

**(1) Merkel Urges ...**

meet Trump for the first time, Merkel said a meeting was possible during a summit of the Group of Seven leading economic powers, which takes place in Sicily in May, and the G20 summit that Germany is hosting in July. In her weekly podcast, Merkel said the German economy was doing "relatively well" but should not rest on its laurels. She urged companies to adapt to the challenge of digitization. (Reuters)

**(2) WJ Rejects ....**

about the 2017 draft budget and provided their suggestions in two weeks."

He said the MPs added \$63 million to development budget as part of suggested projects in the budget. The draft budget has been discussed at many meetings and balance in development budget for provinces has also been considered, Yar added.

Seddiq Ahmad Usmani, a member of the financial commission, said \$600,000 had been allocated to each province in the next budget. However, he said there were no differences among MPs over the draft budget in recent meetings, but some lawmakers today did not accept the amendments.

Samiullah Samim, a lawmaker from Farah province, said no suggestions of other MPs, except the finance commission, had been considered in reviewing the budget document. "The draft budget is prepared based on suggestions of the finance commission members while of others' are ignored," he said.

Other lawmakers held similar views. Speaker Abdur Raouf Ibrahim asked the finance commission to hold a meeting again about the budget on Sunday and hand the draft over to the general session on Monday for a decision. Under Article 98 of the Constitution, the general and development budgets are prepared in light of Meshrano Jirga's recommendations before being sent to the Wolesi Jirga for final approval. (Pajhwok)

**(3) MPs See ...** one of the bloodiest for the Afghan people and said: "It is regrettable that security organs performance falls short of the high commitments of the National Security Council (NSC)."

He once again urged security organs to remain committed to NSC commitments and try to prevent a recurrence of such incidents in future. Calling the Kandahar attack doubtful, he said: "It is believed the enemy cannot target authorities without cooperation of figures from inside the government."

Ibrahimi said a mixed delegation of the parliament and the government should seriously investigate the incident to find how the enemy was able to perform such attack. (Pajhwok)

**(4) IEC Faces ...**

distrust between people and government will increase and people will think government is trying to hold on to power," MP, Saleh Mohammad Saljoqi said.

According to the law, parliamentary elections should have been held by October 2015, but because of a range of problems, these were postponed. (Tolonews)

**(5) Ghazni Mayor ...**

Afghan News that Ahmadi had not resigned but he had been sacked days ago.

"The president during our protest against the mayor promised us that he would remove the mayor, he now honoured his promise," he said. He asked officials concerned to appoint an experienced person as head of Ghazni municipality. (Pajhwok)

**(6) AUAF Asks ...**

family, friends and colleagues.

"Kevin and Tim, when you hear these words, know that we are with you, we support you, we care about you, and we want you home now. We hold you as part of our university family..."

They promised working ceaselessly to do everything in their power to secure the teachers' release.. "We will not give up; we will not stop pressing all involved to do all they can. Our thoughts and prayers are with you constantly. We will not rest until you are back safely with us." (Pajhwok)

**(7) Georgian Servicemen ...**

The Georgian soldiers who organised last night's event have been serving in Afghanistan since October 2016. Their duties mainly involve providing security to the Resolute Support headquarters in Kabul.

Georgia is the third-largest contributor to NATO's Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. (Agencies)

**(8) Transformer ...**

during the trial period. Meanwhile, Governor Mohammad Sami expressed his gratitude to the private sector, hoping the venture would help Nimroz residents become self-sufficient and get rid of relying on foreign transformers.

He said that an industrial park would be inaugurated soon in Nimroz, with the government trying to facilitate businesses and entrepreneurs. (Pajhwok)

**(9) Mujahid's...**

Afghanistan. They carry out terrorist activities, thus instead of peace, they should be eliminated," read a statement released by the presidential palace following the attack. HPC has not commented in this regard.

