

## Quote of the Day

Every day brings  
new choices.

Martha Beck

# Kabul to Host 4th Round of Quadrilateral Talks on Feb. 23

KABUL - Kabul will host the next round of four-nation consultations on the resumption of the Afghan peace process on Feb 23, Pakistan foreign ministry announced on Thursday. Representatives from Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States and China will review progress in efforts for bringing the Afghan insurgents to the negotiating table. At a weekly media briefing in Islamabad, the Foreign Office spokesman said the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), established in December, was facilitating the talks.

On the conclusion of the third round of talks in Islamabad in the first week of the current month,



the participants had called for direct negotiations between Kabul and the Taliban by the end of February.

A joint statement from the four-nation group said a roadmap to peace had been agreed upon. The group

stressed the outcome should be a political settlement that resulted in the cessation of violence. (Pajhwok)

## EU Terms Brussels Conference Vital for Afghanistan

BRUSSELS - The European Union's Special Envoy to Afghanistan, Franz-Michael Skjold Mellbin, said the Brussels Conference that will be held in the next six months is vital for Afghanistan as the international community will renew its commitments to the country. "We are asking for contributions to Brussels which we are responsible for...but for both conferences actually the request is the same. We are asking people to deliver contributions which are at or near the current levels until 2020," the EU ambassador told TOLONews. "EU itself has already committed to remain at the same level that we have been for the previous seven years, for the next

seven years," he added. He added: "There would be a number of things that we need the Afghan government to do ahead of the conference and then certainly in the follow up to the conference. It is going to be very difficult to continue to support Afghanistan at exceptional levels which is what it does right now." He stated that he does not believe in concerns over a political and military breakdown of the Afghan government because the Afghan people will always keep their unity among themselves. However he called on the Afghan government to use the next six months to move forward on a number of key issues. (Tolonews)

## ANSF Capture Key Daesh Stronghold in Nangarhar



JALALABAD - Afghan security forces have cleared 70 percent of Achin district in eastern Nangarhar province of Daesh militants, said security officials on Friday.

The district is considered as the main stronghold of the terrorist group in the region. Security officials in the province said that they will expand their offensive against Daesh to other districts of the province.

After a long delay, Afghan security forces launched their operations in Achin district last week. Officials said that security forces have destroyed the main military base of the... (More on P4)...(1)

## Gen. Raheel, Gen. Campbell Discuss Afghan Peace Process

KABUL - Outgoing Commander of Resolute Support Mission and US Forces in Afghanistan, General John F. Campbell paid a farewell call to General Raheel Sharif, chief of the Pakistani armed forces, at General Headquarter Rawalpindi, Inter-Public Service Relations (ISPR) said on Thursday. The meeting took place on Thursday in which both dignitaries reviewed the ongoing Afghan reconciliation process and discussed the way forward.

Gen. Sharif particularly thanked outgoing Commander Resolute Support Mission for his efforts towards stability in



Afghanistan.

To pay tributes to the Shuhada of Pakistani Security Forces, General John F. Campbell also laid a floral wreath at the Yadgar-e-Shuhada.

Earlier the US Senate Armed Services Committee approved the nomination of General Nicholson unanimously during a Congressional hearing on Afghanistan where the out-

going commander Gen John Campbell testified before the Senators. In his testimony last week, General Nicholson said he would review the plan to cut US troop level by nearly half by the start of next year. Gen Nicholson is currently the US Army commander of NATO land forces. He has served in multiple capacities including chief of staff operations for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and US Forces - Afghanistan, director of Pakistan Afghanistan Coordination Cell for the Joint Staff, and deputy commander - Stability of ISAF Regional Command - South. (Pajhwok)

## Major Anti-Taliban Offensive in Kunduz Soon

KUNDUZ CITY - Chief of Army Staff Gen. Qadam Shah Shaheem has said a major operation would be launched soon in northern Kunduz province to subdue Taliban militants.

Gen. Shaheem, accompanied by Deputy Interior Minister Lt. Gen. Ayub Salagni, visited Kunduz to meet security forces and assess the security situation and needs of the forces, Lt. Gen. Sher Aziz Kamawal, the 808th Zone Spin Ghar police chief, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

He said the visiting delegation from Kabul vowed to assess and resolve problems being faced by security forces in Kunduz.

Gen. Shaheem told a press conference they would launch a clearing operation in Kunduz in the near future against Taliban who he said were servants of outsiders. "Small operations are underway in some parts of Kunduz and many parts of the province would be cleared of... (More on P4)...(2)

## Cameron Struggles to Overcome Summit Resistance to EU-UK Deal

BRUSSELS - David Cameron struggled at a European Union summit on Friday to overcome last pockets of resistance to a deal designed to keep Britain in the 28-nation bloc, with diplomats forecasting an agreement within hours.

"We are moving forward but we are not yet at a stage where a deal is almost done," a British official told reporters after the British Prime Minister held all-night negotiations with top EU officials and a handful of leaders with specific objections to the draft text.

