

(1) Afghanistan to ...

Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan received Ghani at Al Mushrif Palace. A 21-gun salute was fired in honour of the guest. Mohammed hoped that Ghani's visit would contribute toward the further enhancement of cooperative relations between the UAE and Afghanistan. They agreed to bolster ties in economic, developmental and social fields. Ghani updated Mohammed on the efforts being made by his government to achieve development and build national institutions. He spoke about the role of the international community in helping Afghanistan bring about security and economic stability. The two sides also reviewed UAE's role in supporting efforts for the reconstruction of Afghanistan's health, education and infrastructure projects as well as its contribution to maintaining security. (Pajhwok)

(2) Nationwide Ulema ...

and signed an agreement with the ministry of defense (MoD). Based on the agreement, the union will encourage the youth to join ANSF ranks. The union members promised to begin their efforts soon. After declaring end of their combat mission, NATO announced their new chapter of cooperation with Afghanistan under the name of "Resolute Support Mission" aimed at training, advising and assisting the Afghan troops. (Tolnews)

(3) Karimov against ...

Karimov urged to remain vigilant, to increase the readiness of the Armed Forces to stop all attempts to provoke tensions on Uzbek borders, fight back any aggressive action against chosen path of development. The President also added that measures to modernize troops with the newest weapons and equipment are consistently implemented. The system of military staff training is being improved. (AKIpress)

(4) No Safe Havens...

a definitive answer when asked directly about whether Afghanistan could again become a terrorist safe haven. In the interview, the general said the United States still had two years to build the capability of Afghan forces, even as American troops continue to withdraw "We have significantly degraded the Al Qaeda capability, but we believe if we don't keep pressure on that, it's only a matter of time - it will be able to grow very quickly," Campbell continued. In the statement from Abdullah's office, Gen. Campbell welcomed the introduction of cabinet and called it a positive development. He hoped a number of problems and challenges would be addressed once the cabinet started working. Abdullah and Campbell discussed the current security situation in Afghanistan, with the CEO promising to utilise all available resources for providing security to citizens. "Bringing into being a strong administration and serving the masses are among our priorities," said Abdullah, who vowed to work together with the international community towards bringing peace and stability to the region. (Pajhwok)

(5) Iran's FM ...

relations between the two countries, is being prepared." She said that President of Afghanistan Mohammad Ashraf Ghani will visit Iran. (Trend News Agency)

(6) IS Fighters ...

Mazar Qala area about 20 days ago. "These individuals are nearly 80 in number. They have established a training camp in Salimabad village near Saji mountain, where they give training to new recruits." Dressed like IS fighters, their faces masked, the gunmen have raised black flags on the training centre. The self-proclaimed fighters possess enough resources and advanced weapons. "They buy goods from local shops at inflated rates," the official said. The group is led by two brothers. Some Taliban fighters have also joined the group, according to the district chief, who claimed

the group included "some aliens who dress like Arabs and local residents do not understand their language." The official said Abdul Malik and Abdul Raziq were sons of Mullah Abdul Khaliq, who had migrated to Farah from elsewhere years ago. They had lived in Khak-i-Safaidd, Pushtrod and Bakwa districts, he said. The two brothers would propagate for the Taliban when they established their regime in Afghanistan in 1996. Later the brothers became key commanders of the Taliban. Two years ago, the Taliban appointed Abdul Raziq as their shadow chief for the Khak-i-Safaidd district. However, the Taliban later expelled the brothers from the movement for some religious violations. "Locals previously call the two brothers as Wahabi and Salafi."

The Khak-i-Safaidd district chief said the district police could not fight the IS group alone. But provincial police chief Brig. Gen. Mohammad Raziq Yaqubi said they planned to launch a joint operation of Afghan forces against the IS group in the district.

A resident of Nangabad, a village near Salimabad, said: "A few days ago, members of Daesh came to our area for shopping. They included Afghans and some foreigners."

The resident, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the IS men arrived in a "Toyota Hilux" and another car and on 15 motorcycles.

"They were laced with machine-guns, RPG (rocket propelled grenade) launchers and other heavy weapons," he said.

"They bought some food but gave extra money to shopkeepers," said the resident.

Provincial council member Dadullah Qani also confirmed the IS fighters had emerged in Farah.

"Mualvi Abdul Raziq and Abdul Malik were among key Taliban commanders, but they were disowned and expelled from the movement as being "crusaders," he said.

