

(1) Int'l Forces ...

managing the construction of a \$134 million Aegis Ashore Missile Defense Complex in Deveselu, Romania
US Missile System Threat to Strategic Stability - Russian Defense Minister
Russia will continue to provide Tajikistan with significant military support and will strengthen its base in the country, Sergei Shoigu said.
"We will continue to provide strong support to Tajikistan with weapons and military equipment, as well as to strengthen our outpost in the country - the Russian military base," the minister said. (Sputnik)

(2) Big Military ...

forces are well equipped in Warduj and Juram districts but he asked for close coordination among various security organs to ward-off any threat efficiently. (Pajhwok)

(3) 'Afghan Forces ...

said casualties were part of a battle, but important was the manner the Afghan forces fought.
He said foreign forces would not leave Afghanistan alone, although the Afghan forces had taken over security responsibilities nationwide, spearheading operations themselves.

Gen. Hannemann said Afghan security forces had been provided with some military gear, including helicopters, which they used in their military offensives in the north.

He said the Afghan Air Force (AAF) needed more assistance and that Afghan troops were being trained on a high level.

Responding to a question, the TA-AC-North commander rejected the existence of Islamic State (IS) fighters in Afghanistan. (Pajhwok)

(4) Pakistan Allows ...

Afghan traders to facilitate them in organizing such exhibition in major cities of Pakistan. He informed a separate Desk, for the facilitation of Afghan and Central Asian traders, had been set up in the Ministry of Commerce for Afghanistan and Central Region countries to resolve disputes related to trade.

The statement said that Khurram Dastgir Khan, in his meeting with President Ashraf Ghani underscored that Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif attaches great significance to Pakistan's economic and trade ties with Afghanistan.

Dastgir apprised that since the visit of President Ghani to Islamabad, Pakistan has implemented the following main decisions to facilitate transit trade, allowing system based partial shipment of Afghan transit goods instead of manual processing, reduction in scanning of Afghan transit cargo from 100% to 20%.

Afghan trucks have been allowed to carry goods up to Wagah and on their way back, they can carry Pakistani goods for exports to Afghanistan, he said, adding that Pakistan Railways would carry 400 containers of Afghan transit cargo to Torkham and Chaman per week which shall be made operational later this year.

During his meeting with the Afghan President, the Minister for Commerce sought implementation of the following steps by the Afghan government.

He urged removal of financial guarantees on Pakistani goods in transit to Central Asia which are being charged at 110% of the customs duty.

The removal of tonnage fee at rate of \$100 per 25 ton on goods which are in transit to Central Asia, expedite signing of a bilateral treaty to avoid double taxation that would facilitate investment in both countries.

He also stressed for issuance of Afghan multiple entry visas for Pakistani businessmen and skilled workers, lift of ban on transit of LPG via Afghanistan to Pakistan and initiation of talks on Preferential Trade Agreement between Pakistan and Afghanistan, providing enhanced market access to Afghan goods in Pakistani market and addressing the issue of smuggling.

The Afghan president promised multiple entry visas for businessmen on reciprocal basis and ensured to address other issues at the earliest.

The Minister reiterated that economic cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan has gained momentum during the recent months with enhanced dialogue, high level visits and confidence building measures taken by the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Afghan Acting Minister of Com-

merce Muzammil Shinwari, Pakistan's Ambassador to Afghanistan Syed Abrar Hussain, President of Pak-Afghan's Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Khan Jan Alkozay, former President of Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Dr. Shumail Daud Arian, and organizer of the exhibition, Khurshid Barlas also spoke the occasion. (Pajhwok)

(5) Zakhelwal Named...

September of 2014. "As for as I know, the exact number of people serving in government institutions and accused in the corruption case are around 63 people," Ayoubi said on Thursday

Ayoubi previously served close to President Ghani during his presidential campaign. He believes Zakhelwal is unlikely to face an investigation - let alone repercussions - for his involvement in the fuel contract scheme because he was a major donor to Ghani's campaign.

