

### (1) Aid Groups ...

most of its troops in 2014, officials had been predicting that gross domestic product would grow by as much as 12 percent per year, reducing the need for humanitarian aid, Bowden said. Instead, the conflict has worsened and annual GDP growth hovers around 1 percent, undermining efforts to wean the country's "distorted economy" off foreign aid, he said. (Reuters)

### (2) Pakistan wants ...

Afghanistan to continue." Aziz told VOA.

The clarity in the Afghan approach coupled with Pakistan's resolve to prevent the use of its soil against Afghanistan and international pressure may send "right signals" to the Taliban and they may come to the table for peace talks.

"I think they will come under greater pressure and so, if serious negotiations begin in 2017 that will be our best hope for peace in Afghanistan," Aziz said.

He said that years of reliance on the use of military power to resolve the Afghan conflict has so far not yielded results and instead strengthened the Taliban.

"The Taliban may not be able to capture (the) bulk of Afghanistan or the capital or any other (major urban) place but they can carry on insurgency for a very long time and the people of Afghanistan do need peace as early as possible... In the meanwhile, of course, ISAF (international) forces are trying to help Afghanistan to make sure that they (the Taliban) don't gain much territory because if they start gaining (more territory) then obviously they will be reluctant to negotiate," cautioned Aziz.

While the Afghan government controls about two-thirds of the country, the insurgents are in control of roughly 10 percent and the rest is contested, according to a U.S. military assessment. (VOA)

### (3) Al-Qaeda ...

had not been eliminated and there continued to be a smaller number of US service members engaging in counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan, he said.

They were also working closely with thousands of troops from NATO partners, Earnest noted. "I know there has been a question raised about how important a role NATO has played when it comes to counterterrorism.

"You have to look no further than Afghanistan to assess just how valuable a contribution that they have made to that effort," Earnest concluded. (Pajhwok)

### (4) Afghan Forces ...

Afghanistan-Pakistan region had the highest concentration of terrorist groups in the world. As many as 22 terrorist groups operated there, he added.

The event was attended by top officials from the Pentagon, former US ambassador to the UN, Zalmay Khalilzad, and eminent Afghan Americans. (Pajhwok)

### (5) NUG, NATO ...

dinner. No group claimed responsibility and the Taliban denied any involvement.

The Kandahar police chief Gen Abdul Raziq blamed the Haqqani Network while the Afghan National Security Adviser Hanif Atmar claimed that the attack was planned 'outside' the country. However, Head of General Security for the Emirate of Dubai Lt Gen Dahi Khalfan Tamim disputed the claims by the Afghan security officials and said Afghan officials are responsible.

A UAE delegation recently visited Afghanistan to get a briefing about the circumstances that led to the serious security lapse and the progress in the investigation. An Arab diplomatic source said the UAE officials have "conveyed their serious objections at the failure of the Kandahar security officials including Gen Raziq, to ensure security for the UAE ambassador and diplomats."

Raziq had walked out of the guest house just three minutes before the bomb exploded inside the guest house. Sources close to the Taliban say that Taliban representatives from the Qatar office were scheduled to travel to the UAE on Sunday to meet officials and clarify that they had no role in the attack. (Tolonews)

### (6) Trump Team...

so the imperative to continue our joint efforts to defeat them is as strong as ever. As far as economic development, we are one of the newest members of the World Trade Organization and have more than \$1 trillion of minerals, energy resources, gemstones and rare earth elements yet to be mined. Most importantly, in a world heavily consumed by electronics, Afghanistan is rich with the oil of the future - lithium. We are also capitalising on our position at the heart of Asia to become a hub for transit, transport, manufacturing, distribution, data and energy transmission for the entire Asian region. So there are abundant opportunities for cooperation, and abundant reasons to continue our joint counter terrorism efforts.

Q: Afghans are very concerned about Russia-Taliban relations, particular after the Moscow meeting. Many fear that Afghanistan may once again see proxy wars?

A: The Afghan government is working

to create a regional consensus to turn Afghanistan into an area of positive cooperation and regional development. We are the key to unlocking the potential of Central Asia. We will not allow Afghanistan to become a battleground for disputes between other countries. The potential for all our neighbors is far greater in regional cooperation and development. We are two years into an extensive outreach to our neighbors and partners to unlock the prosperous potential of the Afghanistan for itself and the region.

Q: What do US think-tanks think about the Russia-Taliban contacts?

A: There are dozens of think-tanks in Washington and they all have different points of view on this and other matters. This diversity of opinion creates a rich atmosphere of debate, as it should.

