

### (1) President Vows...

"I have ordered all the governors to prevent land grabbing and return usurped lands back to the nation," he said, promising that properties of people would be protected against grabbers in future.

"No one can threaten legal land property of a person neither by force, authority or money," he said.

According to reports, thousands acres of lands has been rescued from land grabbers while four million acres of land remains usurped.

The president said getting benefits of lands that had not been used so far and improving of farmers' livelihood was another top priority of his government, asking relevant organs to pay attention to establishing cold storages and laboratories to process agricultural products.

He asked participants of the conference to highlight problems in the agriculture sector and provide their suggestions for solutions. Ghani expressed concern that Afghanistan yearly imported agricultural materials worth \$4 billion from foreign countries.

At the end of the conference, the president asked the private sector to cooperate with the government in promoting Afghanistan agriculture.

The three-day conference is being attended by government officials, representatives of private sector and farmers.

Agriculture and Livestock Minister Asadullah Zamir said his ministry would share new agricultural programs with the private sector and farmers during the conference.

The creation of an agricultural information bank at the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and establishing laboratories and animal clinics in rural areas were part of his ministry's programs, he said.

Zamir added equipping provincial agriculture departments and creating a contact system with farmers were other important programs of his ministry. (Pajhwok)

### (2) New Defense ...

account. SIGAR found the building was "well-built" but there were still "several construction issues," including issues that could affect the building's ability to withstand an earthquake or a significant amount of rain.

Originally, the cost of the headquarters building was \$48.7 million USD, and it was to be completed in about 18 months. However, there were problems with the contract from the outset.

As a result, the cost to complete the building rose to \$154.7 million, or more than three times the original estimated cost. Similarly, although the headquarters building is now essentially complete, it took almost five years longer to complete than originally anticipated, read the report.

Meanwhile a number of military analysts in the country did not deny the possibility of corruption having played a part in the construction and of technical issues. They said however, that most of the U.S army's construction projects in Afghanistan are facing the same issues.

"These problems exist. In most of the projects funded by the Americans, only 10 percent of the total money of the projects has been spent and the remaining amount is embezzled. This means that there was corruption in construction of the new building for the Ministry of Defense," said Zalmay Wardak, a military analyst.

Meanwhile, a number of economic analysts said that comparing the building to a number of other new buildings, built at a high cost, with the help of foreign countries, may be very harmful to the future of Afghanistan.

The analysts said that not only should U.S defense construction sector be responsible but so too should contractors.

"Compare this building and

its construction with the new building of the parliament and everything will be clear. On the other hand, we see that most of the big construction projects are being subcontracted so many times the last subcontractor does not even receive 20 percent of the total amount of the money allocated for the project. We should not expect these construction projects to be of good quality," said Azarakhsh Hafizi, an economic analyst. SIGAR in its report indicates that during the construction of the building efforts were made to have the contractor's working procedure monitored by the U.S army engineers but due to unknown reasons the engineers did not monitor the project. (Tolonews)

### (3) Afghanistan Must...

punishment," Human Rights Watch senior researcher on Afghanistan Patricia Gossman stated. "That means prosecuting any officer who ordered the killings, as well as the soldiers who pulled the trigger."

The SCA would not say whether the men were affiliated with the Taliban, but did say the hospital in question treats all people regardless of their political affiliations.

Human Rights Watch urged the Afghan authorities to check whether any foreign donors had assisted the Afghan troops, including those from the United States, Germany or Turkey, which provide train, advise and assist support to Afghan troops.

"Foreign donors to the Afghan military should inform President Ghani that they will not underwrite the operations of forces that target protected medical facilities or execute patients," Gossman argued. "No government should want to be paying for such atrocities."

Reports of the latest attack on an Afghan hospital come nearly four months after US airstrike killed more than 40 staff and patients at a Doctors Without Borders (MSF) medical facility in Kunduz, Afghanistan. (Sputnik)

### (4) Afghan Troops ...

presence in the area did not mean anything," he said. "We will use them in battle with enemies in other parts of Helmand province."

