including the Haqqani group, a US-declared terrorist organization. Pakistan says its influence over the Taliban is overrated.

Spreading resources

"Even at the best of times they (Taliban) didn't listen to us," Aziz said earlier. "Look at Bamiyan," he said, referring to the Taliban's destruction in the summer of 2001 of some of the world's most precious statues of Buddha. The Taliban blew up the statues, ignoring the roars of dissent, including from Pakistan.

The Taliban have stepped up their insurgency since the

withdrawal of NATO-led combat troops from Afghanistan a year ago, testing government forces that are forced to spread their resources across the country. But while the fight intensifies, the insurgents rarely hold territory they take for more than a few days and are often driven back by Afghan security forces, sometimes with the support of US airstrikes.

Aziz refused to say whether Pakistan has a list of Taliban representatives prepared to enter into peace negotiations. The existence of such a list was announced Sunday by Javid Faisal, deputy spokesman for Afghanistan's Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. At the start of yesterday's conference, Aziz urged that participants avoid the media and work toward finding ways to get all the Taliban to talk peace. He said the Islamabad gathering needs to define the "overall direction of the reconciliation process" and goals that would create a "conducive environment for holding direct talks between the Afghan government and Taliban groups." After Aziz's televised remarks, the meeting proceeded behind closed doors into afternoon hours.

Taliban ready for talks

Meanwhile, a breakaway Taliban group said yesterday it was ready for talks. The faction, which emerged following the revelation last year that the Taliban leader and founder Mullah Mohammed Omar had died two years ago, is believed to be relatively small and its absence from the battlefield is unlikely to be a game changer.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban have recently been on the offensive in southern Helmand province bordering Pakistan, threatening key towns, including the capital of Lashkar Gah. Most of the world's opium is produced in Helmand, which

along with other contraband helps fund the insurgency.

In the province's Sangin district, the Taliban besieging the local army base for days before reinforcements, backed by US air strikes and British military advisers, were sent in to repel the attackers. As the prospect of a peace dialogue grows, the Taliban can be expected to step up their fight in order to ensure they join any peace dialogue from a position of strength.

Imtiaz Gul, whose Center for Research and Security Studies has delved deeply into the Afghan conflict and Pakistan's decades-old involvement, says Pakistan has significant leverage with the Taliban, led by Omar's replacement Mullah Akhtar Mansoor.

Militants in both countries are allied, and getting rid of the Haqqanis, for example, could unleash a violent backlash inside Pakistan where the army has been fighting for several years to defeat a coalition of militant groups largely based in its border areas with Afghanistan, Gul said. That battle has been brutal with thousands of Pakistani soldiers killed and wounded and thousands more Pakistani civilians killed in deadly retaliatory suicide attacks by the militants.

Past practices

Gul said last month's trip by Pakistani army chief Gen. Raheel Sharif, who travelled to Afghanistan unaccompanied by the country's powerful ISI intelligence agency, long considered the force behind the Taliban, was a signal the military was ready to move away from past practices and center future policy decisions only at the army headquarters.

Changes won't come quickly, says Gul, "but important for us is to turn the page (from supporting militants) and I

think Gen. Raheel Sharif has turned that page." Though the Taliban were not invited to yesterday's talks, a senior Taliban official, who spoke on condition of anonymity fearing exposure and capture, told the AP that two Taliban delegates, currently headquartered in Qatar, will meet "soon" with China's representatives. The meeting, which will also include Pakistan, is to be held in Islamabad, said the official.

Still, there seems little to no chance for early peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government. The Taliban, struggling to consolidate their leadership council following Omar's death, have drawn their line in the sand: no official talks with Kabul on a peaceful end to their protracted and bloody war until direct talks can be held with the United States.

"We want talks with the Americans first because we consider them a direct party," the Taliban official said in a face-to-face interview with the AP. The Taliban want recognition of their Qatar office under the banner of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the name they used when they ruled Afghanistan until they were ousted by the US-led coalition in 2001. They also want the United Nations to remove the Taliban from its wanted list and they want their prisoners released from Afghan jails.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani wants no part in giving the Taliban official recognition. Maulvi Shazada Shaeid, a representative on Afghanistan's High Peace Council, tasked with seeking peace with the Taliban, said the distance between the two sides is vast, holding out little hope for peace. "In the current situation, it is not possible to bring peace," he said. — AP

AL-QAEDA THREATENS SAUDI OVER JIHADISTS' EXECUTIONS

DUBAI: The Saudi-Yemeni and North African branches of Al-Qaeda have threatened to avenge Saudi Arabia's execution of more than 40 jihadists, calling the measure a "foolish act." Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb said in an online statement Sunday that the kingdom executed the militants despite knowing that the "mujahedin have pledged to avenge the pure blood of their brothers."

The January 2 executions were a "new crime committed by the regime of Al-Saud, demonstrating their

tyranny and their fight against jihad (holy war)", the statement added, claiming that the judicial system serves the ruling family in "cementing their rule and oppressing their opponents".

"They should fear the day when the relatives of those martyrs, their brothers and partisans... celebrate (vengeance) against the infidel tyrants." The statement charged that the rulers of the leading Sunni Muslim kingdom "shed the blood of the mujahedin as an offer to the crusaders who were celebrating the beginning of their new year."

Riyadh announced the execution of 47 people convicted of "terrorism". Among them were four Shiites, including prominent cleric Nimr al-Nimr, whose death triggered a diplomatic crisis between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shiite-dominated Iran. In an audio statement posted online, leading Saudi Al-Qaeda chief Ibrahim Al-Assiri warned: "we will deal with Al-Saud, now that the blood has been shed". AQAP is considered by the United States to be the most dangerous affiliate of the global extremist network. — AFP

قطع علاقة



تنوه شركة مجموعة فوزية مبارك الحساوي لإدارة المطاعم بأن السيد / محمد معز بن حسن بن تركيه كان يعمل لديها كمدير تسويق من ٧ ديسمبر ٢٠١٥ وحتى ٦ يناير ٢٠١٦ وعليه تنبه الشركة أنه لا يمثلها في أي تعاملات وأنها لا تتحمل أي مسؤولية مادية أو معنوية تجاه أي جهات أو أشخاص يتعامل معهم من ذلك التاريخ.

MUMBAI POLICE FORCE-FEED THIEF DOZENS OF BANANAS

MUMBAI: Indian police successfully deployed an unusual technique to retrieve a gold chain that a thief had swallowed while officers were in hot pursuit—they force-fed him more than 40 bananas. The man denied snatching the chain from a woman in the street in Mumbai and swallowed it in a desperate bid to conceal his crime last week, but hospital X-rays suggested otherwise.

Police in the western Indian city administered an enema which failed to yield the desired result. Doctors said an operation would be the best way forward, but police officers decided it would be too expensive and opted instead for the bananas. "He was fed more than 40 bananas throughout the day," Mumbai police Senior Inspector Shankar Dhanavade said.

"Eventually the chain was found. We made him wash and disinfect it," the policeman added. The 25-year-old man appeared in court on Friday and is in police custody, said Dhanavade. According to reports, it was not the first time Mumbai police had turned to the fruit in order to recover a stolen item.

In July last year a chain was retrieved after a thief was made to eat two dozen bananas and drink several liters of milk laced with laxatives, the Hindustan Times reported. Months earlier in April, a thief was fed five dozen bananas after swallowing a gold chain with a large pendant. The thief successfully excreted the loot. But the disgusted victim refused to touch it and instead took it to a jeweler in a plastic bag, the newspaper said. — AFP



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