Q: Will the Trump team work for good relation between Afghanistan and Pakistan?

A: I cannot speak for the incoming US administration but we hope they'll do the right thing, which is work to end all safe havens for terrorists and reject attempts to distinguish between good and bad terrorists. The US has a great deal of leverage with Pakistan and it is our hope the new administration chooses to use that leverage to influence Pakistan's behaviour, so that it supports the shared goals of Afghanistan and America: Peace and stability in the region.

Q: President Ghani has long been seeking regional and international consensus on Afghanistan. Was this consensus damaged after the Moscow meeting, where Afghanistan was not invited?

A: Diplomatic relations are not binary and one meeting doesn't change anything. We protested the fact that Afghanistan was not present and, as a result of our objection, we have been invited to the next meeting. So we will absolutely have a seat at the table. Every country acts in its own interests, and Afghanistan is no different. We are a sovereign nation that has proven time and again that we are capable of defending our interests with all means available to us, including through diplomacy.

Q: Lobbying is very important in countries like the US. Are the Afghan embassy and diplomats lobbying on Afghanistan-related issues and meeting members of Congress?

Absolutely, Afghanistan is lucky to have so many friends in Washington, in both political parties, who want us to succeed. Our embassy has strong relationships with members of Congress and their staffs, and our diplomats and I are in near-constant communication with them to communicate Afghanistan's needs, the importance of the US-Afghan partnership, updates on reform progress, and news about the security situation. We meet with people on Capitol Hill on a weekly basis, and also with prominent think tanks, thought leaders in the media, and respected members of the policy community.

Q: Some Afghans living in US complain on social media that embassy staff is not cooperative. What is your view?

A: We are working to improve our consulate operations. We process requests from all over the country and we realize our staffing levels might be inadequate for such demand. We are working to move some processes online so people can apply for what they need more easily. We are also automating some systems that right now are moving too slowly. We recently made it possible to book appointments online so people don't have to call the consulate or wait in line. We are also trying to create an "e-consulate" to make things even easier. So far we have reduced the waiting time for new passports from four months to two weeks. It is an area of ongoing development. I personally attend to all complaints about the work in the consulate and make sure that our diplomats and local staff act professionally.

Q: Some Afghan army officers sent to the US for training have reportedly asked for asylum. The latest case involves female pilot Rahmani. What steps should be taken to prevent this happening?

A: Defending the Afghan nation is the responsibility of all Afghans. Our security forces are completely voluntary - when people sign up to defend their country they need to honor that commitment. As a government, we're doing everything possible to professionalize our security forces, to provide better facilities, and equip our troops. It's one of the main priorities we work with our international partners on, to make sure our military has what it needs to do the job it must. We think this steady arc of improvement will strengthen loyalty.

Q: What did you achieve as Afghan Ambassador in Washington DC last year?

A: Last year was very busy and the efforts of our Embassy in Washington exceeded my expectations. I led a successful effort to make the Embassy the epicenter of Afghan affairs, not just here in Washington but also with the outreach we did to other U.S. states and the groups we welcomed from all over. I hope I changed the perception of Afghanistan in Washington, so that people now see our country not as a war zone but as the home of amazing culture,

beautiful people, and vast opportunities for economic development. This past year saw Afghanistan join the World Trade Organization, which many people here took note of, and we used that milestone to promote Afghan business and investment potential. We opened doors to the Afghan diaspora who are a big asset for Afghanistan and our work here in Washington. Finally, we forged connections between the Embassy and the more than 1 million Americans who have served in our country and still feel a strong connection to our journey toward peace and self-reliance. They are our biggest allies in America and we have made sure they are at the top of our priorities.

Q: Your message for Afghans

A: America's interests are Afghanistan's interests: both our countries want terrorism eradicated from Afghan soil, stability and strength in our economy, and for the Afghan people to have the ability to realize their full potential. Our two countries' strategic partnership is aimed at furthering these goals. The Afghan people should know that millions of Americans are cheering every positive development in Afghanistan; they want us to succeed as a strong, democratic country. I am touched by the love and affection Americans show to Afghans here in the US. I found Americans to be very much like Afghans - like us, they are diverse, hard working, hospitable, and have a strong sense of family. Afghanistan has more than just a friend in America; it has a dependable partner for the future and we work hard each day to make sure we maintain that strong bond. (Pajhwok)

### (7) Some Parts...

Mohammad Mohaqiq, Loya Jirga Chairman Sibghatullah Mujaddidi, Secretary Farooq Wardak and Foreign Minister Abdullah over the question omitting some parts of the constitution. Mohammad Akbar, a lawmaker from Bamyan, province, said some articles had been omitted from the constitution but the media and parliament was yet to pay attention. He said differences existed between copies printed and the one approved at Loya Jirga.