According to Ayoubi, the fuel contract case is not likely to be handled as thoroughly and transparently as the Kabul Bank corruption case was, since that scandal surrounded individuals close to former president Hamid Karzai, instead of those close to the new administration.

"Zakhelwal serves as a top government employee and he also served as a member of the Change and Continuity team during the presidential elections," Ayoubi said.

"I was also member of the same team, and I am aware that Zakhelwal provided financial support to the president during the elections, and now if he is brought to trial and justice, he also keeps documents against the president," he added. If those compromising documents were to fall into the hands of Ghani's opposition, Ayoubi maintained, it could cause a political crisis that no legal authority could reign in.

On the other hand, a source close to President Ghani, responding to the allegations on Thursday, maintained that Zakhelwal's name is not on the list of 63 individuals being investigated for the fuel contract scheme.

Omar Zakhelwal as Minister of Finance, Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal as Minister of Economy and Habibullah Ghalib as Minister of Justice all signed the MoD fuel contract that has garnered so much controversy while still serving under the Karzai administration. At the time, they served on the Special Procurement Commission formed within the Defense Ministry.

Former minister of economy Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal has confirmed that Mr. Zakhelwal served as Chairman of the Special Procurement Commission, and voiced the opinion that the economic advisor should be expected to answer for his role in the corruption case.

The special investigation team appointed to investigate the case has also accused the MoD Special Procurement Commission of primary involvement in the embezzlement scheme. "The special members who were serving in the commission had calculated the price of each liter fuel more than its real price purchased for the MoD and have signed the contract; therefore, we are suspicious about them," said Hamidullah Farooqi, the head of the MoD fuel contract investigation team.

Pointing to further corruption within the Defense Ministry, the Administrative Board of Parliament on Thursday also claimed that the ambush and beheading of Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers in Badakhshan province last week was the result of more senior defense officials illegally selling the military's fuel for profit.

"The most clear model of corruption in the Ministry of Defense is the beheading of the 28 ANA soldiers that happened in Badakhshan, because their vehicles' fuel was sold out by the corrupt and plunderers, and because of the fuel shortage they couldn't escape the Taliban area," House Deputy Secretary Irfanullah Irfan said on Thursday. "I call on the president to try anyone who is involved in this corruption case."

According to Parliament's Defense Committee, corruption exists at all levels of the MoD's contracting process. "Based on the statements of MoD generals, corruption exists in all contracts of the concerned ministry," said MP Ali Akbar Qasimi, the deputy of the committee. (Tolnews)

(6) Rula Ghani ...

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, former U.S. State Secretary Hillary Clinton, North Korean leader Kim

Jong-un and an American journalist Jorge Ramos were also found in the list.

Meanwhile, the First Lady's office issued a statement on Friday, expressing her gladness on the occasion.

"She hopes that her work in the coming four years will fulfill the confidence placed in her," the statement noted.

The magazine deputy managing editor Radhika Jones has, meanwhile, expressed that they would vary the list each year to introduce more influential people to the world.

"One thing that we really try to do with the list to make it varied and interesting from year-to-year is to think about not the people who are blanket influential but also the people whose influence is really rising," she said.

Female Afghan politician Malalai Joya and an entrepreneur Roya Mahboob have already been named in the Time's list in 2010 and 2013 respectively. (Tolnews)

(7) Police Abusing ...

three of his friends - ages 12, 13, and 15 - back to Macedonia. They succeeded in applying for asylum in Serbia after their third attempt. Four adults said the border police in southern and eastern Serbia told them to hand over money to avoid being pushed back to Macedonia and released them after they did.

Human Rights Watch also interviewed 13 people, including two unaccompanied children, ages 14 and 17, who said police had refused to register their intent to seek asylum - in the Železnička police station in Belgrade, in the Bogovada Asylum Center, south of Belgrade, and in the police station in Sjenica, in southern Serbia. The refusal not only denied them access to the asylum system, but also to shelter, food, and medical care.

A police officer at the center who was responsible for registering asylum seekers said he only has time to register 15 people a day and that sometimes as many as 50 show up. He added that families with children, pregnant women, and unaccompanied children have priority for registration.

