

Nato forces close to victory in Afghanistan: Petraeus

Three more coalition soldiers die in attacks

ANI, AFP, Ottawa/Kabul

General David Petraeus, the head of US Central Command, has stated that Canada's decision to pull out troops from Afghanistan has come at a time when the Nato forces are heading toward a decisive victory against the Taliban.

"Having worked hard this past year to get the inputs right... now [the International Security Assistance Force] and its Afghan partners can start to see the progress that is possible," the Globe and Mail quoted him, as saying.

While Gen Petraeus declined to comment on the effect that Canada's 2011 exit from Kandahar next year will have on Nato's broader mission in Afghanistan, he admitted: "Obviously, we always like to see everyone continue to pitch in."

Gen Petraeus, who oversees the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, predicted that Nato will "regain the initiative from the insurgency" by following a counterinsurgency strategy similar to the one he followed as a commanding general in Iraq.

"We all recognise that an enormous amount of hard work and tough fighting lie ahead. As was the case in Iraq, the reality in Afghanistan is that everything is hard and it is hard all the time," he said.

Protecting civilians and helping Afghan security forces pave the way for Afghan governance are more important to the mission than killing or capturing the enemy, he argued.

"You don't kill or capture your way out of an insurgency," Gen. Petraeus pointed out.

"What we learned from Marjah was it's okay to announce that you're coming if you don't want to get into a slugfest right in the city you are trying to save," he added.

"That means some of the bad guys are going to get out the back door. That's okay, because we'll track them down. The objective is to secure the population."

In fresh violence, Nato announced the deaths of three soldiers fighting Taliban militants in Afghanistan's volatile south, bringing the number of foreign troops to die in the war so far this year to 112.

A Kashmiri man inspects the debris of destroyed houses in Dadsara, in Tral district, south of Srinagar yesterday. Four suspected militant belonging to Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Kashmir's frontline militant group, and one army officer were killed on Thursday in two-day gun battle between separatists and central government forces in the south Kashmir village. Four residential houses were also destroyed.

PHOTO: AFP

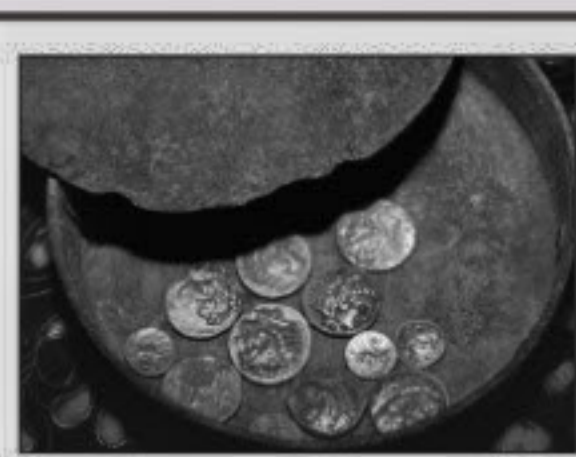


Photo released by the Syrian official news agency SANA on March 2 shows Hellenistic coins dating back to the era of Alexander the Great after they were discovered in northern Syria.

Coins from Alexander era found in Syria

AP, Damascus

More than 250 silver coins dating back to the time of Alexander the Great were unearthed in northern Syria, a Syrian archaeologist said Thursday.

Youssef Kanjo, the head of archaeological excavations in the ancient city of Aleppo, said the coins were discovered two weeks ago in northern Syria when a local man was digging the foundations of his new home.

The man handed the coins, that were found in a bronze box, to authorities, Kanjo said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press.

Moon's biggest crater exposes its hidden lower crust

ANI, Washington

Reports indicate that the biggest and deepest crater on the Moon can provide glimpses of the hidden lower crust of Earth's natural satellite.

Shortly after the Moon formed, an asteroid smacked into its southern hemisphere and gouged out a truly enormous crater, the South Pole-Aitken basin, almost 1,500 miles across and more than five miles deep.



Chinese President Hu Jintao (top/R) applauds as Premier Wen Jiabao delivers his speech during the opening session of the National People's Congress inside the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday.

China vows to address needs of the poor

AFP, Beijing

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao vowed yesterday to ease rules denying public welfare services to millions of migrant workers as he pledged to meet the social security needs of the nation's huge poor underclass.

"We will move faster to improve the social security system for both urban and rural residents," Wen said in his "state of the nation" address opening the annual session of parliament.

The National People's Congress convened with concern mounting over a huge wealth gap and social stability in a country that sees thousands of protests every year -- often violent -- by those who have missed out on China's boom.

"We will move faster to build a better social safety net to provide basic security to people and free them from worries," Wen told the 3,000 delegates to the National People's Congress.

"We will not only make the pie of social wealth bigger by developing the economy but also distribute it well on the basis of a rational income distribution system," he added.

Wen pledged to reform an increasingly unpopular household registration, or "hukou", system under which each citizen's residency status is tied strictly to their hometown.

The system has come under fire for denying the country's 230 million migrant workers access to the government's social safety net once they leave their hometowns for work in China's cities and coastal economic hubs.

"We will carry out reform of the household registration system and relax requirements for household registration in towns and small and medium-sized cities," he said.

The government recently announced its intent to reform the system but mention of the issue in Wen's annual "government work report" officially elevates it to the level of a national priority.

Thousands of women murdered in honour killings yearly: UN

AFP, Geneva

Some 5,000 women are murdered in honour killings every year, the UN's top human rights official said Thursday, calling it an "extreme symptom of discrimination" against women.

