

(1) Situation in ...

shares its border with Pakistan. Two HH-60 Pave Hawk Medevac helicopters were sent to provide assistance. One of those was waived off after taking fire and returned safely to its base, the second landed safely but sustained damage to its rotor blades after it apparently struck a wall. The helicopters remains on the ground, he said.

"This is an ongoing situation, there is still a fight going on in the immediate surroundings. We'll provide more details as they become available. There are dangerous parts of Afghanistan where the fight is still underway, and Helmand Province is one of those places," Cook said.

"The US forces that are there are doing what they can to provide support, training, advice, assistance to the Afghan forces as they take the lead in this fight, as they've continued to take the lead in this fight. "They've shown resilience Helmand Province, but this is an ongoing fight and I think the events of the last few hours in Afghanistan highlight that, highlight the risks that the Afghan forces are taking every single day, and of course, the risks that the American forces who are there assisting them are taking as well," he said.

Cook said the Afghan national security forces are getting better at defending their own country.

"But they're not at a point yet where they are able to operate entirely on their own, which is why US forces, NATO forces are there, assisting and providing this kind of training and assistance to the Afghans.

"So we're confident, because of the support that not only the US is providing, but other countries as well, that the Afghan forces are moving in the right direction. We've seen solid progress from the Afghan forces," Cook added. (Monitoring Desk)

(2) ISIS Not...

Afghanistan but the entire region, CEO Abdullah said the Afghanistan is determined to deal with the terror group loyalists as the Afghan government continues to work with its international allies to deal with the security challenges.

Meanwhile, Abdullah said the loyalists of ISIS terror group in Afghanistan have good resources. "There is no doubt that they [Daesh terrorists] have good resources," Abdullah told Press TV during an interview.

"It [Daesh] is a threat. It is a threat for Afghanistan. It is a threat for region. It is a threat for global peace and Afghanistan is determined to deal with it and at the same time it is not as significant force in Afghanistan as Taliban," he added.

The remarks by Abdullah comes as the loyalists of the terror group have recently stepped up insurgency activities and anti-government propaganda as they continue to expand foothold in the country.

The terror group also launched an FM radio late last year in eastern Nangarhar province and later issued a propaganda video which purportedly shows the cruel terrorist activities of the terror group in Afghanistan.

The US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter also warned regarding the emergent threat of the terror group during a surprise visit to Afghanistan late in December last year, however he said the threat posed by the terror group is being tracked very closely as they have started creating 'little nests' in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the commander of the US and NATO forces in Afghanistan Gen. John Campbell earlier said the loyalists of the terror group are attempting to establish a regional base in Jalalabad, the capital city of eastern Nangarhar province.

In an interview with The Associated Press, the commander of the US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, Gen. John Campbell, said Tuesday that foreign militants from Syria and Iraq had joined the loyalists of the terror group in eastern Nangarhar province and are trying to consolidate links with the leadership of the terror group based in Syria and Iraq. (KP)

(3) Electoral Bodies...

action by the Selecting Committee is illegal and the committee should be dissolved.

"We praise the decision of National Council that said no to the president's decree. We demand from the government to refrain from extrajudicial decree." Abdul Satar Saadat, chairman of IEC, said.

He noted that the reforms process has been illegally started by the National Unity Government.

Meanwhile, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) said that the selecting committee has been formed based on a political agreement not the laws of the country. "We never allow any internal and foreign institutions to interfere in independence of election commission," Ahmad Yousuf Nuristani, chairman of IEC said. (ATN)

(4) MoE Committed ...

"Money was funneled for the construction of at least 524 schools and none of them have been built. Meanwhile, nearly 110 schools to be built by local councils have not been constructed but funds have been paid over for this purpose," he said.

Balkhi said there are textbooks that have been printed for schools but students have not received them.

"There was technical staff, budgets and books but students did not get books," he said.

Meanwhile, Balkhi raised another issue on schools, particularly those in Kabul.

"There are reports that girls take guns to school but teachers cannot stop this. And also we have received reports that girls take drugs to schools but they cannot be stopped. I have ordered the Education Director to put an end to such moves by schoolgirls," he said.

Meanwhile, head of Social Councils of Schools Zia-ul-Haq Safi said at least 583 million Afs has been collected through the council for the country's education system and that they have helped reopen 24 schools in some provinces through the fund.

"Nearly 10 percent of the national budget has been allocated for education - 90 percent of which is spent on teachers' salaries, three percent on overall expenses and the remainder for improving quality of education in the country," he added.

This comes after a newly assigned technical team to investigate the findings of a fact-finding team on ghost schools presented its report to President Ashraf Ghani on Monday.