However, the people living outside the center included two families with small children and six unaccompanied children, all except one of whom said they had been denied the opportunity to register. One 16-year-old Afghan boy said the police officer had registered him but instructed him to go to another center, approximately 112 kilometers away.

In November and December, Human Rights Watch made three visits to the informal camps in and around the Ciglana brick factory in Subotica, a border town close to Serbia's frontier with Hungary. More than 50 people, including women and very young children, were sleeping in improvised tents, on bricks and piles of paper with little or no shelter from the freezing cold - with temperatures as low as minus five degrees Celsius during the night.

Fourteen people there said police had threatened them with detention and deportation if they would not hand over their money and mobile phones. Seven said the police hit or slapped them or sprayed them with pepper spray, then took their money. "Nahla," a 38-year-old mother from Afghanistan, was traveling with her four children ages 6, 9, 11, and 13. Nahla and her 13-year-old son said police had come to the factory two or three nights earlier as they slept, awakened them and sprayed them in the eyes with pepper spray, then took money from them. Serbian authorities should immediately investigate cases of police abuse against asylum seekers and migrants and hold to account anyone found responsible, Human Rights Watch said.

Serbia is a candidate for European Union membership, and actively participates in the Stabilization and Association Process, a step on the way to membership. Under the Stabilization and Association process, it is required to follow certain requirements for its asylum system and treatment of migrants. "If Serbia truly aspires to join the EU it should put a stop to any police abuse and promptly investigate allegations of ill-treatment by the police," Cerimovic said. "Anyone who expresses a wish to apply for asylum should have a meaningful opportunity to register their asylum claim and present their case." (Tolnews)

(8) Badakhshan ...

for the Taliban in the area and were even involved directly in the inci-

dent last week. "One of the Taliban's commanders known as Shamsullah was wounded in Jurm district and was transported by a person who serves in the government," Gen. Baba Jan told TOLONews. "He was given medical treatment and then returned, and the head of the Provincial Council was also there and his phone calls are registered."

Nevertheless, pending details and an evidence-based investigation, those accusations remain largely vague and unsubstantiated claims. And Abdullah Naji Nazari, the head of the Badakhshan Provincial Council, has categorically rejected the allegations. "General Baba Jan has accused me of coordinating with the Taliban in an irresponsible manner, and I reject this," he said on Thursday.

Still, MPs from Badakhshan have bolstered the claims of local officials undermining security in the province. "The commander of the check post sold it, so here the MPs don't have a role," MP Neelofar Ibrahimini said. "But if we deeply assess the roots of the issues in Badakhshan, it is clear that there is political intervention, the interference of local government and neighboring provinces and the state holders who are dreaming to of building mines in Badakhshan [...] these are all fundamental factors of insecurity in Badakhshan."

Independent analysts have lent credence to those claims, yet added that another major factor is the sympathetic ideological inclinations of some officials in the local Badakhshan government. "The individuals who have Taliban-type ideology, or in some way support them, perhaps they have cooperated with them," military expert Sediq Shahbaz told TOLONews.

Yet there seems to be unanimous agreement that, ultimately, it was the security officials that failed in their duties. "One thing that is clear is that it was a coordinated act and the negligence of officials allowed it to turn out like this," Shahbaz said. The Defense Ministry has confirmed the negligence of the battalion commander responsible for the outpost, named Azizullah, who was reportedly on leave in Kabul without permission when the incident took place.

Atta Mohammad Noor, the governor of neighboring Balkh province, has taken criticisms a bit further, accusing more or less the entire central government of negligence in handling the aftermath of the Badakhshan attack. "A few days have been passed since the tragedy of our brothers in Badakhshan, and so far no official has visited the area, because every official is engaged in political negotiations, big programs or are out of the country," Noor said on Thursday. "We feel unfortunate when we see the fate of the nation like this, God knows what will happen tomorrow." (Tolnews)

(9) Atta Accuses...

he said had been involved in the plan. According to him people that work in Kabul and who have ties with the Hezb-e-Islami (Gulbuddin) Hekmatyar faction - but that are employed by government - were also involved.

