

(1) Centralized...

faction of the national unity government shares only less than 20 percent of the power, but we still remain spectators while the other faction continues its struggle to centralize power," said MP Fawzia Kofi. Qanooni stated that the centralized system has also been a reason for corruption in Afghanistan. Qanooni warned that Afghanistan would not achieve sustainable socioeconomic development and political stability unless the political and ethnic boundaries are defined. (ToloneWS)

(2) NATO Stresses ...

with Afghanistan to encourage all regional actors to play a constructive role and find a lasting solution.

This comes after the U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said that NATO is helping "in Afghanistan, Libya, and around the world, and also NATO is helping to protect our homeland and our people, which after all, is in the end what it's all about." (ToloneWS)

(3) Ghani Seeks ...

with Kabul's peace push. A second meeting is expected to take place in the near future. Concerned at the lingering tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, Haq is learnt to have established contact with some Taliban leaders to encourage them to join the peace process. (Pajhwok)

(4) Regional and ...

Amid the HPC's allegations, meanwhile, Sartaj Aziz, advisor to the Pakistani prime minister on foreign relations has accused the Afghan government of failing to forge a political consensus in order to get the much-awaited process back on track.

But, the HPC hit out over the accusations and instead held Pakistan's ISI accountable for the peace talks deadlock between government and the Taliban.

The Afghan political elite and members of the public have often criticized HPC over its failure to make headway in the peace process. But HPC insists that it learned lessons from past mistakes when it comes to the issue of peace with the Taliban.

In a recent statement, Pakistan's Aziz called upon the Afghan political leadership to avoid making illogical excuses and to stop blaming Pakistan for peace talks failure and instead come up with a more clear and comprehensive policy about the peace process.

There is an ambiguity within the Kabul policy on whether to treat the Taliban as terrorists or as a political power, said Aziz.

The HPC also criticized what it called the "zero outcome" of the ongoing war against terrorism.

"The United States, NATO and other friendly countries must sit with us and assess the issue in order to define a new strategy if they think that there previous policy has not worked," said Qasimyar.

"We can say that HPC so far unfortunately has failed to achieve an outcome," said Masoud Tarashtwal, head of Sustainable Peace Research Institute.

In addition, the Peace, Media and Good Governance Institute on Thursday discussed some key topics related to relations between the people and government, media and the peace process.

"The main purpose of our program is to boost relations between people, government and the media," said Hamid Akbar, organizer of the institute for peace, media and good governance.

"Media and religious scholars have the ability to play a constructive role in restoring peace and stability in Afghanistan," said deputy minister of information and culture for

publications Sayeda Muzhgan Mustafawi.

Participants at the gathering also called for a wider role to be played by the media and religious scholars.

The peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban hit a deadlock last year following the death of the group's former leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour in a U.S. drone strike in Pakistan. (ToloneWS)

(5) NUG Urges ...

"The new administration must manage its cooperation with Afghanistan by completely understanding the military situation in Afghanistan," said Mujiburrahman Rahimi, spokesman to CEO Abdullah Abdullah.

"Over the past two years, relations between Afghanistan and America have been strategic relations and like two good partners, these partnerships would further develop under the incoming U.S. administration and would move on the right direction," said presidential spokesman Haroon Chakhansuri.

Meanwhile, legal expert Nasrullah Stanekzai said: "Trump's statement means that Pakistan as terror sponsor must be brought under control. We hope that Trump come up with sufficient pressure on Pakistan and target extremist circles and terrorists."

In addition, the CEO's spokesman reiterated calls for the implementation of election reforms in Afghanistan.

"The issue of electoral reforms in the political agreement has been an important priority of the chief executive officer which also includes the establishment of a constitution amendment commission, rollout of electronic national identity cards, holding the parliamentary and district council elections and moving toward the constitutional amendment Loya Jirga," Rahimi added.

Following the establishment of the NUG, both President Ashraf Ghani and his Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah pledged to take firm steps to implement systematic reforms in Afghanistan's election law

But, election monitoring groups argue that two years have passed since the NUG made the commitment, however no practical work has so far had been done to bring about fundamental reforms in the election law.

