

(1) President, CEO ...

the president and CEO still had some differences. The source said disagreement over ministries of interior and education was still in place. "These two ministries have been the main hurdle over cabinet formation." The source said the cabinet would be introduced this week for a vote of confidence to parliament. Abdul Rauf Ibrahim, speaker of the Wolesi Jirga, told the Saturday's session that President Ghani during a meeting had promised to introduce the cabinet nominees to the house this Monday. (Pajhwok)

(2) Gen. Dostum ...

region and sought the support for the displaced people. Meantime, President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani via telephone conversation to the first Vice-President expressed his gratitude to UAE presidential advisor and thanked his country for its support to Afghanistan.

Gen. Dostum once again stressed for enhancing relations between UAE and Afghanistan. (BNA)

(3) Paktia Govern...

growing corruption in the province. But Rohullah Samoon, the governor's spokesman, said the protesters were being supported by the defeated elements in the runoff election. (Pajhwok)

(4) Ministers' ...

corruption took roots in various institutions. He reiterated the much-delayed cabinet would be named soon. Earlier, the parliament, civil society members, and people criticized delay in naming the cabinet.

The president congratulated the newly elected members. He urged them to serve the masses as they had reposed trust on the elected lawmakers.

Ghani thanked the upper house---or Mesharano Jirga--- for approving the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA). He said BSA was a sign of Afghanistan's long-term partnership with international community.

Chairman Senate Fazal Hadi Muslimyar thanked the president for presiding over the oath-taking ceremony despite his tight schedule. He said members of Mesharano Jirga would serve Afghans through thick and thin. (Pajhwok)

(5) Ghani Discuss...

to resolve them, Ghani remarked. Former Afghan president Hamid Karzai, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah, national security advisor Mohammad Hanif Atmar and a number of jihadi leaders and politicians were also present in the meeting. (Pajhwok)

(6) MoU for ...

canal at Behsood Dist in Nangarhar province were signed. The approval of these 5 projects and today's signing ceremony reflects India's clear and abiding commitment to assisting Afghanistan on its road to recovery by working closely with the Afghan Government and its rural communities. As a predominantly rural developing country ourselves, India is acutely aware of the formidable challenges faced by rural communities in Afghanistan who lack optimum access to basic services and infrastructure. The Embassy hopes that these projects will contribute to the strengthening of communities impacted by them. (PR)

(7) Mullah Omar ...

for the support that we've

already received from this new administration in Afghanistan, for President Ghani's strong leadership, and for the trajectory that the relationship is on right now." (Pajhwok)

(8) Construction of ...

economic development and eventually achieve sustainable development. ADFD's involvement in Afghanistan goes back to 1977. Since then, the ADFD has offered and managed grants, loans and long-term direct investments totaling more than AED1 billion to fund 13 projects in the country's most vital sectors of overall development.

To date, the fund which was established by the Government of the emirate of Abu Dhabi in 1971, has managed more than AED64 billion of the UAE government's foreign aid to fund 238 development projects in 71 countries. (WAM)

(9) Dyncorp Inter...

direct role in combat operations in the country against Taliban insurgents and are now concentrating to training and equipping national forces. (UPI)

(10) Unregistered ...

official letter issued to all police stations by Assistant Commissioner Timer-gara Muhammad Ayaz Mohmand asked the police to begin collecting data of unregistered Afghan refugees in various parts of the district. (Agencies)

(11) Lavish ...

Meanwhile, the deputy head of Balkh Ulema Council said taking large amount of money under any names was totally prohibited in Islam. It is said that the average wage of 70 percent of Afghans is less than two dollars per day, a sharp decline in the recent years. (Tolnews)

(12) Pakistani...

and there was no need for a mobile health service. "We have no personnel for the mobile clinic and there was no such place to keep it safe. We are forced to keep the mobile clinic in a compound in Noor Gul district," he said. (Pajhwok)

(13) Dreaded Mafia...

Khudaidad was head of many kidnapping rings and was on the NDS wanted list for over eight years. He was arrested in a special operation supervised by the NDS in September 2014 in Kabul's 5th police district along with two other accomplices. Khudaidad was involved in 19 murder and 50 abducting cases including kidnapping of five foreigners. (Pajhwok)

(14) AAF Conducts...