Cameron was hoping to fly home and chair a cabinet meeting later on Friday to endorse what he calls a "new settlement" with the EU, setting in motion plans to call a referendum on Britain's future in the Union, probably for June 23.

The stakes are high for both Britain and the EU, with opinion polls showing voters almost evenly split.

The risks of Cameron's strategy were highlighted on Friday when an opinion poll showed the campaign to leave the bloc had a two-percentage lead with 36 percent support. The TNS poll showed 34 percent of British voters wanted to stay in the bloc, 7 percent... (More on P4)...(7)

## Pentagon Sets Date for Change of Command in Afghanistan



PENTAGON - The change of command for U.S. Gen. John Campbell, the leading American general in Afghanistan, and his replacement, Lt. Gen. John "Mick" Nicholson, is set for March 2, Campbell's top spokesman told VOA Thursday. Speaking during a phone interview from Kabul, Brig. Gen. Wilson Shoffner said the date was based on when they could get Gen. Nicholson to Afghanistan, as well as providing each of them enough time for the transition.

Shoffner said the date was solidified on Wednesday. He would not release when Lt. Gen. Nicholson would arrive in Afghanistan due to security purposes. Gen. Campbell has said he will retire from the Army after the transition. Officials close to the general said he was offered another four-star general position by the Obama administration, but respectfully declined.

Gen. Campbell assumed command of the NATO International Security Assistance Force in August 2014. He led the NATO transition from a combat mission to an advise-and-assist operation at the end of that year. (VaA)

## U.S. and Russia Hold Talks on Syria Ceasefire Ahead of U.N. Meeting

GENEVA - U.S. and Russian military officials have held talks in Geneva ahead of a wider meeting on Friday aimed at trying to secure a cessation of hostilities in Syria, diplomats said.

The unannounced bilateral meeting was aimed at narrowing positions before the two powers jointly chair a United Nations meeting on the issue, they said, declining to give details. "The idea of the whole exercise is for Russia and the United States to have a joint view. The U.N. will apparently promote a ceasefire and implementation, and will negotiate with the parties," a diplomat close to the process told Reuters.



U.N. spokesman Michele Zaccheo said the larger meeting of the International Syria Support Group would take place at the United Nations on Friday afternoon. Moscow hopes that agreements on a ceasefire in Syria will be reached on Friday, Interfax news agency quotes. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov

as saying on Thursday. Russian air strikes begun last September saved President Bashar al-Assad's forces after months of military gains by rebels and turned the tide of fighting in his favour, exasperating the United States and its allies which have been working for years to defeat him. (More on P4)...(4)

## Afghanistan Banks Association Islamic Banking will Help Boost Money Circulation

KABUL - Officials from Afghanistan Banks Association (ABA) have said that developing an Islamic banking system in the country will help boost money circulation and improve Afghanistan's monetary system.

According to ABA, presently 11 percent of Afghans have more than 280 billion Afs in cash deposited in banks. However they call for an Islamic banking system to attract stagnant money and boost money circulation.

"Demands for an Islamic banking system is on the rise in the country. If Islamic banking services are offered to people, this will help attract a visible amount of



money deposited by people in banks and strengthen money circulation," ABA chief executive Najibullah Amiri said.

Meanwhile, a number of residents have also voiced support for the expansion of Islamic banking in the country to help bolster the national economy and to revive the monetary system. "Alhamdulillah (Praising Allah in Arabic) we are Muslim, if an Islamic banking system is introduced in the country in line with the Islamic laws, we are prepared to deposit our money in these banks, this... (More on P4)...(5)

## UNESCO to Establish Task Force to Protect Cultural Heritage



BAMYAN - The United Nations education and culture agency (UNESCO) and the Italian government have signed an agreement to establish a task force of cultural heritage experts.

The accord was signed by UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova and Italian Foreign

Affairs Minister Paolo Gentiloni to launch the 'Unite for Heritage' coalition, which has been prompted following attacks on cultural heritage sites.

In 2001, the Taliban's former leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, decreed that two ancient... (More on P4)...(3)

## Afghan Military to Fly First Unmanned Aircraft in March: U.S. Official



KABUL - The Afghan military is expected to field its first specialized surveillance drones as soon as March, a U.S. commander in Kabul said on Thursday, as the Asian nation slowly expands its own air force.

The boost in military hardware comes as Afghan security forces, fighting largely alone since the withdrawal of most international forces in 2014, have struggled for months to hold back a Taliban insurgency.

The NATO-led military alliance will provide the remotely piloted ScanEagle aircraft, and will train Afghan soldiers to operate the system, said Major General Gordon Davis, commander of the unit that pro-

duces new equipment for the Afghans.

"We are just getting the first drones that will be deployed by the corps," Davis told Reuters in an interview. "We've been preparing sites. The pieces and parts are coming in now."

The first drones to be operated by the Afghan National Army will be rolled out in the country's north and south, which have seen some of the heaviest fighting in recent months, Davis said. Afghan officials have asked the alliance for additional resources in air support and reconnaissance, both areas that remain heavily reliant on its aid. An... (More on P4)...(6)