Deputy Speaker Naimatullah Ghafari, who chaired the session, tasked the investigative commission of the house to probe the issue. (Pajhwok)

### (8) NSC Oks ...

security officials for their services to the motherland.

The procedure for celebrating the day was prepared by representatives from defence and security institutions, as well as ministries of hajj, information and culture, social and labour affairs in coordination with NSC.

A delegation tasked with deciding on the district status for Spin Ghar also presented it report to the participants, who agreed with the evaluation of the team and the Independent Directorate of Local Governments (IDLG).

After lengthy discussions, the meeting declared Spin Ghar as a new district and ordered IDLG to complete the required formalities. (Pajhwok)

### (9) MoD Confirms...

were wounded during a separate operation in Maiwand district of Kandahar. At least 5 Taliban insurgents were killed and 7 others were wounded during an operation in Bala Bolok district of Farah province and 3 more were killed in Baghlan province, MoD added.

The anti-government armed militant groups including the Taliban insurgents have not commented regarding the reports so far. (KP)

### (10) Kandahar ...

shared their sympathy with him and prayed for his health.

Aziz hoped he would soon return to his office and continue serving people with a stronger will and work for development and peace in the country.

Kandahar governor's spokesman, Samim Khpalkwak, also said the governor's health condition was improving with each passing day and he would return to his country soon.

He said several investigation teams were still busy probing the attack and they were yet to reveal the result of their investigation.

Twelve people including five UAE diplomats, two MPs and deputy Kandahar governor were killed and 18 others including Kandahar governor and UAE envoy to Kabul were injured in the attack.

The UAE diplomats had traveled to Kandahar to inaugurate an orphanage being constructed at a cost of \$2 million paid by the gulf country.

Two days back, Kandahar police chief, Gen. Abdul Raziq, claimed progress in the investigation and said 17 suspects including some security personnel and officers had been arrested.

Investigative teams from Kabul, the UAE and Afghanistan based foreign forces' have been in Kandahar. The teams have found how the explosives were brought to the governor's guesthouse and then placed them there, the police chief had said. However, Raziq added full details about the investigation would be shared

with the media after the process was completed. (Pajhwok)

### (11) Youngsters...

to improve her capability and proficiency at skiing.

Donned head to toe in all the right ski gear and carrying all the necessary equipment and accessories; from eye-wear and thermals to boots, bindings and poles, the young girl told Xinhua that she absolutely loves skiing and enjoys hitting the slopes near Bamyan most Fridays, as they are a weekly holiday in Afghanistan.

"I have been learning to ski here for nearly a year and a half and my dream is to become a professional skier and to compete at international level and bring honor to Afghanistan," the ambitious young skier told Xinhua.

Located in Afghanistan's highland region, the central Bamyan province is widely regarded as the most peaceful province in the insurgency-plagued country.

Taking advantage of the peaceful environment, the people of Bamyan have spared no efforts in developing their province and expanding in different fields to attract global investment for the region's further development, said Mohammad Afzal Nuri, the head of the Ski Federation in Bamyan.

"Bamyan is not just peaceful, it's wonderfully picturesque and is suitable for the development and promotion of all kinds of sports, including skiing," Afzal Nuri told Xinhua, as dozens of happy skiers zig-zagged by.

Skiing is a relatively new sport in Afghanistan arriving in Bamyan in just 2011, Afzal Nuri said.

"We started the federation here in Bamyan with the participation of 11 teenagers in 2011 and currently we cater to more than 150 boys and girls who are all members of the skiing club here and practice regularly to improve their skills and techniques," Afzal Nuri explained. The peaceful environment and convenient geographical location, as well as the great conditions on the snowy hilltops for skiing at this time of year, have seen the numbers of youngsters coming here to ski rise exponentially over the past few years.

So far six skiing competitions have been held in Bamyan and the seventh competition is expected to be organized this year, the skiing federation chief said.

"Each Friday we come here in Gumbadak area to enjoy the snow and hone our skiing skills, techniques and professionalism as future skinning tournaments are approaching," a young enthusiast, Nasrullah Adili, told Xinhua with a beaming, the snowy scenic backdrop reflected in the youngster's goggles. (Xinhua)

### (12) Over 90pc ...

Bamyan traffic department, acknowledged the existence of illegal vehicles in the province. He said most of traffic mishaps involved unregistered vehicles.