He said the older brother, Abdul Malik, had been missing for some months and he had aligned with the IS group during his disappearance.

Qani said first IS fighters were emerged 25 days ago in the Bakwah district's Shagai area, but they were forced to migrate to Khak-i-Safaidd by Taliban militants.

The public representative believed the group wanted to establish permanent bases in Khak-i-Safaidd's Khost Dehna area and a mountain in Pushtkrod district. "Both the areas are strategic and have natural streams."

He claimed the Daesh fighters wanted to storm a police post in the Khost Dehna area two days ago, but local Taliban prevented their move. The Taliban have so far said nothing in this regard.

Officials in southern Ghazni and southeastern Paktika provinces said 1,050 families, including some Pakistanis, had entered the two provinces and the families say they are aligned to the IS.

There were reports that masked gunmen had a clash with Taliban in Helmand's Kajaki district, leaving 70 people dead and wounded. However, the Afghan government denies the IS presence in the country. (Pajhwok)

(7) Kabul Police

suicide vests were also seized at the house surrounded by the security forces.

Rahimi noted that the security forces were not harmed during the special operation.

According to police reports, the house was used by insurgents for making suicide vests.

Rahimi added that the insurgents had plotted a massive attack plan to target key points of the capital city.

The arrest of suspected terrorists came a day after two people were killed and two others wounded in a remote controlled bomb blast in Kabul.

The security situation of Kabul deteriorated in the past two months after the Taliban increased the series of their armed attacks and bombings following the signing of Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) between Kabul and Washington. (Tolnews)

(8) Peshawar...

President Ashraf Ghani in Ka-

bul.

Kabul assured the spymaster the Afghan administration would act to nab those involved in terrorist activities in Pakistan. It was the second visit of the ISI chief to Kabul in the last three weeks. (Pajhwok)

(9) Support for...

our visits is to promote public awareness about the importance of stability, demonstration of patriotism and educate the masses on the negative effects of poppy cultivation," the official added. He called upon the armed opponents of the government to renounce violence and join the peace process. In addition, he urged members of the peace panel to step up contacts with the people regarding the imperative of stability.

In Dand district, the body organised a gathering attended by Haji Atta Mohammad Ahmadi, head of the committee, Syed Mohammad Hashim, the district chief, and tribal elders.

Haji Atta Mohammad told the gathering ANSF had taken security charge and it was the responsibility of people to support them. The committee was asked to provide people a peaceful environment.

District chief Syed Mohammad Hashim said residents of Dand were peaceful and backed the government and armed forces under all circumstance. He hoped public support for the security institutions would continue. (Pajhwok)

(10) US Designates ...

as well as ordering the shooting of schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai in 2012.

Fazlullah was responsible for the beheading of 17 Pakistani soldiers after an attack in June 2012 and also ordered the targeted killings of elders who led peace committees against the Taliban. (Pajhwok)

(11) Outrage in ...

greater problems down the line. "Because of the negligence of the education department officials, students avoid attending schools in some cases," he said. "If the education officials don't concentrate on the issue, a dark future will be waiting for these students."

Education is considered a critical step along the path of economic and social development in Afghanistan. Uneducated and illiterate Afghans have long been the prey of recruiters from the Taliban and terrorist groups like al-Qaeda.

Meanwhile, officials from the Nangarhar Education Department admitted the accuracy of the Provincial Council complaints and vowed to take action to address them. However, spokesman Mohammad Asif Shinwari also noted that security threats would make it particularly difficult.

"We are committed to upgrading the quality of education in Nangarhar, but security threats in some districts undermine our efforts," Shinwari said. "These issues contribute to the low quality of education in the area." (Tolnews)

(12) 45 Afghan...

on Afghan nationals who are living in the country illegally. During the campaign, hundreds of illegal Afghans have been held under the 14 Foreign Act, who were later deported to their country.

HARIPUR: About 15 suspected persons were arrested during a search operation in Tarbela Ghazi on Tuesday. Sub-Divisional Police Officer, Tarbela Ghazi, Muhammad Ishtiaq, said that the search operation was jointly carried out by the police and bomb disposal unit officials. (Agencies)

(13) Insecurity Spurs

could gain control over mines and pave the way for professional digging if it strengthened security.

Local officials in Ghosta confirmed illegal digging of Shah Maqsood stone deposits in the district.

Nawab Khan, a resident of the Sararud district, who works in an open-pit mine, told Pajhwok Afghan News said they extracted construction materials on their own free will.

