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|--|---|--|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Jalalabad</b><br>Partly Cloudy<br>22°C<br>6°C | <b>Ghazni</b><br>chance of Snow<br>7°C<br>1°C | <b>Kandahar</b><br>Cloudy<br>13°C<br>4°C | <b>Mazar</b><br>Partly Cloudy<br>18°C<br>6°C | <b>Herat</b><br>Partly Cloudy<br>12°C<br>3°C | <b>Bamayan</b><br>Chance of Snow<br>2°C<br>-5°C | <b>Kabul</b><br>Partly Cloudy<br>12°C<br>2°C |
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## In 'Special Message', Taliban Leader Urges Afghans to Plant More Trees

KABUL - The Taliban group in Afghanistan on Sunday used a rare public statement in the name of its leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, to call on Afghans to plant more trees for worldly and other-worldly good. Official Taliban outlets released the "special message" under Akhundzada's name, an uncommon move for the group that has recently published unsigned statements on a range of issues such as civilian casualties, upcoming military operations, and the anniversary of the withdrawal of Soviet troops in the 1980s. Akhundzada, a cleric, is believed to have been in



hiding since becoming Taliban leader in May 2016 following the death of his predecessor in a U.S. drone strike in Pakistan. In the statement, he urged

Afghan civilians and Taliban fighters to "plant one or several fruit or non-fruit trees for the beautification of Earth and the benefit of almighty Allah's

creations." The Taliban has been waging an insurgency against the government in Kabul and its NATO coalition backers since being ousted from power in a

U.S.-led military intervention in 2001. Since the withdrawal of most foreign combat troops in 2014, the Taliban has made slow but steady gains, now controlling or contesting more than 40 percent of Afghanistan. While the Taliban is mostly known for its insurgent attacks, it has political aspirations and has often worked to provide basic services and assert connections in communities in areas it controls. Akhundzada, who was reported to have spent 15 years teaching at a mosque in Pakistan, interpreted verses of the Koran in his call for more trees in the arid country. (Reuters)

## 'Gardez-Patan Road Work Stopped for Non-Payment'

GARDEZ - Local residents say construction work could not be initiated on a 73-kilometre portion of the Gardez-Dand Patan highway in southeastern Paktia province, two years after the projected work was launched. The Ministry of Public Works had allocated 199 million afghanis for the road's construction between Gardez, the provincial capital, and Dand Patan district near the Pakistani border. Some members of the provincial council (PC) say the contractor had been made 60 percent of the total payment, but it was yet to launch work on the road despite the passage of two years. Then deputy public works minister and former Paktia governor Juma Khan Hamdard and other officials had participated in the project's launch. At that time, Hamdard had said: "Inshah Allah, this road will be constructed at a cost of 199 afghanis million in two years. The road should have been constructed earlier, but a lack of budget delayed it." But it did not happen and the road, which should have been completed by now, remains in a rundown condition. Paktia PC head Dr. Allah



Mir Behramzai on Saturday told Pajhwok Afghan News that they had many times complained to the provincial public works department about the protracted delay in launching work on the road. He said the reason behind the delay remained unknown. The public representative said nine districts were situated along the highway and residents of these districts were in great trouble due to the road's dilapidated condition. He claimed the contractor had received 60 percent of the payment and had just constructed a 300-metre sidewalk so far. A member of the provincial council, Ayub Gharwal, held similar views and said the road's condition had further ...*(More on P4)...(11)*

## Ghani Confers High State Medal on NATO Senior Civilian Representative

KABUL - President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani conferred high state medal of Ghazni Amanullah Khan on NATO Senior Civilian Representative Ismail Aramaz for his services in supporting Afghanistan's stability. The Office of the President, ARG Palace, said President Ghani met with Mr. Aramaz in the Presidential Palace on Saturday evening. The two sides emphasized on continued cooperation between the Afghan government and the North Atlantic



Treaty Organization. President Ghani thanked Mr. Aramaz for his services and efforts while serving as the senior civilian representative ...*(More on P4)...(12)*

## Intending Hajj Pilgrims Deposit \$60m in Advance

KABUL - Intending hajj pilgrims have deposited more than \$60million to the State Bank in advance this year, hoping to get a chance to visit Saudi Arabia in next four years. The bank has promised not to use the money. Hajj and Religious Affairs Minister Faiz Mohammad Mukhtar told Pajhwok Afghan News about 125,000 pilgrims had been registered for the holy journey, showing a considerable increase in their number compared to previous years due to the decreased prepaid money. Mukhtar said the prepaid money of each pilgrim had been reduced to \$500 from \$1,060 in compliance with a decision by the National Assembly and the National Hajj Committee. "Hajj expenses are determined after all costs of pilgrims' accommodation, airfare, general expenses and money taken by Saudi Arabia are calculated." About 30,000 pilgrims are expected to be sent to Saudi Arabia for this year's pilgrimage from Afghanistan,



including 8,000, the minister said, adding the 30,000 aspirants would be selected through a lucky draw among 45,000 people who had registered themselves for hajj last year. About 140,000 hajj applicants were already on the list pending and the 125,000 people registered this year would be arranged and included in the pilgrims' list in the next four years through a lucky draw among all of them. He said the process of collecting money in advance had been launched about four years ago and every year 40,000 to 70,000 people had ...*(More on P4)...(13)*

## Concerns over Economic Implications of Border Closure

KABUL - People on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan borders are experiencing tough times following fresh border restrictions imposed by Pakistan in the aftermath of a recent terrorist attack in Pakistan's Sindh province. Hundreds of Afghans and Pakistanis are stuck on both side of the border. The business traffic between the two neighbors has been halted. Among those stuck, there are dozens of patients on the Afghan side of the border who are waiting for permission to enter Pakistan for treatment.