The previous team was assigned in August last year by the president to probe ghost teachers, ghost students, ghost schools, embezzlement in contracts of MoE, scholarships, appointment of unprofessional individuals for organizing gatherings, ghost training sessions in provinces and the renting of buildings for schools. (Tolnews)

(5) Iran Ready...

Economic and Industrial Coordination Council, Akbar Tarkan. Abdullah and Tarkan discussed ways to expand economic cooperation between the two countries.

Tarkan said that they have paved the ground for foreign investments in Iran. He added that despite Chabahar, there were 28 other ports in the country. He hoped that Afghan traders would avail the opportunity to invest in Iranian ports. Abdullah said that Chabahar port was of great economic importance for Afghanistan.

He added that Afghanistan and Iran along with other shareholders should make the most of the port.

"Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA) will encourage Afghan investors to invest in Chabahar port and find an alternative to the current trade route," he said.

Afghanistan is currently using Gwadar port in Karachi city of Pakistan.

Hinting at the economic importance of Chabahar, Abdullah said that the port is also of great value for regional countries. "It is the shortest route to connect Afghanistan to international waters," he added.

Abdullah also met with Iranian Vice President and head of Environmental Protection Organization, Masoumeh Ebtekar.

The two leaders stressed on the expansion of bilateral cooperation on environmental protection.

Ebtekar said that Iran had established several environmental protection centers across the region and had also held training programs for National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) in Afghanistan. She said that they wanted to develop the centers and called for Kabul's support to put end to environmental challenges.

Abdullah said that all necessary measures should be taken to protect the environment.

He added that it was the duty of everyone to protect nature. (Tolnews)

(6) Stanikzai Visits ...

at the 201st Selab (Flood) Corps of the Afghan National Army (ANA) base where he said that the security

forces will continue their military operations in the eastern parts.

He inaugurated a military unit named Reserved Unit that will operate under the 201st Selab Corps in Nangarhar in order to fight Daesh in the area.

"The conflicts which occur in the country's villages are carried out by the Taliban, sometimes by Daesh and sometimes by Lashkar-e-Taiba fighters. We should take this war out of Afghanistan. How long do we have to wait and watch the people suffer?" he said.

"People's concern over Daesh has increased but the security forces have inflicted heavy damage to them so far," he added.

Meanwhile, Nangarhar and Laghman governors said they are still concerned over insecurity in their provinces.

"Daesh has no place among the people anymore. The security forces will take them out of the country and we will change Afghanistan into their grave," said Nangarhar governor Salim Kunduzi.

"We need to stand alongside the security forces in order to enhance good governance, better systems and security," said Laghman governor Abdul Jabar Naemi. (Tolnews)

(7) N. Korea ...

Putin said Moscow was "extremely concerned" by the claims of a hydrogen bomb test by North Korea - which borders Russia - and that the Kremlin strongman had told scientists to look into it.

"President Vladimir Putin has ordered all data from monitoring stations, including seismological stations, to be studied thoroughly and to analyse the situation if a test is confirmed," spokesman Dmitry Peskov was quoted as saying by Russian news agencies. (AFP)

(8) Women's Role...

the weakened participation of women in political process.

But he also acknowledged government's efforts at improving the women's role in government and hailed the appointment of two female governors for Ghor and Daikundi provinces, three female ministers and heads of provincial women's affairs departments.

However, Asghari said the overall presence of women in selective and diplomatic posts had been low.

"There are only two female governors in 34 provinces. We have only one female ambassador in 41 embassies and 24 consulates and one female district chief in 365 districts and no female mayor in 153 municipalities," he said.

He said the presence of women on elected posts was many times high than selective posts. He said 27 percent of Wolesi Jirga members, nine percent of Meshrano Jirga and 20 percent of provincial councils were females.

The FEFA report expressed concern about the rejection of a female nominee for the High Council of Supreme Court by the Wolesi Jirga and said it had been expected the government would again nominate a female, but it did not do so. (Pajhwok)

(9) Iran, Afghanistan ...

efforts to establish security and move towards peace within the framework of all-inclusive talks among all Afghan groups.

He also underscored the necessity for the implementation of all the agreements signed between the two countries in the past.

Iran is one of the most important donors to Afghanistan, which has kept its promises to help to the reconstruction of the war-ravaged country.

Iran has built several roads, power transmission lines, border stations and many other infrastructure projects to better link the two nations. Iran has also contributed more than \$50m annually to Afghan anti-narcotics efforts during the last five years.

Tehran has repeatedly called for a withdrawal of the US-led foreign troops from Afghanistan, stressing that establishment of peace and security in the war-ravaged country is possible only through cooperation among the regional states. (IRNA)

(10) Balkh Police...

to book," Qadiri added. The attack, which started Sunday night, on the Indian Consulate in Mazar lasted 25 hours and raised many questions on how the attackers were able to get to the area and access the building they holed up in.

