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MUST-READS

1. [Suicide Bombers Attack a Red Cross Compound in Eastern Afghanistan](#)

-New York Times, Azam Ahmed, 5/30

BLUF: In a shock to humanitarian aid workers, suicide bombers in eastern Afghanistan on Wednesday assaulted the offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross, an organization that has worked in the country for more than 30 years without suffering a concerted attack and has received praise from all sides.

- Security forces managed to evacuate all seven Western employees working in the Jalalabad compound, with only one injured, the provincial police said. One guard was killed and another wounded when one of the attackers blew himself up at the entrance to the compound. The other two attackers also died in the assault.
- Although the Red Cross offices are patrolled by guards, the guards are not armed. "We do not travel with armed guards or armored vehicles since we are a neutral organization," said Abdul Haseeb Rahimi, a Red Cross spokesman.
- Mr. Rahimi was reluctant to lay blame for the attack, saying it was not clear yet whether the Red Cross was the intended target. The Indian Consulate and other international aid agencies are near the compound, where plumes of black smoke could be seen rising into the evening as the attack raged on. The Taliban did not immediately claim responsibility for the attack.
- Western and Afghan officials have said they believe that this year, the final one before the withdrawal of coalition forces, will be one of the most violent since 2001.

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2. [Pakistan Taliban reject peace talks after No. 2 killed](#)

-Associated Press, 5/30

BLUF: The Pakistani Taliban withdrew their offer of peace talks Thursday, following the death of the group's deputy leader in an American drone attack, a spokesman for the group said, a blow to the incoming government of Nawaz Sharif that was elected partly on promises to restore security after years of deadly attacks.

- The death of Waliur Rehman, wanted by the U.S. for a 2009 attack in Afghanistan that killed seven people working for the CIA, also focuses attention on the controversial U.S. drone program. Despite President Barack Obama's sweeping promise last week of new transparency, Wednesday's strike against a longtime American target shows that the CIA will still launch attacks on militants without having to explain them publicly.
- The announcement by the Pakistani Taliban came amid conflicting reports about whether the Islamic militant movement had selected a replacement for Rehman, who was killed Wednesday in an attack that Pakistani officials said left at least four other militants dead.

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AFGHANISTAN

3. [Afghanistan Red Cross office attack sets dangerous precedent for aid work](#)

-The Guardian, Emma Graham-Harrison, 5/30

BLUF: The International Committee of the Red Cross is one of the very few international organizations whose work and neutrality in Afghanistan has been praised by the Taliban, so Wednesday's suicide attack on the group's office in the east of the country has raised fears the conflict could be shifting into a bloodier and more chaotic stage.

- The ICRC has worked in Afghanistan for almost three decades, and has prided itself on neutrality that, together with widespread respect for its work, has formed the basis its sense of security.
- Even the Taliban, not known for their public appreciation of international organizations, last summer paid tribute to "valuable services" the ICRC provides. These range from immunization of children and fitting landmine victims with prosthetic limbs to tracing insurgent and other prisoners in jails and reconnecting them with their families.
- There are many aid groups that eschew guns, armored cars and the other trappings of foreign security in favor of strong relationships with the people they serve, but the ICRC is probably the largest and best known.
- There have been attacks before on travelling ICRC employees, and some from its partner organization the Afghan Red Crescent. But Wednesday's assault was the first time its clearly marked compounds have been targeted, and the ICRC has no idea who was behind it.

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4. [Afghanistan's Karzai denounces Taliban for killing countrymen](#)

-Reuters, Hamid Shalizi, 5/30

BLUF: Afghanistan's Taliban are killing Afghans and making a mockery of their claim to be fighting foreign invaders, President Hamid Karzai said on Thursday.

- A series of attacks in different parts of the country, including areas long considered largely free of militant violence, is raising worry about the ability of Afghan forces to maintain security after most foreign troops leave.
- "It's clear that the fight is not against foreigners, it's for foreigners," Karzai told a news conference at the presidential palace in the capital, Kabul.
- Karzai did not elaborate on that point though he has long accused neighboring Pakistan of harboring Afghan Taliban leaders and backing their insurgency in a bid to promote Pakistan's security interests.
- "Why do you martyr a soldier who protects this country? You plant a roadside bomb in his way and blow him up," Karzai said.

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5. [Growing crystal meth use blurs drug-hungry Afghanistan's future](#)

-Reuters, Amie Ferris-Rotman, 5/30

BLUF: Impoverished Afghanistan, already plagued by insurgency and struggling to contain crippling rates of opium addiction, faces another potential headache with spiraling usage of the synthetic drug crystal methamphetamine.

- The growing use of the drug, known as crystal meth or ice, comes at a critical time. Some fear that, with the exit of most foreign troops by the end of next year and dwindling interest and aid from the international community, significant addiction to the relatively new drug could wreak social havoc.
- The number of crystal meth samples taken from seizures tripled to 48 in 2012 compared with the year before. There are concerns the power vacuum left by the withdrawal of foreign troops could turn Afghanistan into a new route for moving Iranian-made crystal meth to nations in the Pacific, like Thailand and Indonesia, through Pakistan.
- Afghanistan is the world's top producer of opium, from which heroin is made and which helps fund the Taliban's insurgency, and is heading for a near-record this year, the UNODC has said. Treatment options for Afghanistan's 1 million heroin addicts, some of whom inject into their groins in broad daylight in central Kabul, are sorely limited.
- Dubbed "glass" in Afghanistan, crystal meth only appeared in recent years and is made in high-tech labs across the border in Iran. Most of it is consumed in the border provinces of Herat and Nimroz, but seizures have been scattered across the country.