But according to an AAF instructor, Mohammad Ehsan, the Afghan airmen still have a long way to reach self-reliance in conducting night raids. "We will not be able to independently operate without NATO support until 2016," Ehsan declared. "We still need strong support of international community." AAF has a key role in every mission and can easily eliminate threats. Currently on average, there are 84 combat and logistic flights from Kabul military airfield.

The training of AAF forces began in 2009; with so far only 20 Afghan pilots have received professional training from the United States.

Shortcomings in AAF is the biggest challenge to Afghanistan after the NATO withdrawal. However, the

international community has promised to continue helping Afghanistan in this sector until 2017. (Tolnews)

(15) 1 socite...

others. He said civilians remained unhurt during the anti-militants offensive. Nang lauded police force of the province by thwarting a big sabotage attack. However, Taliban have not yet spoken on the arrest of rebels. (Pajhwok)

(16) socite...

hammad (PBUH) that was why "we justified the attack and called the two attackers heroes." (Pajhwok)

(17) Mammoth ...

statement by NDS said the detained suicide bomber was identified as Abdullah who was looking to carry out a suicide attack in Gardez city.

The statement further added that the bomber was arrested from Gardez-Logar highway before he manage to enter the city.

According to NDS, the suicide bomber was also carrying with him three pistols and was arrested when he arrived in Maktab Tera area.

In a separate operation, the Afghan intelligence operatives arrested a Taliban commander from Shakar Khel village of Gardez city.

NDS said the Taliban commander was identified as Amanullah and was arrested along with a pistol and a communication device.

Afghan intelligence operatives also confiscated a weapons cache belonging to anti-government armed militants from Mohammad Agha district of Logar province, NDS said, adding that the cache included 25 rounds of mortar rockets, 5 rounds of Rocket Propelled Grenade launcher rockets, one rifle, an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) and a hand grenade. The anti-government armed militant groups have not commented regarding the reports so far. (KP)

North Korea Offers to Suspend Nuclear Tests if U.S. Suspends Military Drills

SEOUL - North Korea said on Saturday it was willing to suspend nuclear tests if the United States agreed to call off annual military drills held jointly with South Korea, but Washington rejected the proposal as a veiled threat.

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The offer, which the North's official KCNA news agency said was conveyed to Washington on Friday through "a relevant channel", follows an often repeated demand by Pyongyang for an end to the large-scale defensive drills by the allies. "The message proposed (that) the U.S. contribute to easing tension on the Korean peninsula by temporarily suspending joint military exercises in South Korea and its vicinity this year," KCNA said in a report.

"(The message) said that in this case the DPRK is ready to take such a responsive step as temporarily suspending the nuclear test over which the U.S. is concerned," KCNA said, using the short form for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the nuclear tests and military exercises were separate issues.

"The DPRK statement that inappropriately links routine US-ROK exercises to the possibility of a nuclear test by North Korea is an implicit threat," Psaki told

reporters traveling with Secretary of State John Kerry in Europe.

The United States and South Korea have carried out the joint military exercises for roughly 40 years, she added.

Psaki said the United States remained open to dialogue with North Korea and urged Pyongyang to "immediately cease all threats, reduce tensions, and take the necessary steps toward denuclearization needed to resume credible negotiations."

North Korea has conducted three nuclear tests, the last in February 2013, and is under U.N. sanctions for defying international warnings not to set off atomic devices in pursuit of a nuclear arsenal, which Pyongyang calls its "sacred sword".

It often promises to call off nuclear and missile tests in return for comparable steps by Washington to ease tensions. It reached such a deal in February 2012 with the United States for an arms tests moratorium only to scrap it two months later. The United States and South Korea have stressed that the annual drills, which in some years involved U.S. aircraft carriers, are purely defensive in nature, aimed at testing the allies' readiness to confront any North Korean aggression.

Tension peaked on the Korean peninsula in March 2013 when the North ratcheted up rhetoric during the annual drills, with Pyongyang threatening war and putting its forces in a state of combat readiness. (Reuters)

Obama Turns Focus to Internet Security, Privacy

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama will highlight plans next week to protect American consumers and businesses from cyber threats, a month after the most high-profile hacking attack on a U.S. company.