Meanwhile, former Afghan president Hamid Karzai has also asked the US government under president-elect Trump to take steps to root out terrorist hideouts and safe havens in Pakistan.

Karzai called on Trump to review the current U.S. anti-terrorism policy and avoid making the same mistakes made by the Barack Obama administration in dealing with terrorism.

Karzai also suggested the Trump government increase cooperation with regional powers such India, China and Russia in order to combat terrorism effectively.

"My message to president-elect Donald Trump is to thoroughly review the war policy against terrorism and militancy and target terrorists roots and the safe havens where terrorists are trained and armed," said Karzai.

Karzai criticized the international community for not focusing on the terror hideouts in Pakistan which have been operating there for decades.

"When I talk about roots of terrorism, I want to point towards the area where they are trained and they have safe havens and training camps. I do not talk only about Daesh or some other groups, I want to say that these groups have been ignored by the international community for decades," Karzai added. (ToloneWS)

(6) Pakistan Concerned...

as baseless allegations.

"The accusatory approach is unhelpful towards efforts for peace. Pakistan has suffered from the menace of terrorism and has made unparalleled sacrifices," the Pakistani spokesman said.

"We have done more than any other nation in the world in the fight against terrorism. Pakistan has highest stakes in the peace and stability in Afghanistan. No country gets affected more than Pakistan due to instability in Afghanistan," he said.

He said Pakistan remains committed to a meaningful engagement with Afghanistan to address the common challenge of terrorism, adding Pakistan is willing to extend all possible cooperation to Afghanistan, particularly for sharing the achievements and experience in the field of counter-terrorism and border management. (Xinhua)

(7) HIA Slams ...

and the government, Karim criticized government's efforts for beefing up the implementation process of the peace accord.

"Good incentives and good works have been done with them, but it is hoped that the accord is implemented appropriately," said HPC member Mohammad Ismail Qasimyar. After months of backdoor peace talks, the Afghan government and Hizb-e-Islami signed a peace deal a few months ago in a bid to end the group's long insurgency in the country.

The two parties agreed to take a number of steps that could help Hizb-e-Islami conduct its political activities within the framework of the Afghan laws and constitution and lay down its arms.

Government and Hizb-e-Islami also pledged to take a number of solid steps in line with the peace accord so that Gulbuddin and his party can re-initiate their political activities in the country, but in accordance to the laws and the Afghan constitution. (ToloneWS)

(8) Afghan Journalists ...

and other physical attacks, a 38 percent increase over numbers recorded in 2015.

"Direct attacks on journalists are very worrying," said Parwiz Kawa, editor of the 8 A.M. Daily newspaper.

"It limits the ability of journalists to move and produce stories and increases the cost of media outlets for additional security."

Targeted violence has forced some journalists to find safer work, he added.

The AJSC blamed the deaths of at least 10 of the 13 journalists on the Taliban, saying the group had "drastically increased" its targeting and intimidation of journalists, leading in some cases to more self-censorship by media.

In late 2015, the Taliban issued death threats against journalists over what they perceived as unfavorable coverage.

The militants followed up with a deadly attack against employees of Tolo, one of Afghanistan's largest TV stations.

They said the station was an "intelligence network" opposed to national unity and religious values, not an impartial media outlet. Tolo rejected the accusations.

A Taliban spokesman could not immediately be reached for comment on the AJSC's findings. (Reuters)

(9) 53 Insurgents ...

According to the statement, 11 militants were killed and 12 suspects rounded up as a result of air raids and ground offensives in Kunduz province.

Six suicide vests, 20 landmines and three bags of explosives were discovered destroyed. The ministry said all available resources were being used to defeat the rebels. (Pajhwok)

(10) 16 Police ...

in contact with media, claimed that the armed militants inflicted huge casualties to police personnel in Maidwand district.