"There are some involved who are currently serving in the government, and live in Kabul. There is another person involved who has ties to the government and today lives in Mazar-e-Sharif. These individuals along with their sons have plotted this together," he said adding that investigations are continuing. The suspects have not however been named as yet, he said.

He accused the Director of the NDS, Rahmatullah Nabil, of having known about the planned attack ahead of time. He said Nabil also knows that his office has information on who harbors insurgents. He says these people get away with it as they have powerful government contacts.

He says nothing was done about the information on the planned attack because of political rivalry. He says he is doing a good job in the province and his detractors are trying to destabilize the area. However, the NDS has rejected such claims and said the directorate is a non-political institution with the aim of achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Last week's attack on the AG's Office resulted in the deaths of 19 people. A further 67 were wounded. The provincial prosecutor's building was also torched and important documents were lost in the fire. The attack on the provincial prosecutor's office was among the bloodiest attacks in the past 13 years. (Tolnews)

(10) British Museum ...

his support and assistance with regards to the Afghanistan Center. A chapan - or variant of a caftan - is a traditional coat worn by Afghan men in winter. These coats are adorned with intricate threading and come in a variety of colors and patterns. (Tolnews)

(11) Farkhunda's Family...

Our family has decided to take its decision, once the incident has been investigated."

He said Farkhunda's family is awaiting finalization of the investigation and will ask the judicial institutions to publicly punish those found guilty.

"Our family demands that the perpetrators be publicly punished where Farkhunda was killed. Investigations must be public and the decision must also be made in public," adds Mujeebullah.

Police have said that they are searching for the three remaining offenders in Farkhunda's case but the suspects have gone into hiding. The acting attorney general recently announced that his office will soon submit the case files to the high court.

"We will not allow anyone to interfere in the investigation, and we would like to assure people that we will transparently investigate the case and will soon share the results with the people of Afghanistan. We will also hand over the case to the high court," said Noor Mujeeb Jalal, acting attorney general.

Police have so far arrested 49 suspects including 20 police officers in connection with Farkhunda's death. Earlier, the attorney general's office had said that some of the arrested individuals have already confessed to their crime. (Tolnews)

(12) Pakistan Wasn't...

of events that took place."

The subsequent raid on the Abbottabad compound of OBL in May, came six weeks after Raymond Davis, a contractor who worked for the CIA, was bailed out by the ambassador after he shot dead "two thugs who tried to rob him" by paying blood money to the family.

"These incidents came at a time when the trust we were trying to build, the whole Richard Holbrooke project about maintaining trust and not falling back to the old ways, was buckling a bit," he added.

During the course of his talk, he didn't mention the drone programme saying instead that the attack in the tribal areas a day after Davis's release from Pakistan, "was bad timing".

Just as the diplomats on both sides were figuring out how to work on the "badly damaged relationship", the Abbottabad raid came about. Munter said Pakistan probably didn't know about OBL's presence. "Because everything was taken out during the raid and if there was a link it is hard to imagine there would have been no trace of that."

The raid and its implications made cooperation between the two countries difficult, the former ambassador said. He believes the relations between the two countries are getting better.

He said the policy of looking at Pakistan through the lens of Afghanistan is a problem. Continuing, he said the nature of US-Pak relationship is more linked to counter-terrorism than creating regional associations, philanthropic or economic links, as a result.

"American popularity in Pakistan is about five per cent. Lowest in the world. Yet in the same Pew poll, more than 90 per cent of the people want to see better relationship with the United States."

There were many cultural affinities that we could play on, he said, "but unfortunately the focus that most Pakistanis see from us is of a counter-terrorist."

He said he was not suggesting that counter-terrorism should be overlooked, "but we can still look towards people-to-people contact and find cultural affinities".

"What do Karachi and Los Angeles have in common? Seashore, culture, gang warfare. We are made for each other. They got twenty million people, we got South Central. This is the link to have."