Internet security became a national focus after a cyberattack on Sony Pictures that Washington blamed on North Korea. The attack and subsequent threats of violence against theaters prompted Sony to scale back its release of "The Interview", a comedy film that depicts the fictional assassination of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

A White House official said on Saturday Obama would announce legislative proposals and executive actions that will be part of his Jan. 20 State of the Union address and will tackle identity theft and privacy issues, cybersecurity and broadband access.

On Monday, Obama will present plans "to improve confidence in technology by tackling identity theft and improving consumer and student privacy" in a visit to the Federal Trade Commission, the official said, on condition of anonymity. Obama will host members of Congress from both parties on Tuesday to discuss common goals for the economy and national security, the official said, as the Democratic president prepares a speech that will be his first to the U.S. Congress since Republicans won the Senate in November elections.

Later he will visit the Department of Homeland Security's cybersecurity nerve center to promote voluntary information sharing between government and private sector and industry to fight cyber threats "while protecting privacy and civil liberties", the official said. The National Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center monitors threats to the country's criti-

cal infrastructure, including energy and chemical plants, emergency and financial services and government facilities.

In Iowa on Wednesday, Obama will propose new steps to increase access to affordable, high-speed broadband across the country, the White House said.

Last week, the president highlighted economic issues and plans to help Americans, including a proposal to make two years of free community college tuition to students. That plan, and its \$60 billion price tag over 10 years, immediately faced skepticism from Republican lawmakers on Friday.

Obama floated the education idea on the third and final day of a tour to promote agenda items being prepared for his State of the Union address. (Reuters)

Ukraine Has Violated loan terms:

Russia
MOSCOW - Ukraine has violated the terms of a \$3 billion Russian loan but Moscow has not yet decided whether to demand early repayment, Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov was quoted on Saturday as saying. Russia lent the money in December 2013 by buying Ukrainian Eurobonds, two months before Ukraine's then-president, the pro-Moscow Viktor Yanukovich, fled the country amid mass protests against his rule.

The terms of the loan deal included a condition that Ukraine's total state debt should not exceed 60 percent of its annual gross domestic product (GDP).

Last month, rating agency Moody's estimated that Ukraine's debt amounted to 72 percent of GDP in 2014 and would rise to 83 percent in 2015. It also said "the risk of default is rising".

"Ukraine has definitely violated the terms of the loan, and in particular (the condition) not to increase its state debt above 60 percent of GDP," Russia's Siluanov said, according to Interfax news agency.

"So Russia definitely has the right to demand early return of this loan. At the same time, at present this decision has not yet been taken."

Siluanov was commenting on earlier remarks by an anonymous government official saying that Russia was likely to demand early repayment as Ukraine had violated many of the loan terms.

Last November, President Vladimir Putin told German media that Russia did not intend to demand early repayment of Ukraine's debt as this would trigger the financial collapse of the former Soviet republic.

The Russian finance ministry was not immediately available on Saturday to comment on the reports.

The Russian remarks on the debt come ahead of key peace talks to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine and may be intended to increase economic pressure on Kiev with a view to influencing those talks.

More than 4,700 people have been killed in fighting between Kiev's forces and pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine since last April. The foreign ministers of Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France will meet in Berlin on Monday to discuss the conflict, with a summit between the four countries' leaders in Kazakhstan provisionally scheduled for Jan. 15.

The comments on Ukraine's debt also followed a downgrade overnight of Russia's credit rating by Fitch, underscoring Moscow's own deteriorating finances.

Russian agencies cited an anonymous government official on Saturday as branding the Fitch downgrade "politically biased, not partner-like and economically absolutely unfounded". (Reuters)

Violence Fuels Debate Among Muslims Over Interpreting Faith

CAIRO - After gunmen in Paris killed 12 people, Saudi Arabia's top body of Muslim clerics quickly condemned the attack and said it could have no acceptable justification. It was a signal from some of the Islamic world's strictest voices that cartoons lampooning the Prophet Muhammad in the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo were not a reason to kill the artists.

Only days later, Saudi Arabia sent an opposing message: On Friday, a young Saudi was whipped 50 times in a public square in the city of Jiddah, the first of what will be 20 such weekly rounds of lashes. That, along with 10 years in prison, is his sentence from the kingdom's religious-based courts for insulting Islam, based on posts on his blog criticizing prominent clerics close to the monarchy.

The contradiction points to the difficulties at a time of a growing debate within Islam about whether and how to reject a radical minority that some fear is dragging them into conflict and wrecking the faith.