Atta Mohammad Noor, acting governor of northern Balkh province, said it is not known what action government will take against such remarks. (Tolonews)

**(10) Afghanistan to ...**

in March. We go to India to play Afghanistan. It will probably be our first tour of that stature. We play three T20s and five ODIs against them, but for now our first goal in 2017 is to win this tournament," Khaleej Times quoted Porterfield as saying.

Meanwhile, Stanikzai said during a practice session in the run up to the match: "We have a good advantage here because we have played a lot of matches here."

He said the team is well prepared and fit and that they have been training hard for the past two months.

Stanikzai said the team's aim is to win all their matches. Tonight's match starts at 7.30pm Kabul time. (Tolonews)

**(11) Policemen...**

a clash in the Kamparak area of Nahr-i-Saraj district of Helmand late on Friday night.

The governor's spokesman, Omar Zwak, said civilians and security forces suffered no casualties in the battle.

Helmand is one of the most unstable provinces of the country where six of the 13 districts are under government control, with the rest being controlled by the insurgents.

Taliban have not yet commented about the incidents but claimed the fighters attacked the Ziurook district Paktika and killed a policeman. (Pajhwok)

**(12) Ex-NDS ...**

police chief confirmed the incident and identified the slain border policeman as Mohammad Rahim

Col. Sakhi Dad Hidari, Badakhshan crime branch chief, said gunmen shot dead a former driver and an employee the Ministry of Defense in

Tirgran locality of the Wardoj district on Friday night. He named the victim as Farid. (Pajhwok)

**(13) Clash Kills 4 ...**

Afghanistan where security is fragile, the armed bandits and insurgents groups tend to create law and order problems by attacking travelers. (Xinhua)

**(14) 4 Haqqanis ...**

and two others wounded. The attack was pushed back on Friday night.

He said the security forces suffered no casualties and some weapons and ammunitions belonging to the attackers were also sized.

Sayed Mohammad, a resident of the district, also confirmed the battle that he said continued throughout the night. However, he had no figure about casualties on either side.

Militants have not yet commented about the incident. (Pajhwok)

**(15) US House...**

chambers of Congress, some Republicans were reluctant to vote along party lines as they believe their party should agree on a plan before moving to overturn the current legislation.

Obamacare, officially the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, has drawn criticism due to a rise in premiums. U.S. President-elect Donald Trump has vowed to replace it after taking office. (Xinhua)

**(16) France to ...**

countries and organizations will take part in the Paris peace meeting which Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called a "rigged conference" that "pushes peace backwards" and aimed "to adopt additional anti-Israel stances."

Refusing preconditions, Israel said it was committed to bilateral and direct negotiation to achieve peace deal. (Xinhua)

**(17) May Must...**

membership of the Single Market and the Customs Union, so that it can be scrutinized by parliament and the public." (Xinhua)

**(18) Britain's Jobless...**

forecast to increase to some degree over the next two years, and this is because of Brexit."

Forecasting beyond 2018 was not possible, because of the uncertainty of what Brexit might be when it takes place, according to Kuhn.

The unemployment rate in Britain is currently 4.8 percent, lower than the 10 percent rate across southern, northern and western Europe and lower than France (10 percent) and Italy (11.5 percent), but higher than Germany (4.3 percent). (Xinhua)

**(19) Oil Prices...**

time. The West Texas Intermediate for February Delivery decreased 0.64 dollars to settle at 52.37 dollars a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange, while Brent crude for March delivery erased 0.56 dollars to close at 55.45 dollars a barrel on the London ICE Futures Exchange. (Xinhua)

**(20) Iraqi Forces...**

coalition aircraft, also recaptured al-Kafa'at neighborhood adjacent to the University complex and raised the Iraqi on some of its buildings, leaving some 30 IS militants killed and destroying three car bombs, the statement said. Moreover, the CTS troops advanced in the early morning into the three neighborhoods of al-Sadriya, al-Naser and al-Faisaliyah in the central part of Mosul's eastern side and engaged in heavy clashes with IS militants, and managed to free the three neighborhoods after killing some 25 IS militants and destroying two car bombs, the statement said. The troops also reached the

eastern bank of the Tigris in central the eastern side of the city and seized the Old Bridge and al-Hurriyah Bridge, which both are partially destroyed, the statement added. The CTS special forces deployed many of their snipers on the roofs of some buildings in the University complex during the day, while many of IS militants were seen fleeing to the northern neighborhoods of Mosul's eastern side, where the extremist militants still have presence, according a CTS Brigadier General who spoke to Xinhua by telephone on condition of anonymity.