"It has been estimated that as many as one in three women across the world has been beaten, raped or otherwise abused during the course of her lifetime," said Navi Pillay in a statement.

"And the most common source of such violence comes from within the family. Amongst the most extreme forms of abuse is what is known as 'honour killing'," added the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

She pointed out that the problem is exacerbated by the fact that in some countries, legal systems "exempt individuals guilty of honour killings from punishment."

"Honour killings are, however, not something that can be simply brushed aside as some bizarre and retrograde atrocity that happens somewhere else," she said, stressing that under international laws, there is a "clear state responsibility" to ensure that women are not discriminated against.

Singapore boosts security over terrorist threat

AP, Singapore

Singapore bolstered security measures after receiving information of a plot by terrorists to attack ships off the coast of the city-state, a Cabinet minister said yesterday.

The government has increased security at land checkpoints, on the sea and at high-risk targets such as two new casino resorts, Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng told Parliament.

Wong did not say which terrorist group was planning the reported attack.

"We received intelligence from our liaison partners about this possible plot to go and attack vessels coming through Singapore waters through the Malacca Strait," Wong said. "The threat is real and we are not immune to it."

Singapore's navy warned Thursday that a terrorist group was planning attacks on oil tankers and other vessels in the Malacca Strait, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia said Thursday they have stepped up maritime and air patrols in the waterway, through which 15 million barrels of oil a day passed in 2006, according to the US Energy Information Agency.



An Indian Nihang (religious Sikh warrior) performs a fire breathing act while participating in a procession during the Amritsar Heritage Festival in Amritsar yesterday. The festival, which runs from March 4-7, aims to preserve and promote Punjabi culture.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT PADMA MULTIPURPOSE BRIDGE DESIGN PROJECT

The Study

Bangladesh Padma Authority (BPA) is currently undertaking the detailed engineering design of the Padma Multipurpose Bridge Design Project under the finance from Asian Development Bank (ADB). The Project has been preparing the detailed engineering design for the construction of Padma Bridge and associated structures. The Project involves construction of about 6.15 km long main bridge, transition structures, approach roads, river training works (RTWs), bridge end facilities (service areas, construction yards, toll plaza, resettlement sites), two railway stations at both ends with the provision of rail track, gas and power transmission lines and communication cable on the bridge. The construction of the project components will involve massive activities which will have both negative and positive impacts on the environment.

Project Financing

Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has been in discussion with various co-financiers to participate in the investment of the Project. A number of co-financiers has already showed interest and extended their commitments. These co-financiers include the ADB, the World Bank, the Japan International cooperation Agency, the Islamic Development Bank, and the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development. In addition to the Co-financiers, GoB will also contribute in the implementation of the Project.

The Process

The Project is being categorized as Category "A" project in accordance with the Harmonized Safeguard Requirements of the Government and co-financiers. As per the harmonized safeguard requirements, two public consultations are required for category "A" project, once during the early stages o EIA filed work and once when the draft EIA report is available. Upon completion of the study, an Environmental Impact Assessment report documenting the process will be submitted to BPA and the co-financiers and will be available for public review. A draft Environmental Impact Assessment report documenting the process has been submitted to BPA and the co-financiers on November 19, 2009 and a revised version on January 31, 2010 and are available for public review.

Public Consultation

The first public consultations were conducted during July 20-22, 2009. This is the second public consultation and is scheduled to allow the public to meet the project team, discuss the study outcome, major environmental and social impacts, and mitigation and enhancement measures recommended in the study. You are invited to attend the meetings in the following locations:

- 1. Mawa Side 1, Date : 10AM to 12AM, March 16, 2010 Location : Village : Jashaldia, Lauhajang, Munshiganj
2. Mawa Side 2, Date : 2PM to 4 PM, March 16, 2010 Location : Village : Kumabhog, Lauhajang, Munshiganj
3. Janjira Side 1, Date : 11AM to 1 PM, March 17, 2010 Location : Naodoba High School, Janjira, Shariatpur
4. Janjira Side 2, Date : 11 AM to 1 PM, March 18, 2010 Location : Union Council of Matbarer Char, Village : Bakorerkandi, Shibchar, Madaripur.
5. Charland, Date : 11AM to 1 PM. March 19, 2010 Location : Kathalbari Char, Shibchar, Madaripur.

The consultation will consist of formal invitations to the various stakeholders and displays showing the final alignments, environmental and social impacts and mitigation and enhancement measures. BPA and their design consultant Maunsell AECOM will be on hand to answer any questions.

Comments

We are interested in hearing any comments that you may have about the study. With the exception of personal information, all comments will be part of the public record. In addition, there will be a comment sheet available, please place the completed questionnaire in the box provided or return it to the address below:

Mr. Rafiqul Islam Project Director, Padma Multipurpose Bridge Project Bangladesh Bridge Authority, Setu Bhaban New Airport Road, Banani, Dhaka. Tel : (02) 988 8969
Dr. Masud Karim, P.Eng. Environmental Specialist 1 Road 83, House No.13/A, Gulshan 2, Dhaka Tel : (02) 881 2938 / 882 5796 Email : masud@eng-consult.com

Advertisement for Power Grid Company of Bangladesh Ltd. (PGCB) featuring a table of electricity tariffs for various categories like residential, commercial, and industrial, along with contact information and website details.

Advertisement for Gulshan Club Ltd. in association with the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB), announcing a competition for the design of a multi-purpose club complex. It includes details about the project, eligibility criteria, and submission procedures.