He said they sold a metre long dimension stone for 500 afghanis and the stones were sold for 600 afs each in cities. "Taliban exist

here, but sometimes they come and demand money."

Khan said the area had been secure few years ago, when police would visit mines and would prevent illegal digging.

"But now police and other security forces do not come to the area and illegal mining has increased."

Nangarhar Mines Director Farooq acknowledged illegal mining had increased due to growing insecurity in the province.

He said though most of the mines were located in remote and insecure areas, yet they had awarded contracts for the riches.

He said if the level of insecurity was brought down, mines officials would visit the deposits in remote areas to closely monitor them.

"We make our last ditch-effort to award contracts for the mines and we are successful in this effort," he said.

Farooq said insecurity had negatively impacted mining across Afghanistan and if the issue of insecurity was resolved, the mining process would automatically improve.

He said about 25,000 people worked in the mining sector of Nangarhar and their number could increase four times if the insecurity issue was addressed.

The governor's spokesman, Ahmad Zia Abdulzai, also admitted illegal mining took place in most insecure areas of the province.

He said besides other mines, the largest gemstone mine existed in the Sherzad district and the stones were currently being legally mined.

In response to mines' officials concerns, he said a recent major offensive had resulted in driving insurgents from the Sherzad district.

"There had been some problems, which have reduced after the operation," he said, adding the provincial government was serious about illegal mining and smuggling.

"It is obvious insecurity leads to illegal mining and smuggling of the riches, but the provincial

An expert on security affairs, Mohammad Anwar Sultani, said some big businessmen were involved in fueling insecurity in order to extract more minerals than the amount agreed in the contract.

"This way they increase their income," he said, linking every progress in the mining sector to improvement in security. (Pajhwok)

(14) Helmand Officials ...

government to resume the vital project and ensure its safety as well.

"Unfortunately the government failed in the past years to ensure safety of its major infrastructure projects," MP Iqbal Sapai said. "Interference of neighboring countries also caused delay in completion of this dam."

Kajaki Dam is one of the controversial and long-delayed projects. Although, the third turbine of the dam which was funded by the United States has been brought long ago in the site, it is yet to be installed. (Tolnews)

(15) Alleged...

police on the Kabul-Kandahar highway seized 10-kg of drugs, including crystal that was skillfully placed in a vehicle.

Samim Khpalkwak, provincial governor spokesperson, said four individuals -- residents of northern Takhar province -- had been arrested on the charges of smuggling. (Pajhwok)

(16) Power....

looks like that of an interim government.

Although many were simply happy to see the cabinet nominations finally named on Monday, after well over four months of delay since the national unity government took office, inevitably not all were pleased to see the way the cabinet shaped up. However, the objections of Mr. Tamanna and others are geared less toward specific names having been nominated and more toward the structuring of the cabinet as a whole.

"Existence of two different ministries of economy and finance doesn't make any sense, because both ministries deal with financial affairs; the jobs of the ministries of refugees and repatriations and tribal affairs have been very weak and both should have been changed into departments," Tamanna told TOLONews on

Tuesday. "ikewise, the ministry of counter narcotics, which also been weak, should have been integrated with the anti-narcotics department and also the ministry of women's affairs should have been integrated with the ministry of work."

Most developed countries around the world have a total of 20 cabinet ministers, but in Afghanistan, there are 25 total. "We are scoffed at in our foreign relations - when our two ministers meet one foreign minister - because there are a lot of ministries," Tamanna said.

While analysts have applauded the nominations for the government's top security positions, they have raised concerns about other names, and echoed Tamanna's sentiment about restructuring the cabinet to rid the government of parallel institutions. Political analyst Mir Ahmad Joyenda said he had hoped President Ghani would appreciate the need for redesigning the ministries.

"We expected that changes would occur in the structure of the cabinet, but they acted on the basis of the commitments made to their supporters," Joyenda said of Ghani and Abdullah. "We don't believe that a small Afghanistan can work with a big cabinet."

Afghanistan has roughly 27 million people and 25 ministers. Meanwhile, China is a country with 1.4 billion people and 29 ministries. The United States, Germany and Japan have only 15 ministries. Switzerland and Bhutan, which have population sizes slightly smaller than Afghanistan, have only seven ministries. (Tolnews)

(17) Kabul...

said the Ministry of Mines awarded salt excavation contracts to a handful of individual who enjoyed a monopoly over raw salt.

Sharif said these individuals supplied the mined salt to their own factories and left other factories struggling with raw material.