The recapture of Mosul University complex is a significant step, as the complex included important headquarters of the extremist group, the officer said, adding that the next significant target will be the former presidential palaces in eastern the city. (Xinhua)

**(21) Over 25,000 ...**

migrant girls interviewed in Italy in Jan. 2017 said they had been forced to be engaged in prostitution while in Libya to pay off the cost of the dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean to the smugglers, according to the UNICEF.

The agency described such high number of unaccompanied children crossing the Mediterranean from North African coasts to Italy as "unprecedented." (Xinhua)

**(22) Chinese President's...**

opened for cooperation for the ties to move up a new ladder, said Leuthard, who has been at the helm of the Swiss government since the beginning of the year. (Xinhua)

**(23) Gen. Sharif...**

would speak at two sessions of the event to be held on January 17.

The session entitled "terrorism in the digital age" will feature debates on the "fragmented struggles" against Al Qaeda, the militant Islamic State group and Boko Haram; responsible leadership in international security; and resilience to the global network. (Monitoring Desk)

**(24) Rahmaon Appoints ...**

league football club – in which he had a both a playing position and a backroom role – and he became the youngest man to be awarded the title of major general in Russia's post-Soviet Commonwealth. Emomali's new position as mayor does not appear to be merely a titular role, as he was appointed alongside four new deputies and three new city region heads, whose predecessors departed with the outgoing mayor Mahmaid Ubaidulloev. (AP)

## French President Promises Training, Funding Support for Africa

BAMAKO - French President Francois Hollande pledged training and funding support for Africa to tackle security threat and boost economic growth.

The French leader made the pledge at the 27th Africa-France Summit, which opened here under heavy security.

"As long as we are united, as long as we are of solidarity, as long as we are together to eradicate the threats to peace, we can succeed," said Hollande to more than 30 African heads of state and government attending the summit. Hollande promised that France, a victim of terrorism, will train 25,000 African soldiers per year for the coming three years to help the continent tackle security issues.

"France will always be by the side of Mali, till the Malian authorities will be respected across the whole territory of Mali," Hollande affirmed. Hollande also promised efforts to help with Africa's economic development.

He announced France will provide 23 billion euros in the coming five years to support the development of Africa. A Franco-African investment Foundation is also to be set up by France and to be managed by a Franco-African team. (Xinhua)

## IS Unleashes Violent Offensive on Gov't Positions in Eastern Syria

DAMASCUS - The Islamic State (IS) group unleashed on Saturday a violent attack on government-controlled areas in the eastern province of Deir al-Zour, the latest attempt to capture more areas in that oil-rich province, a monitor group reported.

The large-scale offensive started on Saturday morning, as the confrontation between the government forces and IS terrorists led to the killing of 30 fighters from both sides, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. At least six powerful bombings rocked the city during the IS offensive, and the Syrian warplanes took part in pummeling the IS attackers, the London-based watchdog group added.

The Observatory, which says it relies on a network of activists on ground, said the current attack is the most violent one since the terror group attacked and besieged government areas in Deir al-Zour in early 2015.

It added that the IS militants were advancing near the graveyard area and the vicinity of the Deir al-Zour airport, the only port the Syrian army uses in and out of the city.

The IS militants have been preparing for this new offensive since early this month, when they brought in tires and crude oil, in what the Observatory said was a preparation to make huge fire during their offensive. (Xinhua)

## Trump Aide Spoke with Russian Envoy in December: Trump Spokesman

WASHINGTON - Michael Flynn, U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's pick for national security adviser, took a phone call last month from Russia's ambassador to the United States, Trump's spokesman said Friday.