Pakistani immigration officials are not allowing them entry into Pakistan. The situation is leading to huge financial losses for those trying to enter Pakistan. Pakistan shut the Spin Boldak crossing ten days ago. Whenever the relations between the two countries sour, Pakistan imposes fresh border restrictions ...*(More on P4)...(14)*

## Reopen the Border, Sherpao Asks Pakistan Govt.

PESHAWAR - A senior Pakistani political figure has called for the immediate reopening of the border crossings at Torkham and Chaman to ease tensions between the two neighbours. The border sealing had caused huge losses to traders besides inconveniencing peoples from both countries, the Quami Watan Party (QWP) chief told reporters in Peshawar on Saturday. Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao, also a former chief minister and interior minister, said: "Both Pakistan and Afghanistan need to undertake confidence-building measures to reduce the trust deficit." He underlined the need for using diplomatic channels to build bilateral trust, improve mutual understanding and forge cooperation. Testy exchanges served no one's purpose, he argued. Student exchange programmes could help create better understanding between citizens of both countries, Sherpao believed, voicing grave concern over the recent wave of terrorist attacks in Pakistan. (Pajhwok)

## Sarobi District Chief Detained on Corruption Charges

SHARANA - The Sarobi district chief of north-eastern Paktika province has been detained by intelligence officials on administrative corruption and forgery charges, officials said on Sunday. The accused, Mohabbat Kharoti, was shown to media persons in Sharana, the provincial capital, by National Directorate of Security (NDS) personnel. An NDS official told Pajhwok Afghan News the district chief was detained on bribery and forgery charges. He said Kharoti had committed corruption and fraud in distribution of aid to displaced families. "The district chief has issued fake cards to his relatives to benefit from the aid that was for people in need. We have 13 copies of the ID cards as proof." He said the district chief had embezzled nearly one million afghanis. Kharoti would be referred to judicial organs soon. A displaced person from Omnai district living in Sarobi district, Jafar, said aid-giving ...*(More on P4)...(15)*

## Poverty Pushes Bamyan Women into Hard Labour

BAMYAN CITY - Fifty percent of women in central Bamyan province are doing hard manual labour, despite somewhat improvement in their situation over the past 15 years. Widespread poverty, joblessness and cultural taboos are the major problems facing Bamyan's women. However, hundreds of them are eking out decent livelihoods. Those on job enjoy basic facilities and reasonable incomes. Fatima, a beekeeper, told Pajhwok Afghan News the agriculture department had provided her five bee boxes. She acknowledged the support had enabled her to meet her financial needs to some extent. To her, this job is far better than working as cleaner in offices or homes. She sold around 100 kilograms of honey and earned 80,000 afghanis last year. "For some women, bee farming is a very good business. I want all women to engage in such activities." Hamida, another woman

who received 10 hens from a charity organisation, said she earned 80 afghanis daily from selling eggs. "We know selling these eggs cannot solve our problem, but it somehow helps in meeting our basic needs," she remarked. Basma, 45, is another woman who peels timber in the capital of Bamyan and earns 200 afghanis a day. She said the job was not permanent. "This duty is hard for women, who should do tailoring and embroidery. They can also sell different items besides doing office work. Unfortunately, however, such jobs are not available." Ali Hassanzada, an Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce & Industries (ACCI) official, said women were currently busy working in 35 tailoring, cosmetic and handicraft shops. "About 31 socioeconomic associations are registered with ACCI in Bamyan, and 15 women carry out economic activities on average under each ...*(More on P4)...(16)*

## Afghan-Turk Schools will Operate under Turkish



KABUL - President Ashraf Ghani has agreed to hand over the Afghan-Turk school, run by a pro-Gulen institution, to the Turkish government. Currently six Afghan-Turk schools are operating across Afghanistan where over 8,000 students, including girls, are enrolled. Because of the new agreement, some 150 pro-Gulen Turkish teachers will be expelled from Afghanistan after

the handover which is expected to happen soon. The schools are in Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad and Sheberghan cities. Afghanistan initially opposed to Turkey's demand to shut down the schools, but couldn't resist Ankara pressures, according to sources. The schools will remain open, but run by an institution directly operated by the Turkish government. (Tolonews)

## Loss of Diplomats won't Affect Friendly Ties: UAE



KABUL - A United Arab Emirates (UAE) diplomat on Saturday said the loss of Emirati diplomats in a bomb attack in southern Kandahar province would not affect friendly relations between the two countries. A statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) said Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani met the new charge'de affairs of the UAE to Afghanistan in Kabul. Rabbani welcomed Ahmad Al Khaja and again extended his condolences over the killing of five UAE diplomats in the deadly attack inside the governor's house. Ahmad Al Khaja said the inci-

dent would not affect relations between the two countries, but the UAE would further increase its humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. Twelve people including the UAE ambassador and five UAE diplomats, two Afghan MPs and the deputy governor for Kandahar were killed in the attack on December 31. The UAE Ambassador Juma Al Kaabi succumbed to his injuries from the attack a few days back. After the attack, President Ashraf Ghani met with bereaved families of the diplomats during a trip to the UAE on February 11. (Pajhwok)