Western critics are increasingly brazen about suggesting there is something inherent in Islam that is sparking violence by some of its adherents. Most Muslims reject this, arguing that the tumult of the post-colonial Middle East has created fertile ground for radicalism among people whose faith is fundamentally one of peace.

Nonetheless, the past year has seen increasing voices among Muslims saying their community must re-examine their faith to modernize its interpretations and sideline extremists. As much as recent attacks in the West, the rise of startlingly vicious violence by Sunni Muslim militants in the name of Islam against fellow Muslims, including Sunnis, brought it home for many Muslims that something must change in religious discourse.

In Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State group has butchered entire families of Sunnis and beheaded Sunni soldiers, as well as Western hostages. In Pakistan, a Dec. 16 militant attack on a school that killed 150 people, mostly children, stunned the country. It made many Pakistanis question any empathy they felt in the past toward militant groups - the attitude of "even if they're wrong, they're still fellow

When people ask "why Islam?", much of the answer has little to do with the religion itself. The Arab world has seen decades of bloodshed and foreign intervention unlike any in any other region - long entrenched dictatorships, regime suppression, two Iraq wars, the Syrian civil war and Libya's turmoil.

Those conflicts have stirred up hatreds - against the U.S., against the West, against Shiites and other communities - that rebound back into religion. Some youth angered by the conflicts find the answers in the version of "true Islam" touted by extremists like al-Qaida and the Islamic State group and promoted on the Internet. Those groups tell them Islam requires them to use violence to defend the faith, then provide whole networks to make it easy for them to do so.

Notably, Cherif Kouachi, one of the French brothers behind the Charlie Hebdo killings, appears to have been first radicalized by hearing of abuses of Iraqi inmates by American guards at Abu Ghraib prison.

The attack on Charlie Hebdo prompted condemnations from across the Muslim world - and fueled voices in the West contending that Islam fuels violence. Social media feeds bristled that insults to other religions do not tend to spark murders.

That frustrates many Muslims who tire of apologizing for an extremist fringe they view as distorting their religion. Still, Muslims are also turning inward for change in the community.

The most prominent call came days before the attack, when Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi gave a speech to Muslim clerics saying interpretations developed over centuries have made the Muslim world a "source of worry, danger, killing and destruction in the whole world." He called for a "religious revolution" to modernize the faith.

The Paris attack added a complication to the debate, because of the magazine's extremely broad lampooning of Islam's Prophet Muhammad. Muslims who denounced the killings were often clearly discomfited by the content and defended their right to be upset over cartoons even some Western critics said crossed into racism.

In Egypt and Lebanon, political cartoonists published cartoons expressing solidarity with Charlie Hebdo, with images of pens standing up to gunmen. On Twitter, some pointed to Ahmed Merabet, a Muslim policeman of Algerian heritage killed by the attackers. "I am Ahmed the dead cop. Charlie ridiculed my faith and culture and I died defending his right to do so," was a tweet of solidarity circulating among Muslims.

"Obviously the act of terrorism is a far greater evil than the question of satirical comments," Khalid Samad, a lawmaker from an Islamist political party in mostly Muslim Malaysia, said. But some in the religious establishment struggled with the issue.

On pan-Arab satellite channel al-Arabiya Thursday night, an official from al-Azhar, the state-run Egyptian institution that is one of the most prestigious centers of Sunni Islam, said al-Azhar is working to modernize religious discourse, in part by interpreting texts in light of the context in place and time as opposed to literally.

"But we can't exonerate the West for its insulting of the prophet. I'm not justifying what happened, but these are causes," Sheikh Ashraf Saad said. "Just as we condemn extremists, we must also condemn these freedoms that have reached the point of insulting the prophet."

He was countered by a Saudi journalist on the panel, Mshari al-Thaydi. "But the question is, why is it Muslims who get so angry and kill and blow things up? The French magazine insulted the pope, the Dalai Lama. ... Why do we express our anger in this way?"

That hits to the issue of who speaks for Islam, where in the Sunni branch in particular, individual clerics build on centuries of scholarship to argue what the faith requires. Al-Qaida and the Islamic State group roughly take elements from two relatively modern strands. One is the writing of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood thinker Sayed Qutb, with its tenets that Muslim society has fallen from faith and violent jihad must be waged to bring "God's rule." (AP)