Kandahar, the former stronghold of Taliban militants, has been the scene of insurgency over the past several years. (Xinhua)

(11) 134 More ...

too have been set up," he added.

In coordination with UN agencies, Afghanistan set up a camp for them in southeastern Khost province. Kabul says more than 200,000 tribal people have been displaced to Afghanistan by the military operation in Waziristan. (Pajhwok)

(12) Ghazni Police...

and Qasim had been arrested and efforts were underway arrest the rest.

Qarah Bagh district police chief Col. Lofullah Kamran told Pajhwok Afghan News Akhtar Mohammad's family was yesterday paying ransom money to the kidnappers in Maqur district when police arrested the gang.

"Two men who were receiving the money were arrested and later with their cooperation seven other members of the group were detained."

Akhtar Mohammad, who also possessed Greece nationality, had arrived home some days ago on vacation. "I went to mosque with father for evening prayer, when we were returning from the mosque, a vehicle stopped near us and the car occupants said they were Taliban and we should go with them. They asked us why local police had arrived in our area."

He said he and his father were ordered to sit in the car. Later the kidnappers released his father and took him away.

"After an hour of journey, we reached a abandoned home and I was locked in a bathroom. They phoned to my family in my presence and demanded \$150,000 in ransom." Mohammad said the kidnappers threatened him with elimination and also used to beat him. He thanked police for rescuing him from the clutches of his kidnapers.

One of the detained kidnapers, Mohammad Raza, said Akhtar Mohammad had been kidnapped by other people and he was just told to collect money from the family. He said he was not involved in the kidnapping and the real culprits should be arrested.

One of the detainees belong to Shah Joy district of southern Zabul province, two to Andar district of Ghazni and one to Maqur district and the remaining to Qarah Bagh district. (Pajhwok)

(13) Parwan Public...

district said. Samandar Sikanderi told Pajhwok Afghan News Dr. Safiullah, who was on his way home along with some relatives, was seized in Qala Sehra area.

Local authorities said there was no clue yet to the kidnapers, or the motive behind the advisor's abduction.

Public Health Director Dr. Mohammad Qaseem Saeedi said Dr. Safiullah was technical advisor to the department. He asked the security organs to launch efforts for the advisor's safe recovery. (Pajhwok)

(14) Afghan Girl ...

club named after the famous Chinese Wushu school in Shaolin, to improve her proficiency.

"In the beginning when I opened my private club two years ago to teach Wushu, no girl dared to attend at first, but gradually the number increased and presently 20 girls attend the club to practice this art of self-defense," she explained.

Contrary to others, Azimi's family, especially her father Rahmatullah Azimi, 45, is also an athlete and supports his daughter to improve her

career as a Wushu expert. "I am proud of my daughter and would continue to support her," her father told Xinhua.

In conservative, post-Taliban Afghanistan, women have become considerably more empowered and their social status has improved demonstrably in comparison with the Taliban era of rule when the hardliner group confined women to their homes and banned schools for girls.

Rehana, 20, is a Wushu trainee and while thanking her coach for promoting Wushu in Kabul city, said happily that her "health is getting better and better since attending the club four months ago."

Like Seema Azimi a few other girls including Fakhria, Rubaba have launched social programs aimed at raising women's status to that of men in the conservative society.

Women in today's Afghanistan are serving as cabinet members, politicians, business people, movie directors and musicians.

However, many believe that there is still a long way ahead for women in Afghanistan to achieve parity with men. (Xinhua)

(15) US-Led...

The group has suffered significance losses recently, as many of its commanders have been targeted by either anti-terror coalition or the rival rebel groups. (Xinhua)

(16) Germany Says...

protectionist backlash emanating from Washington, but Germany would be somewhat insulated since its growth was currently driven by domestic demand.

Nearly 61 percent of Germans fear relations between Germany and the United States will suffer under Trump, according to a poll conducted by the Civey institute for the Tagesspiegel newspaper. Only 5 percent expect a positive change. (Reuters)

(17) G20 Ministers...

been a cornerstone of the Turkish G20 presidency in 2015, and Mehmet Simsek, deputy prime minister of Turkey, argued that it was important for creating jobs and reducing income inequality.