Fierce fighting has raged in Musa Qala and other parts of Helmand for months and the Taliban overran the district in August last year before they were driven back by Afghan forces backed by U.S. airstrikes. Musa Qala itself is a dry and sparsely inhabited district that British and American troops fought hard to control between 2006 and 2008 but its loss could bring further losses elsewhere, including Sangin where government forces have been clinging on.

"Now that the government has withdrawn its forces from this district, we will see Kajaki, Gereshk and Sangin collapsing very soon," said deputy provincial council member Abdul Majid Akhundzada.

The Taliban said in a statement it had captured armoured personnel carriers, bulldozers and other equipment abandoned in Roshan Tower and nine other checkpoints.

The withdrawal prompted speculation among local officials that the government had reached an arrangement with the Taliban but Abdul Jabbar Qahraman, presidential envoy for security affairs in Helmand, denied any such pact.

"There wasn't any deal," he said. "We learnt that there was no need to continue the fight in that area."

No comment was immediately available from the ministry of defence in Kabul.

The outgoing commander of international forces, Gen. John Campbell, recently sent hundreds of American troops to Helmand, where they assist and train Afghan forces but do not fight.

A spokesman for NATO's Resolute Support mission in Kabul said its aim remained to train,

advise and assist and referred questions on Afghan troop movements to the defence ministry.

U.S. officials estimate the Taliban dominates or threatens almost a third of the country and has full control over at least four districts. Although it briefly took the northern city of Kunduz last year, it does not control any provincial capitals. Although Helmand has been one of the provinces most at risk, the Taliban have been pushing forward across the country, putting severe strain on government troops, fighting alone since international forces ended most combat operations in 2014. (Reuters)

### (5) 3,000 ...

on routes close to Kunduz city. "The Taliban are establishing checkpoints even during the day for two to three hours and then go to their villages," said Farhad, a resident of Kunduz city.

Telecommunication services are also being suspended at night, they say.

"Those who come from villages say that the Taliban are establishing checkpoints," said Amanullah, a shopkeeper in the city.

Kunduz city collapsed to the Taliban for three days last year but it took security forces weeks to oust the insurgents and stabilize the city. (KP)

### (6) Experts Blast ...

NUG should not do so. "If the constitutional Loya Jirga is expected to be convened, then according to rules district council elections should be held. As we see now, the elections cannot be held, because the situation is deteriorating day by day," said Gul Rahman Qazi, former head of the Commission for Overseeing Implementation of the Constitution. Qazi added that the government should instead convene a traditional Loya Jirga to provide a legal base for the government.

Meanwhile, members of the Election Commissions Selection Committee accused the NUG of negligence in bringing about electoral reforms.

"The two leaders are afraid that they might not receive enough support from people in elections and Loya Jirga," said Naim Ayubzada, a member of the committee.

Although the government has pledged on several occasions in the past to bring about electoral reforms, some influential figures believe the NUG doesn't have the will to bring reforms and convene a Loya Jirga. (Tolonews)

### (7) Gov't Rejects ...

as encouraging. "The government's commitment will be instrumental in turning the page on the recruitment and use of children in the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)," the report said.

In 2015, an average of 53 children were killed or injured every week, the highest number since 2009, when the UN began documenting casualties, the report said, adding most of child casualties were attributed to ground engagement between conflicting parties.

The UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict also called on all parties to "respect international humanitarian law and to take all precautions to reduce the impact of conflict on children." (Xinhua)

### (8) Afghan Battle ...

also destroyed several power pylons and thus plunged Afghan capital Kabul into darkness over the past three weeks. Similarly, military operations in parts of the restive Badghis province have left 20 militants dead since Friday, an army spokesman in the province, Shir Hamza said Saturday.

"A cleanup operation involving units of national army and police was launched in parts of Badghis province on Friday and so far 20 armed Taliban have been killed and 13 others injured," Hamza told Xinhua.

Eight security personnel have been injured during the operation, which is continuing, the official added.