But Mines Ministry spokesman Mohammad Rafi Rafiq said it was up to the contractor as to whom he should supply the excavated salt and his ministry had no right to intervene.

He said import of raw salt was not the country's interest because they had to pay 40 percent duty on imported salt.

He also acknowledged salt deposits were mined in an unprofessional way and as a result, most of the excavated salt was damaged and mixed with unwanted substances.

Sharif said Andkhoi salt mine in Faryab and Namakab mine in Takhar contained sodium chloride, sand and rocks. He said more plants should be established to filter dangerous materials from salt excavated from the two mines.

He said the government should provide long term loans with low interest rate to businessmen as the current interest rate was not affordable.

He said in other countries, governments provided long term loans to factory owners against low interest rate. "In Afghanistan, there is no trend of healthy competition and the government does not support small businesses."

Sharif said: "We have established this factory to serve our people and contribute to the national economy." The factory's production declined due to the absence of government support. (Pajhwok)

(18) 6 Taliban...

prevent these types of acts from killing and wounding innocent civilians and security forces.

The Taliban militants group has not commented regarding the incident so far.

Taliban insurgents frequently use Improvised Explosive Device (IED) as the weapon of their choice to target Afghan and coalition security forces which normally leads to civilian casualties. (KP)

(19) Jawzjan ...

incidents were handled and urged the government to take stern action against those proven guilty. (Pajhwok)

North Korea Offers Direct Talks with US

PYONGYANG - North Korea on Tuesday offered to hold direct

talks with the United States on its proposal to suspend nuclear tests, and suggested dialogue could pave the way to changes on the Korean peninsula.

The US State Department has rejected Pyongyang's offer to suspend nuclear tests in exchange for a temporary freeze on US-South Korea joint military exercises but said it "remains open to dialogue" with Pyongyang.

North Korea's Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations An Myong Hun told a news conference that the offer still stands.

"We are ready, the government of the DPRK is ready, to explain its intention behind its proposal directly to the United States," said the envoy.

"We are ready for that, if the United States wants additional explanation about the proposal."

The envoy indicated that the talks could lead to broader engagement.

"If this proposal is put into practice this year, many things will be possible," he said.

"I can't go any further, but many things will be possible this year." The United States, which has close to 30,000 troops permanently stationed in South Korea, conducts a series of joint military exercises with its key Asian ally every year.

- US urged to be 'bold' - Seoul and Washington insist the drills are defensive in nature, but they are regularly condemned by Pyongyang as provocative rehearsals for invasion.

"By refusing to accept our proposal, the United States has shown once again that they will continue to increase their military capabilities in South Korea," said An.

"This is absolutely unacceptable and cannot be justified."

The envoy called on the United States to drop its "hostile" policy and make the "bold" choice of opting for a new approach.

North Korea has conducted three nuclear tests -- the last in February 2013 -- and recently threatened a fourth in response to a UN resolution condemning its human rights record.

The North Korean envoy insisted that the proposal to the United States was "a very meaningful and significant offer" that would create an atmosphere conducive to dialogue and cooperation on the Korean peninsula.

The United States and North Korea fought each other during the 1950-1953 Korean War and have no diplomatic relations.

Earlier Tuesday, US officials warned that they were considering other sanctions against North Korea in retaliation for the cyber-attack on Sony, which Washington blames on Pyongyang.

North Korea's deputy ambassador again denied any involvement.

"My country has nothing to do with Sony hacking. It is nonsense," he said, adding that the US administration should provide proof of Pyongyang's wrongdoing. (AFP)

Al Qaeda Claims French Attack, Derides Paris Rally

DUBAI - Al Qaeda in Yemen claimed responsibility for the attack on French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo, saying it was ordered by the Islamist militant group's leadership for insulting the Prophet Mohammad, according to a video posted on YouTube.

Gunmen killed a total of 17 people in three days of violence that began when they opened fire at staff in Charlie Hebdo's offices last week in revenge for publication of satirical images of the Prophet.

One Western source said no hard evidence of a direct operational link to al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) had yet been found.

Authorities in France hunting possible accomplices say they are on alert for further attacks.

He added without elaborating that the strike was carried out in "implementation" of the order of overall al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahri, who has called for strikes by Muslims in the West using any means they can find.

Ansi also gave credit for the operation to slain AQAP propagandist Anwar al-Awlaki, a preacher cited by one of the gunmen in remarks to French media as a financier of the attack. (Reuters)