

Quote of the Day

Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence.

Robert Frost

Taliban Willing to Peace Talk: HPC

KABUL - The High Peace Council (HPC) on Friday said that the Taliban has shown willingness to participate in direct talks with the Afghan government. "After the efforts made by the HPC to bring the Taliban to the table of negotiations and also contact with the group members, they [the Taliban] have shown willingness to talk peace with the Afghan government," said HPC member Shafiuallah Shafi Nuristani.

He said the HPC is optimistic about the results seen after the two rounds of the four nations



meeting on the peace talks.

"The HPC is optimistic over the quadrilateral meetings on the peace talks and we hope that the sessions set the schedule for face-to-face

talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban," he added.

Meanwhile, a number of experts believe that the quadrilateral sessions on the peace talks had no

specific result for Afghans.

"There was no positive result from the four nations meeting on the peace talks and nothing was made clear for the people. Government should come up with a clear policy in this regard," said Mohammadullah Haidari, an analyst in international affairs.

"The mechanism of the four nations meeting is good and we hope that it will yield a good outcome," said Mohammad Natiqi, another analyst in international affairs.

Analysts also say that China and ...*(More on P4)...(1)*

Effective Strategy in Place to Combat Graft: Presidential Aide

KABUL - The government has made significant progress in combating the scourge of corruption, particularly in procurement contracts, the president's deputy spokesman claimed on Thursday.



A day earlier, the Transparency International (TI) ranked Afghanistan as the third most corrupt country in the world in its annual Corruption Perceptions Index for 2015.

Millions of dollars that should have been spent on Afghanistan's reconstruction had been wasted or stolen, seriously undermining efforts to restore peace, the organization lamented.

But the government took issue with allegation, rejecting as groundless the claim that there was no effective plan to deal with the ...*(More on P4)...(2)*

Intra-Syrian Talks to Start as Planned

GENEVA - The intra-Syrian talks originally scheduled for Jan. 25 but delayed until Friday will go ahead as previously announced by UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura, a UN information officer said.

"All I can say about the talks is that they will start as planned as Staffan de Mistura announced," head of the UN information office in Geneva Ahmad Fawzi told reporters here, without specifying the time and location of the talks nor the details of the delegations.

Khawla Mattar, a spokeswoman of the Special Envoy for Syria, indicated in a statement on Friday that De Mistura would kick off the intra-Syrian talks by meeting the government's delegation headed by the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the UN, Bashar Jaafari. She indicated "he will continue meetings with other participants in the talks and with representatives of the civil society subsequently." Scheduled talks, which will strive to broker a lasting solution to ...*(More on P4)...(3)*

NEB Incapacitated Despite US Training Efforts: SIGAR

WASHINGTON - Afghan National Engineer Brigade (NEB) is incapable of operating independently, according to the report of Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR).

The Afghan army's engineering corps is unable to function without support despite efforts by the US military to train them, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) said in a press release on Thursday.

"SIGAR published an audit

of the Afghan National Engineer Brigade (NEB) that found despite US training efforts, the brigade is incapable of operating independently," the release stated.

US Forces Afghanistan, the release added, "was unable to achieve its goal of training the... NEB to a 'partially capable' level by December 31, 2014."

According to ...*(More on P4)...(4)*



Govt. Won't Allow Terrorists to Harm Free Media: Atmar



KABUL - The National Security Advisor (NSA) on Thursday said the government was committed to protecting the value of the freedom of speech.

A statement from the NSA office said Mohammad Hanif Atmar visited officials of Tolo News private television and extended his condolences to families of staff members killed in a suicide attack on their van in Kabul.

Seven TOLO TV workers were killed and 26 others injured on January 20 when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives near the minibus at the Allauddin intersection in the limits of the third police district.

The statement said Atmar vowed the government would not allow Afghanistan's enemies to harm the freedom of speech with their terrorist attacks.

Atmar said the National Security Council (NSC) in coordination ...*(More on P4)...(6)*

Govt. Increases Provincial Governors' Authority

KABUL - Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) has said that security organizations from now on will perform their duties in coordination with provincial governors. It added that the appointment of provincial and district police chiefs will take place in consultation with governors.

Munira Yousufzada, spokesperson for the IDLG, said security organizations should perform their duties in consultation with governors. She said governors will also lead the fight against land-grabbing, corruption and violence and should brief the president on their performances on a monthly basis.

Meanwhile, a number of provincial governors said giving these authorities to governors will help in bringing security to provinces.