Munter said that "Pakistan works because of its people" and counted Balochistan, Karachi and the tribal areas as the "three problem zones, in terms of setting state writ, for Pakistan". "What's interesting about diplomacy at present is that there are many bilateral, trilateral, quadrilateral discussions going on between India-Pakistan-China, Afghanistan-China-Pakistan, all trying to find a common ground.

"Pakistan does tend to be myopic but it can use its potential to have better relations with India, to con-

tinue the relations it has with China and to work with Iran and Afghanistan. That might have a whole lot more impact than worrying about issues of civic identity."

When he was asked to give a proper prescription for Afghanistan in the immediate future, he said Afghanistan must establish multi-pronged diplomacy with its neighbours. "Ashraf Ghani has skillfully balanced Pakistan and India. One of my nightmares is to see India and Pakistan fighting through proxies in Afghanistan rather than on their borders.

"Thankfully the possibility of that is less, thanks to Ghani's diplomacy."

According to him, much of Afghanistan's future depends on the relations between India and Pakistan, and between India and China. (Pajhwok)

(13) Power Outages ...

stable for many years. "Industrialists want electricity, through any means," said one factory owner, Fazel Haq Meshkani.

Officials in Kandahar have confirmed that there is a power problem in the area but claim the situation will be resolved soon.

"Work has started on installing generators and we are in contact with Kabul in order to use solar energy and other sources of energy," says Amanullah Ayoub Farooqi, Deputy Business Head of Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat - the local power supplier.

Meanwhile, factory owners in Kabul have raised their concerns over the National Unity Government's inability to keep its promises made to business owners and over the Kandahar situation.

"Without a doubt, it will have a negative impact on the region. But it's good news for neighboring countries when our industrial parks fail, as they will have good markets then," says Abdul Karim Raufi, Chairman of Kabul Industries Convention. (Tolnews)

(14) Economists Throw...

openly and covertly - sought to undermine the development of economic, political and military ties between Afghanistan and India. With the pending introduction of Tajikistan to APPTA, Afghan officials and economic experts have pushed to have India admitted as well in order to ensure Afghanistan's interests, and not just Pakistan's, are served in the new iteration of the agreement.

"Right now, the Afghan government must put pressure on Pakistan to endorse India joining the agreement," economic analyst Mohammad Qurban Haqjo said on Thursday. "Otherwise, the signing of the trilateral agreement between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan will only favor the interests of Pakistan and we will have more problems ahead," he continued.

In addition to ongoing disputes over access to Pakistan's ports and custom duty rates, Afghan analysts say Tajikistan's inclusion in the APPTA will have no advantage for Afghanistan, and, instead, will simply allow Pakistan to have greater access to Central Asian markets. (Tolnews)

(15) Potatoes...

The cost of this machine he said was \$1,000 and a replacement for manual work. Separately, the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) distributed three machines for refining of wheat seeds to agriculture cooperative departments in Faryab.

Marketing Manager Najibullah said each machine had the capacity to refine 500 kilogram of wheat seed in an hour, adding cooperative sectors of Almar, Qaisar, Kohistan would become self sufficient in production of refined seeds. (Pajhwok)

(16) Ghani, Abdullah ...

Hafizullah Rasikh, chief of Afghanistan Solidarity Party (ASP), told reporters that the protest was aimed at reminding the incumbent government of its flaws. "A few days back, we lost 27 ANA soldiers in Badakhshan who were killed brutally. A number of persons were killed in another attack in Balkh province. Khost took bloodbath few weeks back," Rasikh lamented. (Pajhwok)

(17) Prices of Fuel,...

tea was priced at 180afis, the same quantity of African black tea at 210afis, a 24-kg sack of rice at 1,800afis, and 16 liters of Momin ghee was on 960afis. the same price of last week's.

But a retailer in Kabul, Khan Ali, sold a 49-kg bag of flour for 1,350afis, a 50-kg sack of sugar for 1,750afis and a 24-kg bag of rice for 2,200afis. (Pajhwok)