On Tuesday, Mohammad Ali, a guard at the building where the

attackers took cover, said he managed to escape when the attackers stormed the building. He said: "I saw two people and they were talking in a language I did not understand.

I was in the basement when they went upstairs and then I ran to the yard and escaped from the building."

The attackers were holed up on the 4th floor in the kitchen of the building and wrote messages in what appeared to be blood on the wall. The messages were in Urdu and warned of suicide attacks and of revenge.

No group has claimed responsibility for this attack. (Tolnews)

(11) Security Forces...

It was not immediately possible to independently verify claims by either party because most of the Helmand province has been in the grip of hostilities for months.

On Tuesday, the United States confirmed that one of its service members was killed and two others were wounded during the fighting.

"They came under fire while conducting a train, advise and assist mission with their Afghan special operations counterparts on the ground in Marjah... We understand a number of Afghan forces were injured as well," Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook told reporters.

Two helicopters were sent to provide assistance but one was waved off after taking fire and returned safely to its base while the second landed safely but sustained damage to its rotor blades after it apparently struck a wall, Cook said, adding the helicopter was still on the ground trying to retrieve the wounded U.S. personnel.

"We can confirm the wounded have been evacuated," U.S. military spokesman Col. Michael Lawhorn told VOA on Wednesday.

Marjah is one of several parts of Helmand under control of the Taliban. Taliban insurgents have put pressure on the province in southern Afghanistan's poppy-growing region for months.

Ground situation Ten of Helmand's 14 districts either have fallen to the Taliban or have an uncertain status in the midst of fighting between the Afghan government's security forces and Taliban fighters.

The insurgents' advances prompted commanders of NATO's Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan to deploy American and British military advisers last month to help Afghan forces better coordinate their efforts to re-take lost territory in Helmand, Afghanistan's largest province bordering Pakistan. (VoA)

(12) Taliban ...

successive deadly suicide attacks want to demonstrate their military power ahead of the proposed peace dialogue to bargain for concessions," political analyst Khan Mohammad Daneshjoo told Xinhua on Tuesday.

The quadrilateral meeting between Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States and China will be held in Islamabad next week to map out ways in which talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban can reach an amicable solution to Afghanistan's lingering crisis. The first ever face-to-face talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban was held in the scenic city of Murree some 100 km from Islamabad last July.

However, the Taliban's new leader Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor who replaced the former Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar after confirmation of his death in early August, said the peace talks were a "meaningless practice" and called for jehad ahead with the so-called Pishawar or holy war.

Mullah Mansoor's succession has divided the Taliban outfit, with the main factions being led by Mullah Akhtar Mansoor and Mullah Rasoul Akhund whose supporters have challenged Mansoor's leadership and fighting between the two sides has claimed hundreds of lives over the past couple of months. (Xinhua)

(13) Residents Blast ...

seal up his window. Meanwhile, the owner of a restaurant in the same area said that he was very frightened that he does not want to return to work.

Ahmad Khalid, 25, said that he had invested a large amount of money in the restaurant, but now he is fed up with the current security situation in Kabul. "The explosion was

very powerful and we are traumatized. All windows of my restaurant were shattered and one of my workers was injured," he added. Residents of the area accused the government of negligence - of not ensuring security in some areas.

Romal, a student who lives in the same area, said that government has turned a blind eye to what is happening to residents in the city. Assadullah, another resident agreed and said government is not paying enough attention to security on the streets.

"Most suicide bombers, about whom the government receives tip-off information, come in by road," he said.

According to him, authorities should put plans in place to tighten security measures in bordering areas in order to prevent the influx of militants from neighboring provinces.

Kabul gates, leading in to the city, were to have been equipped with scanners to detect explosives.

But spokesman for the Ministry of Interior (MoI), Sediq Sediqqi, said that they needed more equipment to detect explosive-laden vehicles at Kabul gates. He urged the international community to equip Kabul gates with the technology. (Tolnews)

(14) MRRD/NSP...

far made by the Community Development Councils (CDCs) at community level.

"A sum of AFN 218,775,250 has been allocated for the MCG Project, initially designed to launch in Enjil, Karukh and Kuhsan districts of Herat province. Managed by 48 engineers and social organizers, the MCG Project will provide 24,948 individuals (3,743 professionals and 21,205 non-professionals) with employment opportunities", he added.

The launch of the MCG Project of the MRRD/NSP planned to operate under "National Employment Generation Program for Peace" in various provinces on the one hand ensures the maintenance and protection of projects already executed, while on the other hand, it facilitates the economic growth in the communities suffering from unemployment. (PR)

(15) 31 Militants...

tack a security post but security forces raided them before they could launch their attack.