He added at least 220 traffic accidents happened in the province during the ongoing solar year, killing 30 people. The official blamed right-hand drive vehicles for such accidents.

With the use of unregistered vehicles increasing in the country, he asked the government to pay special attention to the issue, as local officials were unable to deal with it.

Aziz did not give an exact figure for illegal vehicles in Bamyan. A large number of illegal four-wheelers are plying Bamyan roads, with some registered in other provinces.

The ones registered outside could not be dealt with by the Bamyan traffic department, the director explained, believing 50 percent of the vehicles in Bamyan were without legal documents.

This Pajhwok reporter, watching the flow of traffic at one of the busy squares in Bamyan City, learnt only 14 of every 166 vehicles had legal documents. Number plates indicated that over 90 percent of vehicles in the province were illegal.

Driver Syed Mirza Hussain Bamyani around 100 cars plied agreed Rekshad, Mullah Ghulam and Wazdar roads. But only two or three of them had legal documents, he agreed.

He added: "2006 or 2005 Corolla cars without legal documents coming from Wesh were inexpensive each selling for 200,000 to 300,000 afghanis. Most of the people can afford to buy them."

Hassan Raza, another resident of the city, said he owned a car with no documents and used it because it was inexpensive. There was no major hurdle to acquiring or renewing documents for such cars, he claimed.

Thousands of Bamyan inhabitants owned illegal vehicles, which had a good market in the central province, he maintained.

Mohammad Azim, a showroom owner in Bamyan City, noted a huge increase in the number of second-hand NCP cars imported through Wesh border town. Impounding these vehicles would be a difficult job, he thought.

"Most of the people in Bamyan are unable to purchase registered cars because their prices are high. Therefore, the market of used NCP cars is very lucrative," Azim continued.

Mujtaba, a dealer who imports NCP vehicles, alleged: "Fake number plates of all provinces are available in Wesh. If a customer requests one, we can bring it for him. These number plates are made in China and owners use them to make their vehicles look like registered ones."

Mujtaba said smugglers faced no serious problem at security checkpoints in driving NCP cars to Bamyan. Police officers would let them go in return for small amounts of money.

Most of cars coming from Wesh are newer than 2000 model, included Fielder, Corolla, 4Runner and Compact.

NCP car-related problems

Hayatullah Hekmat, a civil society activist, said NCP cars were used in most criminal incidents that threatened the safety of Bamyan people. This made the identification of criminals harder for security and detective organs.

Additionally, he continued, the legal business was also affected as investments were made in an uncertain area and millions of afghanis in government revenue were lost due to poor law enforcement.

Economist Mohammad Sadiq Mirzad accused the government of negligence, saying the authorities had no plan for effective economic management. A huge amount of money was wasted and government revenue lost due to the illegal business, he pointed out.

The problem had become more complicated as the Ministry of Interior (MoI) is also unable to deal with it, he said, adding one in 10 families currently used NCP cars. Mirzad said mafia groups and senior officials were involved in the sordid business.

"This environment has been created by the government and the people themselves. When people are sure of police indifference, they sell registered vehicles and purchase NCP cars at lower prices," he reasoned.

Official view

Governor Tahir Zuhair confirmed that some NCP vehicles existed in Bamyan but said the problem was encountered in all parts of the country, including the capital Kabul. (Pajhwok)

### (13) Spy Agency...

arrested were involved in series of attacks in the province, 150 km southeast of national capital Kabul, the statement added.

As a Taliban-linked group of militants, the Haqqani network mostly operating in eastern provinces and capital Kabul, has been responsible for many high-profile attacks against security forces. The security force also confiscated ammunition, two explosive-laden motorcycles and three vehicles after the raids. Among the sized materials were a total of 50 sticky mines, 15 rounds of RPG-7 grenades and several hundreds of bullets, according to the statement.

The Afghan security forces had beefed up security operations recently elsewhere in the country. The militant group has yet to make comments. (Xinhua)

### (14) Afghan Security ...

within the past seven days, the statement said, adding the CNPA also seized two vehicles and six mobile phones from the arrested.

Much of the world's opium poppy is cultivated in militancy-hit Afghanistan, particularly in western and southern parts of the country, where government security forces have little presence.

Some 1.9 million to 2.4 million adult drug addicts have been living in Afghanistan, according to the Afghan officials. (Xinhua)

### (15) 3 Young ...

head of the European Union's presidency is urging member countries to consider opening up humanitarian corridors to allow people fleeing conflict to cross the Mediterranean.

Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat said Wednesday that the EU's migrant deal with Turkey must be replicated with northern African countries otherwise "Europe will face a major migration crisis." Such deals would see migrants screened in Africa to see whether they would be eligible for asylum or are job-seekers unlikely to be allowed in. Muscat said the EU should "organize humanitarian safe passages and corridors that would get recognized asylum-seekers to Europe safely."

More than 181,000 people attempted dangerous sea crossings of the Mediterranean to get to Italy last year. About 4,500 died. Muscat is expecting another record year in 2017.

A Serbian government official says about 1,100 migrants remain out in the open in severe weather after only 250 people agreed to move away from the streets into a camp outside Belgrade, the capital. Svetlana Velimirovic, from the government's refugee agency, said Wednesday that Serbia's asylum centers have enough room for all migrants but that most have refused to go.

Migrants trapped in Serbia have been reluctant to seek official help, fearing they could be deported or unable to move toward Western Europe. (AP)

### (16) 2 People Killed...

He said security forces were ordered to

go to the area this morning and demolish residential buildings constructed on the land.

When security forces arrived, local residents opened fire at them. Two local residents were killed and a third wounded when the security forces returned fire, Saleh said.

He said people who had constructed buildings on the land lacked documents to prove ownership of the property.

However, a resident, Javid, said they possessed 'temporary' ownership documents of the land.

"We have the documents and, destruction of our homes is unacceptable to us," he said. (Pajhwok)

### (17) NATO Dismiss...

mission. The Taliban-led insurgency has been rampant since it launched its spring offensive in mid-April last year. However, the Afghan officials claim that the group's main motive to capture key provinces, districts, and cities was repulsed by the security forces.

The Minister of Interior General Taj Mohammad Jahid said Monday that the Afghan forces are fully prepared to counter the militants activities in the next fighting season that starts late in March and earlier in April next year. (KP)

### (18) Mateen's Wife ...

Pierce Police Department and special agents of the FBI to prevent them from communicating to federal agents, and judges, information relating to the attack at the Pulse Night Club in Orlando in Florida. (Pajhwok)

### (19) UN Predicts...

in the United States, the forthcoming changes by the new administration of the United States to international trade policies as well as Brexit and its potential implications for free movement of goods and workers in Europe. (Xinhua)

### (20) Russia, Turkey...

truce went into effect on December 30 and has brought calm to much of Syria, although fighting persists in some regions.

The ceasefire excludes IS and its rival the Fateh al-Sham Front, which changed its name from Al-Nusra Front after breaking ties with Al-Qaeda last year. (AFP)

### (21) EU Says...

nearly one-third of its global exports. The EU's special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance, GSP Plus, is part of EU's tariff preferences in favor of developing countries. The European Commission last week proposed to grant GSP Plus to Sri Lanka, and the EU Parliament will decide on the proposal. (Xinhua)

### (22) British FM...

would not be granted better trading terms outside the single market.

On Wednesday, Johnson said Britain's decision to exit the single market did not mean it wanted to stop having access to EU countries. (AFP)

### (23) Kerry Asks...

comes to an end, however, John Kerry pledged to remain engaged: "Given the issues that are on the table and the challenges that we face globally, I intend to be extremely active and involved and continue to press in the same direction that we've been pressing in. (Xinhua)

### (24) Troops have...

days intensified their push into the last IS-held neighborhoods in Mosul's eastern sector, closing in on the Tigris River, which roughly divides the city. Stiff resistance by the militants, thousands of civilians being trapped in their houses by the fighting and bad weather had in the past slowed the advances of the troops. (AP)

### (25) Obama Commutes...

take full and complete responsibility for my decision to disclose these materials to the public. I have never made any excuses for what I did." Manning wrote in her petition in November to have her sentenced commuted. "I pleaded guilty without the protection of a plea agreement because I believed the military justice system would understand my motivation for the disclosure and sentence me fairly. I was wrong," she said. (Xinhua)

### (26) China Hopes ...

Brazil and the Gulf States. Saying China attaches importance to Britain's status and role, Hua called on both sides to deepen cooperation based on mutual respect and benefits. (Xinhua)

### (27) Pakistani Forces ...

Sheikhupura when the CTDF force encountered them." "On a tip-off, the CTDF team blockaded the Railway crossing late on Tuesday. The team asked the terrorists to surrender but they fled and later took positions and started firing indiscriminately on the police party chasing them. The police responded and found four terrorists dead while three terrorists succeeded in fleeing from the scene," the official said. The CTDF members also recovered two Kalashnikovs, two pistols, three kg explosives, prima cord and live bullets. (Xinhua)