

Quote of the Day

Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.

Gilbert K. Chesterton

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Afghanistan Hopes for Talks with Taliban this Month

KABUL - Afghanistan expects to hold direct talks with the Taliban by the end of this month, an official said Sunday.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Ahmad Shakib Mostaghani told reporters that Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States agreed on a roadmap toward peace talks at a meeting in Islamabad the day before. He said the government hopes to "put an end to the futile violence which is imposed on our people."

The last direct talks between Kabul and the Taliban broke down after just one session last summer when Kabul announced that



the Taliban's reclusive, longtime leader Mullah Mohammad Omar died two years earlier. The next

four-country meeting is scheduled for Feb. 23 in Kabul. The Taliban are not taking part in those

negotiations, which aim to lay the groundwork for peace talks. The Afghan government has long

accused Pakistan of granting the insurgents safe haven across the porous border, charges denied by Islamabad. But Pakistan is widely believed to have influence over the Taliban and is seen as a key player in any peace efforts.

Afghan forces have struggled to fight off the Taliban since the U.S. and NATO officially ended their combat mission at the end of 2014. The insurgents have spread their footprint across the country, leading to high casualties among Afghan forces and fear among the population. The Taliban fractured last summer after the announcement of Mullah Omar's death,

with senior figures accusing his deputy-turned-successor, Mullah Akhtar Mansoor, of deceiving them by speaking in his name. The infighting appears to have died down in recent weeks, with many top commanders publicly accepting Mansoor's leadership. A unified front would allow the insurgents to speak with one voice in future talks. Despite the recent diplomatic efforts, the war shows no sign of abating.

A roadside bomb targeting judges in the eastern city of Puli Alam killed a policeman on Sunday ...*(More on P4)...(1)*

Thousands of Vacancies Remain Vacant

KABUL - Thousands of government positions are vacant; however, no efforts are seemingly being made to fill them with competent people.

Sources told TOLO-news that the number of vacant positions is around 50,000 posts and for unknown reasons the government is not calling for the positions to be filled.

Meanwhile, officials at the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) said that they have made efforts to find out the number of vacant positions in government organizations. They added that other organizations are reluctant to cooperate in this regard.

"The average number of members of one family in Afghanistan is 7.5 people. If there are 10,000 vacant positions, or tens of thousands of positions, then one person [if employed] can ...*(More on P4)...(2)*

Gen. Campbell Rules out Taliban's Return to Power



KABUL - The US and NATO top commander in Afghanistan on Sunday said the international community would never accept the return of Taliban to rule, saying the only way with the rebels was to join the peace process.

Gen. John Campbell was speaking at the first meeting of the joint commission of Afghanistan, US and NATO on implementation of security programs in Kabul. He said Afghanistan would not have the current military force if Kabul had not signed the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the US and Status of Forces Agreement

(SOFA) with NATO. He said the two agreements were not only important to the international community, but to Afghanistan as well. The two agreements helped Afghanistan enjoy continued support from the internation-

al community, he added. Calling Taliban as Afghanistan's enemy, the US general said that the Haqqani network, part of the Taliban, were killing Afghan civilians and did not want development, education, women's

rights and Afghan forces in Afghanistan.

Campbell stressed operations by the Resolute Support (RS) mission against the Taliban and said the RS would continue supporting Afghan forces to make them stronger.

He said the international community was committed to supporting Afghanistan under agreements signed with Kabul. He said the Taliban would be never allowed to lead Afghanistan, but they only could join the peace process.

"The Taliban should not damage the achievements made in Afghanistan, they should accept ...*(More on P4)...(3)*

Spike in Foreign Currency Trafficking Raises Concerns



KABUL - The moneychangers union in Kabul and the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) expressed their deep concern over trafficking of foreign currency through airports in Afghanistan.

According to law, no one may take more than \$20,000 USD out of Afghanistan without having permission.

Officials from the moneychangers union in Kabul's

Sarai-e-Shahzada said an increase in trafficking of foreign currency has affected the value of the Afghani and led to currency instability in exchange markets.

"Unfortunately, trafficking of foreign currency out of Afghanistan is underway by different people through different ways— via airports and borders," said Khan Mohammad Baz, head of the union ...*(More on P4)...(5)*

Waziri

Landmines Slow Down Military Operation in Baghlan

KABUL - The Defense Ministry said Sunday that insurgents have planted landmines in areas which lead to the embattled Dand-e-Ghori area of Baghlan province, an issue which is slowing down the military operation against the Taliban insurgents.

Dawlat Waziri, spokesman for the Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed that the military

campaign by Afghan forces has been slowed down due to landmines planted by the Taliban, adding that the security forces have also halted their air strikes and artillery shellings in a bid to ensure the security and safety of the civilian population.

When asked about the number of militants fighting Afghan ...*(More on P4)...(6)*

Consultative Panel set up in Mazar-I-Sharif Municipality

MAZAR-I-SHARIF - A consultative council has been formed for accelerating municipality activities in Mazar-i-Sharif, the capital of northern Balkh province, an official said on Saturday.

The 31-member council, involving representatives of civil

society, journalists, traders and women, would act as a bridge between the people and the municipality, the mayor of Mazar-i-Sharif said.

Mohammad Younus Muqeem told Pajhwok Afghan News the council was not an ...*(More on P4)...(7)*

MoE Engineers Demand Super Skill Allowance

KABUL - Dozens of construction engineers of the Ministry of Education (MoE) on Sunday staged a protest rally against what they claimed non-payment of "super skill allowance" and warned to continue their protest if the problem was not resolved.

Some 60 MoE construction engineers gathered in front of the Presidential Palace, saying they had not been paid the allowance from the past 14 months.

They chanted: "We want our legal rights", "we want to meet with the president about our problem."

They said they had been busy in hard construction works of the MoE in rural and insecure areas, but they were yet to receive their allowances.

Shah Wali Stanikzai, an engineer at the MoE's development department, said he was working with the ministry for the last four years, but remained ...*(More on P4)...(4)*

Kunduz Residents Stage Protest Against Mounting Insecurity

KUNDUZ CITY - A number of residents and civil society activists in Kunduz province staged protests on Sunday against mounting insecurity in the province.

They accused the government of incompetence and negligence in bringing security to the province.

The protesters called on government to conduct a large-scale operation in the province soon.

"Sporadic fighting is still going on in Kunduz and the Taliban are trying to find a foothold in the province. If the government doesn't take action, Kunduz city may once again fall to the Taliban," said Hamidullah Baloch, a civil society activist.

"People in Kunduz are fed up with being homeless and they are fed up with their houses being torched. We have to say that the government is a liar. The president [Ashraf Ghani] is a liar," said Ghulam Rabani, a member of Kunduz provincial council. He added that the government has no policy for Kunduz province.

Meanwhile, the acting governor of the province, Hamdullah Danishi, shares the concerns of the people of Kunduz and called on the concerned authorities to take action to eliminate militants.

"A large-scale operation should be conducted to eliminate the Taliban in Kunduz city," ...*(More on P4)...(8)*

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