The call between Flynn and Sergey Kislyak on Dec. 28 "centered around the logistics of setting up a call with the President of Russia and the President-elect after he was sworn in and they exchanged logistically information on how to initiate and schedule that call," Sean Spicer said.

The spokesman also said Flynn and Kislyak exchanged greetings during the Christmas holidays prior to the call. The contacts between the Russian envoy and Trump's top aide came around the time U.S. President Barack Obama announced on Dec. 29 tough sanctions against Russian entities and individuals over alleged hacking during the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Russian President Vladimir Putin decided not to retaliate against the sanctions -- a move that Trump praised as "very smart." Trump, who has called for improving U.S.-Russia relations, on Wednesday conceded for the first time that Russia was behind cyberattacks during the presidential election. (Xinhua)

## 'We Waited for Decades': Polish Govt Welcomes US Troops

WARSAW, Poland - Polish leaders welcomed U.S. troops to their country Saturday, with the defense minister expressing gratitude for their arrival and calling it the fulfillment of a dream Poles have

had for decades.

The ceremony in the western Polish town of Zagan comes some 23 years after the last Soviet troops left Poland. It marks a new historic moment – the first time Western forces are being deployed on a continuous basis to NATO's eastern flank. The move has infuriated Moscow.

"We have waited for you for a very long time," Defense Minister Antoni Macierewicz told the troops as snow fell. "We waited for decades, sometimes feeling we had been left alone, sometimes almost losing hope, sometimes feeling that we were the only one who protected civilization from aggression that came from the east."

The American deployment includes an armored brigade of 3,500 American troops from Fort Carson, Colorado. It comes in reactions to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its backing of separatist insurgents in Ukraine's east.

Those actions have frightened many in Poland, the Baltic states and other countries in Eastern Europe that were once under Moscow's control. (AP)

## UNHCR Repatriation of Somali Refugees in Kenya Nears 40,000

NAIROBI - The UN refugee agency said Saturday it has repatriated some 39,316 Somali refugees in Kenya since the return exercise begun in December 2014.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said in its bi-weekly Update said out of the figure, some 33,725 were supported in 2016. "The number of flights has been significantly increased as it remains the only mean of transportation to Somalia. Returns movements by air are organised to Mogadishu, Kismayu and Baidoa," it said in a statement issued in Nairobi.

The report said the UNHCR Dadaab will resume road movements to Somalia on Monday and the plan is to organize four convoys a week (each convoy will carry 350 -500 refugees).

"Verification, assessment and screening is ongoing for the registered refugees who have protection, health concerns and People with Specific Needs. These cases will be verified before being processed at the voluntary repatriation desk," it said. Kenya in collaboration with the UNHCR are working on a program that will ensure a smooth and voluntary repatriation of over 300,000 refugees living in five camps at the Dadaab refugee camp after Nairobi announced the closure of the camp. The UN agency has said it expects the majority of the remaining refugee population to return to Somalia throughout 2017 and possibly into early 2018. Kenya which has since postponed the closure of Dadaab refugee camp says it has put solid measures in place to fast-track repatriation of Somalia refugee sand their re-integration in their native country. (Xinhua)

## New Appointments in Turkmenistan's Cabinet of Ministers

ASHGABAT - Dadebay Amangeldyev and Bayram Annamerodov have been appointed the new deputy chairmen of Turkmenistan's Cabinet of Ministers, according to President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov's decrees. Amangeldyev will supervise the power and construction industries, while Annamerodov is to supervise transportation and communications. During a government meeting, the Turkmen president said a large-scale construction program is expected to be implemented in 2017, the Turkmen Dowllet Habarlary state news service reported. Also, the president noted that the opportunities of the North-South and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan railways should be used more efficiently and the construction of the Turkmenbashi International Seaport should be continued. (Trend)