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INDIA

6. [India's Economy Posts Meager Gain](#)

-Reuters, 5/31

BLUF: India's economic growth began a feeble recovery at the tail end of a 2012 fiscal year that recorded the slowest expansion in a decade, government data showed Friday.

- The Indian economy, the third largest in Asia after China and Japan, grew 4.8 percent from a year earlier in January through March, in line with a poll of economists by Reuters. The showing in the quarter was only slightly better than an upwardly revised 4.7 percent growth in the previous three months, which was the lowest in 15 quarters.
- The economic growth for the full 2012-13 fiscal year was 5 percent, in line with an official forecast given in February, but the worst for India in a decade and a far cry from the 9 percent annual expansion recorded until two years ago.
- "The sectoral performance affirms our expectations that while G.D.P. growth remains subdued, a floor is in sight but lacks signs of sustainable pickup in momentum," said Radhika Rao, an economist at DBS Bank in Singapore.
- Years of fiscal profligacy, a long struggle with high inflation, high interest rates, persistent political gridlock and a fragile global economy have put India an economic rut.

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PAKISTAN

7. [Pakistan's 'answer to Glee' will address homosexuality and extremism](#)

-Washington Post, Caitlin Dewey, 5/30

BLUF: Starting in September, Pakistani TV stations will begin broadcasting what some have called the country's "answer to Glee": an envelope-pushing musical drama called "Taan," set in a fictional Lahore high school.

- If a peppy musical about misfit teenagers and their social/sexual escapades seems out of place in Pakistan, that's because it is. Interviews with director Samar Raza tend to focus on the way the show can grapple with those issues like sexuality and teen romance without provoking the ire of Pakistan's media censors.
- Raza told Agence France-Presse, for instance, that the show suggests a homosexual relationship through innuendo and conversation among the characters. (Homosexuality is illegal in Pakistan.) It will also tackle Pakistan's religious and sectarian violence: One of the characters is described as an extremist who initially planned to blow the music school up — before getting into music, of course. Another main character is a Christian whose girl family was massacred in the 2009 riots at Gojra, an actual event that heightened interfaith tensions for weeks.

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KYRGYZSTAN

8. [Hundreds of protesters in Kyrgyzstan cut power to gold mine](#)

-Associated Press, 5/30

BLUF: About 700 protesters, some on horseback, besieged a gold mine run by a Canadian-based mining company in Kyrgyzstan, demanding its nationalization and more social benefits, officials said Thursday.

- As part of the protest that has been going on for several days, the demonstrators have cut the road leading to the Kumtor mine operated by Centerra Gold, the company said in a statement Wednesday, saying it's continuing operations despite the blockade.
- But on Thursday some of the protesters entered a power transformer unit and cut electricity to the mine before dispersing for the night.
- The Kyrgyz Cabinet held an emergency meeting to discuss the situation. Officials said that if the electricity supply isn't quickly restored, it could lead to an emergency shutdown of the mine. It wasn't immediately clear what impact the power cut had.
- Kumtor, which accounts for about 12 percent of the economy of the impoverished ex-Soviet nation, was at the center of heated political debate among those seeking its nationalization and officials who believe that would deter much-needed foreign investment.

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9. [Kyrgyz Crime Boss's Cushy Prison Life Prompts Calls For Government Purge](#)

-Radio Free Europe, Zairbek Baktybaev and Daisy Sindelar, 5/30

BLUF: Aziz Batukaev's release has stirred fresh speculation that the pro-Bakiev camp remains a force in Kyrgyz politics. Some lawmakers have accused officials of accepting hefty bribes -- from Chechen authorities or Batukaev himself -- in exchange for his release. Court officials say they had medical documents asserting the crime boss was suffering from acute leukemia, and said he needed to be released immediately in order to seek medical care.

- Batukaev's release briefly coincided with another major story in the region, when it was revealed that Boston bombing suspect Tamerlan Tsarnaev and his family briefly lived next door to Batukaev in Tokmok, the northern Kyrgyz city that is home to the country's largest Chechen community. No closer ties between Batukaev and Tsarnaev have been uncovered, however.
- Lawmakers confronted officials with evidence of Batukaev's good health -- and a photograph of the crime boss in his Naryn prison cell, dragging on a cigarette while sitting next to a table groaning with alcohol and platters of sumptuous food.

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TURKMENISTAN

10. Turkmenistan, Turkey Ankara To Cooperate On Gas Deliveries

-Radio Free Europe, 5/30

BLUF: Turkey and Turkmenistan have signed an agreement on cooperation for the supply of Turkmen natural gas.

- The accord was signed by officials from both governments in Ashgabat on May 30 during a visit by Turkish President Abdullah Gul, who was meeting with Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov.
- Both leaders also were expected to sign other bilateral accords during Gul's three-day visit, which began a day earlier. Gul, who was welcomed to Turkmenistan with a military parade, has been awarded the country's highest state medal.\

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