



### Taliban Seek Image Makeover as Afghan Peace Talks Gain Momentum

KABUL/PESHAWAR - As moves towards peace pick up in Afghanistan, the Taliban are trying to show they have changed since the brutal days of the 1990s when they banned music and girls' education and carried out public executions in Kabul's football stadium.

"If peace comes and the Taliban return, then our return will not be in the same harsh way as it was in 1996," Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid told Reuters, referring to the year they took over in Kabul before their ouster by U.S.-led troops in 2001.

"We want to assure Afghan nationals that there will be no threat to anyone from our side."

The comments come as moves towards peace negotiations have intensified, following a series of meetings between U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban representatives over the past three months.

Expectations of a decisive shift have been heightened by reports that more than 5,000 U.S. troops may be withdrawn from Afghanistan, in an abrupt about-turn from the previous U.S. strategy of stepping up military pressure on the insurgents.

"Our opposition is with the presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan. Once they are out and a peace deal is reached, then a nationwide amnesty will be announced," said Mujahid.

"No one, police, army, government employees or anyone, will face revenge behaviour from our side."

Reports of the withdrawal are unconfirmed but they have triggered alarm among many Afghans with bitter memories of the Taliban's ultra-hard-line regime. *...(More on P4)...(12)*

## Daesh Spokesman Killed in Nangarhar Airstrike

KABUL - The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Khurasan (ISIS-K) spokesman has been killed in an airstrike by foreign forces in eastern Nangarhar province, an official said on Thursday.

Nasrat Rahimi, deputy spokesman for the Ministry of Interior (MoI), said ISIS-K's spokesman Sultan Aziz Azam was killed in the airstrike in Haska Mena district of on Wednesday.

Rahimi said Azam was also in charge of recruiting militants for the terrorist group and was involved in killing innocent civilians. Azam's three associates were also killed in the raid. There has been no word so far from Daesh in this regard. *(Pajhwok)*



## Afghanistan's Rice Yield Goes up by 4pc this Year

KABUL - The Ministry of Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock (MoAIL) says the production of rice has increased by four percent this year despite a drought in the country.

A joint survey, conducted by the Central Statistical Bureau and Agriculture Ministry using the geographic information system (GIS), revealed the hike in rice yield.

Based on the survey, this year the total area under rice cultivation was 117,540 hectares of land, which produced 352,000 metric tons of rice. A seven percent increase was recorded in the land under cultivation and a four percent surge in production.

A statement from the ministry said the country's annual demand for rice was 574,000 tons, while the domestic yield amounted to 352,000 tons --leaving a shortfall of 222,000 tons.



According to the statistics, total rice imports in the first three quarters of the year stood at 180,000 tons, worth \$92 million. Rice is cultivated in 81 district of 17 province, included Kunduz, Baghlan, Takhar Nangarhar, Laghman, Kunar, Balkh, Herat, Badghis, Badakhshan, Khost, Paktia, Daikundi, Uruzgan, Kabul, Bamyán and Sar-i-Pul. Kunduz is the top rice-producing province, with 48,229 hectares of farms yielding 3.36 tons of per hectare. The ministry has spent 2.9 billion afghanis on implementing 235 projects and 1.2 million have farmers benefited from irrigation water during the ongoing year. *(Pajhwok)*

## Commander Qaisari Released from NDS Custody: Junbish



KABUL - The Junbish-i-Milli Islami party on Friday confirmed militia commander Nizamuddin Qaisari has been released by the National Directorate of Security after six months in detention. Security forces arrested Qaisari, a pro-government militia leader, in Maimana, the capital of northern Faryab province, on July 2 and shifted him to Kabul and he has since been in custody of the intelligence service.

Close to Vice-president Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum, Qaisari was released on Thursday night and moved to a guesthouse in the Shash Darak area of Kabul, said Junbish party deputy head Massoud Ahmad Massoud.

He said there had been no hurdle in the release of Qaisari whose case had been declared as 'one-sided' by the government and the Attorney General's Office.