Meanwhile, Taliban outfit in an online statement confirmed clashes in Badghis and Baghlan provinces, claiming its fighters have inflicted casualties on government forces in Sang-e-Atash district of Badghis, besides killing seven soldiers and injuring six others in Dand-e-Shahabudin over the past couple of days. (Xinhua)

### (9) Woman among ...

schools in this very conservative area.

Educating girls was even considered wrong and female teachers were unheard of. Aqeela set up a school for girls in a borrowed tent and worked hard to overcome parents' reluctance towards education.

Initially twenty families agreed, once she had put the focus of her teaching on the non-controversial subjects of personal hygiene, home management skills and religious education for girls. Having gained the trust of the community, she then introduced subjects like literacy, Dari language, mathematics, geography and history.

Over time she turned her school into a formal secondary school for girls which produced 1,000 graduates. They were mainly Afghan refugee girls, but Aqeela made sure that local Pakistani children were included as well. Several of her students have gone on to become doctors, engineers, government officials and even teachers in Afghanistan.

Today there are nine schools in the camp with many female teachers and over 1,500 students, 900 of which are girls. Due to the higher level of education, the occurrence of early and forced marriages has declined in the community.

For her efforts to give girl refugees access to education, Aqeela was recently honoured by the UNHCR with the Nansen Refugee Award. (Tolonews)

### (10) Bodies of 12...

stop going to foreign countries through danger routes so they do not become food of fishes."

The bereaved woman said sailors could not find bodies of other Afghan migrants and most of the coffins were empty which had been sent to Kabul for condolences with their families.

Another girl, while loudly crying, said: "My brothers left for Europe to save their lives. One of them was twice wounded in suicide attacks in Kabul City and the second had been struggling for three years to find a job. Oh my God, I lost my brothers."

The girl said her brothers were victims of violence in Afghanistan and they would not have lost their lives if the situation was fine in the country.

More than a million refugees arrived in Europe by sea in 2015, with over 80 percent entering via Greece, according to the UN.

The International Organization for Migration says 3,771 asylum seekers died or went missing on their way to Europe in 2015. (Pajhwok)

### (11) 70 Tonnes...

sale of substandard items. He said: "The governor has ordered checking of medicine at customs stations before their supply to the market." At least 200 tonnes of such items were burnt last year. (Pajhwok)

### (12) Tribal Elder ...

Friday. Rahman is currently under investigation. Mohammadi accused the Daesh fighter of involvement in at least 14 civilian killings on the Kabul-Ghor highway, including the traffic chief for Ghor, three traffic officers and a judge. (Pajhwok)

### (13) Afghan Soldier ...

had been sent to Shneez for investigating the incident. He added the ANA soldier manning the security post has been detained for interrogations.

At least 12 civilians, including 10 children, have been killed in military attacks in the past few months in Syedabad district.

Three days back, soldiers raided a hospital of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan in the Tangi Syedan area of Daimirdad district and killed four people, including two patients. (Pajhwok)

### (14) Barmal Students ...

from the district were enrolled in Pakistani schools due to lack of education facilities in the area.

"The government repeatedly says that schools are functional across Barmal, but this is not the case," he said, asking the authorities to open all educational institutes in the district at the earliest possible.

Abdur Rahman, another resident, confirmed the closure of schools had left parents with no option but to send their children to Pakistan.

"If schools in Barmal are reopened, Pakistani refugees are also ready to let their children study Afghanistan's syllabus," he observed, stressing improved educational facilities at the local level.

Widespread insecurity and other factors have led to the closure of schools in the backward border town, according to Rahman, who hoped the situation would be addressed on a priority basis.

Lewal promised the issue would be shared with the higher-ups in Kabul and a solution found sooner rather than later. He said education facilities for a thousand students from Barmal would be ensured in the national capital.

Governor Aminullah Shariq also pledged all-out efforts to reopen schools in the district. "Providing education facilities for the locals is our responsibility," he remarked.

Education Director Kochai Zazai told Pajhwok Afghan News Barmal schools had been shut down because of violence. Efforts were underway to reactivate the schools, he concluded. (Pajhwok)

### (15) Rocket Attack ...

injuries have been taken to hospital for medical treatment.