Nangarhar has turned into a hot-spot of the group where it is trying to establish a regional command. (KP)

(16) Suicide ...

imposing their demands on them," Hashar is quoted by BBC as saying. Hashar suggested that civil society, community elders and government should increase public awareness programs to prevent such incidents. (KP)

(17) UNAMA ...

nine women - were killed or injured while going about their everyday lives in homes, restaurants, shops, offices or traveling on a busy public street. Four United Nations' civilian staff members were among the injured.

"The use of highly explosive devices in civilian populated areas continues to cause extreme harm to Afghan women, children and men," said Mark Bowden, the Deputy Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and acting head of UNAMA.

"Loss of life, maiming, destruction of homes, businesses and personal property and widespread fear - these are the real consequences of suicide attacks in urban areas."

"On New Year's Day, the Taliban attacked Le Jardin restaurant, killing two civilians and injuring 18, while on January 4, Taliban carried out two suicide attacks near Kabul International Airport, which killed three civilians and injured 38. (Tolnews)

(18) Driver Killed ...

Officials say the accident took place due to the negligence of the truck driver on its way Kabul who is at large leaving his vehicle at the site of the accident.

Hayatullah Hayat, governor of Maidan Wardak province has expressed sorrow over the incident and instructed security officials to arrest the fleeing truck driver. (KP)

(19) 4 Soldiers ...

destroyed by the blast in the mountainous province, he added.

The Taliban militant group has been using IEDs to target security forces, but the lethal weapons also inflict casualties on civilians. (Xin-

hua)

(20) US Sees Assad...

would-be caliphate across parts of Iraq and Syria.

Not the least of those hurdles is the growing rift between Sunni-led Saudi Arabia and Shiite-ruled Iran, which back opposite sides in the Syria conflict and had to be lobbied heavily to agree to meet in Vienna to craft a way forward for the war-torn country. Saudi Arabia executed a prominent Shiite cleric and then severed diplomatic relations with Iran this week after its embassy in Tehran was stormed by a mob protesting the death. (AP)

(21) Security Beefed...

dustrial Security Force (CISF) which guards the high-valued installation, has been asked to maintain extra vigil with the deployment of additional personnel."

The Republic Day in India marks the date when India's new republican constitution came into force in 1950. Every year the day is celebrated officially in India on January 26. The main function is held in Indian capital where India's cultural diversity and military might are displayed. (Xinhua)

(22) Erdogan Arch...

trial, facing terms ranging from seven years to 330 years.

The judge at Istanbul's main courthouse opened the proceedings by conducting a roll call of the defendants and the plaintiffs, an AFP correspondent said.

Eight defendants, including Saygili and Aksoy, who had been remanded in custody were brought to the courthouse from the prison. (AFP)

(23) Britain's...

ing surrendering his passport, that was sent six weeks after the militant had left Britain. In the letter, Dhar, who was said to have fled with his pregnant wife and four children, was urged to contact police.

Dhar turned up in Syria two weeks after the letter was sent brandishing a gun and a baby and taunting Britain for its "shoddy" security that allowed him to "breeze" into Syria. (Reuters)

(24) S. Korea Says...

to take bilateral and multilateral measures, including those from the UN Security Council, necessary for responding to the DPRK's nuclear test.

South Korean President Park Geun-hye vowed to make the DPRK pay a corresponding price over the nuclear test, which Seoul and the international society had repeatedly warned against. (Xinhua)

(25) Rebels in...

The Ukrainian Defense Ministry has not commented on a possible prisoner exchange with the rebels, but the country's senior security official said he doesn't rule out that a swap of hostages could happen in the coming days.

"The Christmas holidays, which are beginning, is a good reason for us to settle the issue of the release of the hostages," Yury Tandyt, the aid of the head of the Ukrainian Security Service, told reporters. (Xinhua)

(26) Indonesia...

push forward diplomatic measures in creating conducive situation for peace, stability and development in the region.

DPRK has announced its successful hydrogen bomb test on Wednesday morning with its official media boasting that the country is now an officially nuclear-armed country. (Xinhua)

(27) Myanmar's...

absolute majority of the parliamentary seats, which is strong enough for it to form a new government independently under the constitution and has right to nominate the president and two vice presidents. Suu Kyi herself also won as a representative re-elected to the Lower House of the next parliament. (Xinhua)

(28) UN to Reduce...

NUSCO should focus more on policing the country's presidential election set for November 2016.

The number of UN peacekeepers had already been reduced by 2,000 soldiers in March last year out of a total of 20,000 the mission had.

DR Congo authorities have been calling for a reduction of 6,000 troops under a strategy for progressive withdrawal of peacekeepers on the Congolese soil.

Ban Ki-moon's proposal will be discussed next week in the Security Council which is expected to renew the mission's mandate before it ends in March. (Xinhua)