*...(More on P4)...(11)*

## Over 1,000 Militants Killed in US Airstrikes

KABUL - The United States Air Force figures show that 1,089 Taliban fighters, including nine commanders, have been killed in the US airstrikes in Afghanistan since 9th November.

The US Air Force figures show that in the less than two recent months, over 440 airstrikes have been carried out in different parts of Afghanistan by the US army on the Taliban.

From the total airstrikes, 392 airstrikes were carried out in November and 150 airstrikes have been carried out in the three weeks of this month, December, in different parts of the country including Helmand and Farah provinces.

According to the US Air Force, only 450 Taliban fighters have been killed in the three weeks of December in the airstrikes. US forces in Afghanistan said the airstrikes are aimed to support the Afghan security forces against Taliban. Col. Dave Butler, *...(More on P4)...(13)*



## Outlook Horoscope

### Aries (Mar. 22-Apr.20)



It's possible that you're having some ups and downs in your love life at the moment. Someone may be asking you to play another role than you're used to playing in your relationship. Today, Aries, you should take the time to think about these pressures on you. You're going to need the answers to these questions over the next few months.

### Taurus (Apr.21-May 20)



Today you may get the opportunity to feel proud of yourself. But don't let things get too out of hand. It isn't often that you allow yourself this little bit of narcissism. Everything you say will be pertinent, and people will let you know. For once, the stars are giving you the opportunity to cater to your own ego, so take advantage of it!

### Gemini (May 21-June 20)



Today you may be overcome by a current of humanist thought, Gemini. Your consciousness is traveling, and you probably couldn't care less about the details of the events going on around you. You're freethinking, which is inspired by your spirit of fairness. You may even be in a situation where you have to act as a kind of "enlightened" referee, which you will only be too happy to do!

### Cancer (June 21-July 20)



Even if you're a good judge of character, Cancer, the people who know you say that you base your opinions on your personal feelings, which often affect your good judgment. Today your critics are wrong and your judgments are as precise and objective as they can possibly be. They may even help you out of a sticky situation.

### Leo (July 21-Aug. 21)



You have a tendency to want to explain everything that goes on around you, Leo. You rationalize everything in an instant, and group all your experiences into great theories. But you've been very quiet for quite some time now. It's as if something is keeping you from speaking. Today you will get a few words in, so don't worry.

### Virgo (Aug. 22-Sep 22)



As a Virgo, you don't really like to talk about things. Talking just isn't one of your specialties. Everyone has his/her own role, and yours is to take action and create, not talk about doing it. However, the planetary positions today might make you utter a few very deep words. Come on! Tell us a little something about how you feel deep inside!

### Libra (Sep 23-Oct. 22)



Scientists seem to live in a world apart from the rest of us, Libra, and from the events in everyday life, because they're so absorbed in other realities. This is a lot like your universe. If you were a scientist, you might do what they sometimes do - make parallels, like those learned men who apply their scientific reasoning to events in the world by analogy.

### Scorpio (Oct.23-Nov.22)



You're often like a Zen master who doesn't say anything to pupils for months, until the day the pupils begin to not believe any more and find themselves growing indifferent to the whole thing. Then the master pronounces one or two phrases that are so incredibly true that no one knows what to say! You could be that Zen master today.

### Sagittarius (Nov.23-Dec.20)



- It's time to take some time out of your busy day for your personal life, Sagittarius. One of your family members or friends may need to talk to you, and you need to listen attentively to what they have to say. You need to use all your wonderful energy to get down to the heart of the matter. Who knows? You may discover some hidden treasures along the way.

### Capricorn (Dec.21-Jan19)



Today is a good day to clarify your life, Capricorn. You may have understood lately that it's useless to undertake anything new when you're confused. You've figured out that all it takes to get out of that state is to take care of yourself, eat better, get more sleep, or take a vacation. Your mind will be sufficiently rested today to deal with all the problems that come your way.