Since eruption of fighting between security forces and Taliban militants in Dand-e-Ghori and Dand-e-Shahabudin districts outside Pul-e-Khumri a month ago, several rockets and artillery shells hit the provincial capital Pul-e-Khumri city. (Xinhua)

### (16) Daesh Leader ...

the emergence of Daesh about 16 months before, the hotspot of terrorists was southern part of the country but now they are apparently trying to establish its roots in western and northern parts of the country as well more likely to spill over to other countries.

Observing the situation, Turkmenistan has strengthened its border security by sending additional combat-ready forces and equipment to its border areas with Afghanistan. (KP)

### (17) Global Unity ...

piracy has declined in Somalia coast mainly due to international ship's adhering to the latest best management practices (BMP4) recommendations and private armed security guard onboard ships," Choong said. However, experts still believe that a single successful hijacking of a merchant vessel will rekindle the Somali pirates' passion to resume its piracy efforts. (Xinhua)

### Al-Qaida Gunmen Captures Third Southern Town in Yemen

ADEN - Gunmen of the Yemen-based al-Qaida branch seized a third town in Yemen's southern province of Abyan Saturday after clashes with pro-government tribal fighters, leaving five people killed, a security official told Xinhua. In the early hours of the day, scores of well-armed al-Qaida gunmen took control of the coastal town of Ahwar, in southern

Abyan province, killing a senior pro-government tribal chief along with his four guards, the local security source said on condition of anonymity. "The al-Qaida attackers burned cars and demolished houses of the pro-government tribal after seizing Ahwar town," the security source said. Local residents told Xinhua that the tribal fighters could not stand long in front of a large number of al-Qaida gunmen, who spread in around the town and set up several checkpoints there. The al-Qaida gunmen seized full control over government buildings and a number of suburbs and villages around the Ahwar town, according to local residents. Last December, scores of gunmen of the al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) took full control over two strategic towns in neighboring southern Abyan province, about 45 kilometres from Aden, Yemen's temporary capital. (Xinhua)

### North Korea Escalates War of Words in Standoff with Seoul

PYONGYANG - North Korea responded to an unusually harsh verbal attack by South Korea's president against the North's leader and its recent nuclear test and rocket launch with a characteristically colorful invective of its own Saturday, calling her policy traitorous and adding that Washington's newly enacted sanctions are "laughable."

The North's official reaction - including the insult "senile granny" - was expected, though it took several days for Pyongyang to announce it through its state-run media.

North Korea regularly condemns South Korean President Park Geun-hye through sexist and violent language, saying recently that she lives upon "the groin of her American boss."

But the renewed war of words has some worried that the tensions could lead to real conflict.

As evidence of heightened anxieties, sounds of explosions early Saturday caused South Korean residents of a front-line island to prepare to evacuate, but it was later determined that the noise came from a North Korean artillery drill across the rivals' disputed maritime border. No North Korean projectiles crossed into the south side of the border.

Park has been backed up several high-profile demonstrations of U.S. military might that are seen by Pyongyang as deliberate provocations. (AP)

### WHO Dispels 4 Biggest Rumors about Zika and Microcephaly

BEIJING - While the Zika virus is spreading explosively in the Americas, where an increasing number of microcephaly cases are being reported, rumors about the virus and microcephaly are also swirling.

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Friday issued a statement, dispelling the four biggest rumors around the mosquito-borne virus and microcephaly.

Rumor Number One: Microcephaly in babies is caused by vaccines.

There is no evidence that vaccines cause microcephaly in babies, the WHO said.

The statement added that there is no evidence linking any vaccine to the increase in microcephaly cases that were observed first in French Polynesia during the 2013-2014 outbreak and more recently in northeastern Brazil.

Meanwhile, an extensive review of the literature published in 2014 found no evidence that any vaccine administered during pregnancy resulted in birth defects. The Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety reached a similar conclusion in 2014. Rumor Number Two: Pyriproxyfen insecticide causes microcephaly. (Xinhua)