"Governors' consultations will be effective in the appointment of police chiefs as well as ensuring security of provinces, because governors are in contact with district chiefs and receive updates about security situations in their areas. That is why they [governors] best know who [as police chief] can be effective in bring security," said Naser Khazae, the governor of Ghor province. *(Tolonews)*

Four-Nation to Discuss Afghan Peace Talks on Feb. 6



ISLAMABAD - Pakistan's Foreign Ministry announced Thursday that representatives from Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States will meet in the Pakistani capital Islamabad next month to discuss how to resume the stalled peace process between Kabul and the Taliban. The ministry spokesman, Qazi Khalilullah, said the Feb. 6 meeting would continue the ongoing efforts to lay out a roadmap to peace for the war-shattered Afghan nation. It will be third such meeting in recent weeks. Officials have said that Taliban representatives will be invited when the four countries reach some understanding on the overall roadmap. Khalilullah said Pa-

kistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will soon travel to Qatar as part of that effort, but did not elaborate on that visit. The announcement came days after the Afghan Taliban said its "political office" in Qatar was the only entity authorized to carry out negotiations on its behalf. The peace talks have been on the hold since July 2015, when the Afghan government revealed that Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar had been dead for years. The Taliban ruled Afghanistan according to a harsh version of Islamic law from 1996 until late 2001, when it was ousted by a U.S.-led invasion launched after the Sept. 11, 2011 attacks. *(AP)*

Govt. Partially Agrees to HRW Report

KABUL - The Afghan government has agreed to some points in the Human Rights Watch (HRW)'s annual report, but says security forces are paying more attention to human rights and the government has seriously continued its anti-corruption effort.

In its world report for 2016, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) said little progress was made in reining in militias, reducing corruption, promoting women's rights and reforming the courts.

Infighting among government institutions jeopardised the broader reform agenda in 2015 when abuses by security forces and advances by the Taliban undermined public con-

fidence in their rulers, HRW noted. The government's steps, notably expansion of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) that has been accused of rape, extortion and unlawful killings, endangered the protection of fundamental rights, the watchdog observed.

A statement from the Presidential Palace said the government had studied the report and agreed to some findings regarding violations of human rights, insecurity and anti-human acts by Taliban and other militants.

"The acts of Taliban are not something new for us, they have already committed systematic anti-human acts in the ...*(More on P4)...(5)*

Kabul-Berlin Working on Plan to Address Migration Causes

KABUL - The National Security Advisor on Friday said Afghanistan and Germany were jointly working on a programme to address the causes of migration by increasing number of Afghans to Europe. A statement from the National Security Council said Mohammad Hanif Atmar on Friday met with German Ambassador in Kabul Markus Potzel.

They discussed the next security conference in Munich and economic and security assistance of Germany with Afghanistan and the issue of migration.

Atmar said both the countries were jointly working on a multi-dimensional programme aimed at eliminating the main causes of increasing migration of Afghans to European countries.

Recent reports suggest at least 160,000 Afghans have reached Europe over the past one year to seek asylum and 40 percent of them have been accepted.

Atmar told the Germany envoy that Afghanistan had carried out some necessary preparations and would share security strategies and priorities with participants of the Munich conference.

The Munich conference has been conducted each year in February over the past 52 years in which representatives from different countries discuss security and political issues of the world.

Potzel said his country would continue supporting Afghanistan in the spheres of economy and security.

The German ...*(More on P4)...(8)*

Obama's Pick to Lead U.S. Forces in Afghanistan to Review Drawdown

KABUL - President Barack Obama's pick to lead U.S. forces in Afghanistan said on Thursday he aimed to review a campaign plan that would cut American troop levels by nearly half by the start of next year, as he acknowledged deteriorating security in the country. Lieutenant General John Nicholson's Senate confirmation hearing underscored anxiety in Congress about Obama's withdrawal plan, which has already been slowed to address Afghanistan's struggle to blunt a still-resilient Taliban insurgency. The emergence of Islamic State as a threat in Afghanistan has



added to U.S. concerns. Nicholson acknowledged gaps in Afghan military capabilities and said during his Senate confirmation hearing he aimed to complete his review of the

situation in Afghanistan within his first 90 days in command, if confirmed by Congress. He was careful not to disclose any potential recommendations he ...*(More on P4)...(7)*

Rebuilding Afghanistan Hampered by Security Situation



WASHINGTON - The Pentagon's watchdog for Afghan spending found that a deteriorating security situation in the country is making it more difficult to keep U.S.-funded construction projects running.

The quarterly report released Friday found that Afghanistan was "even more dangerous" between October and December than it was over the same time period a year ago and that the Taliban controls more territory now than at any time since 2001. "The lack of security has made it almost impossible for many

U.S. and even some Afghan officials to get out to manage and inspect U.S.-funded reconstruction projects," according to the report from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction.

"The dangers of absent oversight were exposed when a task force appointed by President Ashraf Ghani reportedly found that millions of dollars were being embezzled while Afghanistan pays for numerous nonexistent 'ghost' schools, 'ghost' teachers, and 'ghost' students." *(Monitoring Desk)*

Japan Poised to Return over 100 Artifacts to Afghanistan

KABUL - Japan is preparing to return more than 100 artifacts to Afghanistan's national museum in coming months, a media report said on Thursday.

The cultural assets, seen as symbols of the Silk Road civilisation, include wall paintings and Buddha statues, the NKH news site reported

Omara Khan Masoudi, ex-director of the Afghanistan museum, is currently in Japan to check artifacts before they are returned to the war-torn country.

He commended Japanese experts for preserving the 102 artifacts that were taken out of Afghanistan over the past three

decades. Masoudi is considering displaying them in Afghanistan to let people know the country boasted a rich culture and high-quality assets.

Before being sent back to Afghanistan, the artifacts will be put on display in Tokyo in April and then in other countries. *(Pajhwok)*