### Aquarius (Jan 20-Feb.18)

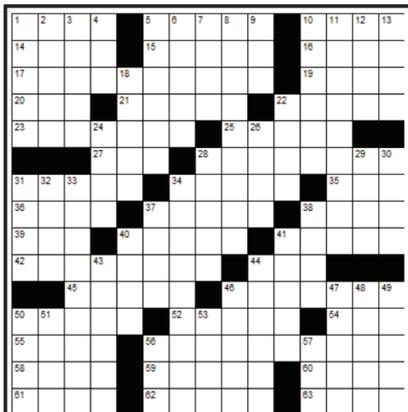


Are you going to be available to other people today? Someone in your entourage may need to confide in you. If the superficiality of the exchange bothers you, you will understand what the atmosphere of today is all about! Yes, you're available, but not for just anything. You're in no mood to waste time at the moment.

### Pisces (Feb.19-Mar.20)



You may come in contact with someone today with whom you enjoy a highly emotional exchange. You may even fall in love! Be very attentive to your moods and everything going on inside you, Pisces. They will be particularly strong, and they will help you understand what is changing in you. Just be careful to distinguish your feelings from those of your (future?) partner.



### Across

1. European currency, 6. Wanes, 10. Drudgery, 14. Flora, 15. Journey, 16. Christmas season, 17. Interlace, 19. Anagram of "Ties", 20. Chinese cinnamon, 21. Atlantic food fish, 22. Rip, 23. French farewell, 25. Compassion, 26. A compact mass, 30. A bowl-shaped depression, 32. Rejoinder, 35. Laughable, 39. Ring around the nipple, 40. Hairly, 41. Social department, 43. Mollify, 44. One who denies, 46. Resorts, 47. Prevent legally, 50. Was fond of, 53. Large mass of ice, 54. Nevertheless, 55. Place, 60. Boast, 61. Unsanctified, 63. Wicked, 64. Breezed through, 65. Cornered, 66. French for "Head", 67. Roman emperor, 68. Impudent, , ,

### Down

1. Sweeping story, 2. Forearm bone, 3. Rodents, 4. 1 1 1 1, 5. Stripes, 6. French for "Summer", 7. Stimulating drink, 8. Encamp, 9. Hurried, 10. Mystifying, 11. Not inner, 12. Of a pelvic bone, 13. Apprehensive, 18. Roll of bills, 24. Frozen water, 25. Notes, 26. A metric unit of weight, 27. Former Italian currency, 28. Not closed, 29. Wastefulness, 31. Drags, 33. Slumber, 34. Mountain pool, 36. Applaud, 37. Aquatic plant, 38. Caustics, 42. Quiet, 43. Biblical boat, 45. One or the other, 47. A common green newt, 48. Wait on, 49. Characteristic, 51. L, 52. Knuckleheads, 54. Basic unit of money in China, 56. Daughter of Zeus and Demeter, 57. Amazes, 58. Dregs, 59. Countercurrent, 62. Fuss, , ,

### Yesterday's Solution

MILE SALSALA IDEM  
UNIT OVALS NOPE  
FUNGITIONAIS SWIM  
FIE ARIEL BUNCO  
STROKED ORALS  
BIG SMUTTING  
TAXIS SPLITS ZOD  
ABET SPANS SEND  
BUBBLING DOSES  
STOCKING BEN  
PREEN BOBSLED  
PSHAW APARAG EGO  
AHOZ SKYSCRAPER  
LOBO AERIAL DESK  
EDEN DRESS ARTS

M N A M O W T E S T I F Y  
B E T T E R Y K R I U Q B  
P R I C E S H G U O C S Q  
M D A V A I S W M V M L J  
E E I I R S M E A E L U W  
P S G S O Y I L L R A F O  
E U R I M L L L O H M I R  
V V O O A A E C D E R T T  
I L A N H N Y C O A O U H  
S O N S X A L E R D F A C  
T V D R O O L W O R S E A  
A E D I S T U O U Y R B O  
C R I E S H O U S I N G C