"Evidence shows that inequalities constrain global growth," he said, adding that protectionism was another growth hurdle. (Xinhua)

(18) German Finance ...

internal consumer demand," and thus maintaining "resilience against geo-political risk."

For Schauble, the major problem for the European monetary union was a gap in competitiveness between members.

Reducing the competitiveness gap "can't be done by weakening the stronger ones," he insisted, adding "we must strengthen the weaker ones. Europe must become more competitive."

Asked about the negative impact of Brexit on European economies, of particular interest since British Prime Minister Theresa May's Tuesday confirmation that Britain would leave the European Union (EU) single market, Schauble saw no immediate concerns.

"In the long term, we don't know, but in 2017 Brexit will not have a negative impact," he said. (Xinhua)

(19) Lebanese PM...

witnessed," Hariri said.

"The strain on our real economy due to the conflict in Syria has been both immense and unprecedented," he added.

The prime minister also pointed out the pressure the Syrian refugee crisis has exerted on the Lebanese government.

"Demand exceeded the capacity of institutions and infrastructure to meet the needs of both displaced Syrians and Lebanese citizens," he said. Hariri appealed to the inter-

national community for more investment in Lebanon's economic development. (Xinhua)

(20) Russia Plans...

Ministry and Russia's United Aircraft Corporation (UAC) will work to agree on a timetable for the production of the substitute planes and for the decommissioning old ones.

Moreover, the minister insisted that the replacement must be accomplished without additional funding from the government, noting that the exact timing for the aircrafts' replacement has not yet been specified. (Xinhua)

Syria Lets Russia Expand its Mediterranean Naval Facility

MOSCOW - Syria has allowed Russia to significantly expand its naval facility in the Mediterranean port of Tartus and keep using it for decades to come.

The facility is the only such outpost Russia has outside the former Soviet Union. The Russian military has used Tartus to back its campaign in support of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Under the agreement released on Friday, Syria has offered Russia free use of the Soviet-era facility for 49 years. The term can be automatically extended for further 25-year periods if neither side objects.

The deal signed in Damascus also allows Russia to modernize the site so that it can host up to 11 ships at a time, including the nuclear-powered ones. Now Tartus only has room for a couple of mid-sized ships at a time. (AP)

Danish Gov't Mulls Sending Special Forces to Iraq, Syria to Combat IS: Report

COPENHAGEN - The Danish government is considering sending special forces to the border area between Iraq and Syria to combat the Islamic State (IS), local media reported on Thursday.

Local newspaper Politiken cited unidentified sources as saying that the plan will be discussed on Friday at a meeting of the parliament's Foreign Policy Committee, where Defense Minister Claus Hjort Frederiksen and Foreign Minister Anders Samuelsen are expected to account for the new tasks.

According to the report, the idea is to fight the IS directly in cooperation with the Iraqi forces, most of which have been trained over the past year.

In April last year, a broad majority in the Danish parliament approved a proposal to increase the country's military contribution to the fight against the IS in Iraq and Syria. (Xinhua)

EU needs Turkish-style migration deal on Libya: Maltese PM

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - The European Union needs to reach a deal on curbing the flow of migrants trying to sail on smugglers' boats from Libya to Italy, the prime minister of Malta, holder of the EU's rotating presidency, said on Wednesday.

Joseph Muscat said the new measures should have the same impact as an agreement struck with Turkey last year that cut the number of migrants and refugees reaching Europe from Turkish shores to below 390,000 from well over a million in 2015, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The treacherous voyage from North Africa to Italy is now the favored route. The IOM says more than 5,000 people died or went missing while crossing the Mediterranean last year, and at least 219 drowned in the first two weeks of this year alone.

"There is no doubt that unless the essence of the Turkey deal is replicated in the central Mediterranean, Europe will face a major migration crisis," Muscat told European lawmakers. (Reuters)