

### (1) Taliban...

US can play a vital role in the peace talks, therefore Kabul should convince the two countries to put the needed pressure on Pakistan in order to sincerely support the peace process in Afghanistan.

The third round of the four nations meeting on the peace talks will be held within the next eight days in Islamabad. (Tolonews)

### (2) Effective Strategy...

graft. The assessment, it said, was based on lack of proper research on the part of Transparency International.

Asked for comments on the TI report, President Ashraf Ghani's deputy spokesman Syed Zafar Hashemi told Pajhwok Afghan News the government was trying to remove institutional weaknesses that facilitated major corruption.

"Under this plan, a national procurement system has been put in place. The president, CEO and other high-level officials take part in reviews. Almost 90% of contracts fail to meet legal requirements but they were corrected," he said.

The last meeting in this regard noted a significant improvement in careful preparation of contracts by different ministries in compliance with relevant laws and the principle of transparency.

For the first time ever, major Ministry of Defence (MoD) oil contracts had been published in an attempt at ensuring transparency, the official explained.

The judiciary -- a major source of corruption in the past -- had embarked on reforms, he continued. In the past two months, 130 judges have been removed and new ones appointed.

Accountability and ending the culture of impunity are the second component of the anti-graft strategy, according to Hashemi, who said the government had reopened the Kabul Bank case and was determined to recover the stolen funds.

At least 10 officials, including prosecutors involved in corruption, have been arrested in recent months. The presidential aidesaid the detainee were being tried.

He called corruption a global issue that could be tackled effectively only if government, civil society and citizens acted together. "In Afghanistan, the government has taken important steps in the past one year to deal with corruption." (Pajhwok)

### (3) Intra-Syrian...

the Syrian crisis that has been raging since 2011, will take place on a proximity basis, meaning that delegations will convene with the Special Envoy separately. (Xinhua)

### (4) NEB Incapacitated ...

to SIGAR's audit, many of the same issues that plagued US efforts with the Afghan army also bedeviled the engineering training program, including unstable security conditions, poor reading comprehension skills and absences due to holiday leaves and political events.

The US Department of Defense, the release noted, were overly optimistic in forecasting that the NEB could be partially capable within eight months and fully capable within ten. A Defense Department official told SIGAR that the US military does not even know the number of NEB personnel within each unit, which is still missing much of at least \$29 million in vehicles and equipment. SIGAR has previously reported that the Defense Department has wasted billions on training and reconstruction efforts since the mission began in Afghanistan because of poor oversight, mismanagement, corruption and fraud. (Monitoring Desk)

### (5) Govt. Partially...

past. The Afghan government is offering sacrifices each day to prevent them," the statement said.

It said respect for human rights was the main value of Afghanistan security and defence forces and awareness about human rights had been included in the curriculum of the forces.

President Ashraf Ghani had several times instructed Afghan defence and security forces that in addition to respecting human rights, they should defend their rights, the statement added.

"Even credible international institutions have praised Afghan security and defence forces for obeying human rights in the war, especially Kunduz," it added.

The president likewise has instructed the Ministry of Interior to prevent illegal armed groups from operating and the local police should only be operating under the framework of the ministry.

The Afghan government has taken some effective measures against

corruption in the country, the statement. For instance, it said, the government had sacked 130 judges over the past two months as part of the anti-corruption effort and safety of human rights. (Pajhwok)

### (6) Govt. Won't ...

with media representatives would create a draft for the protection of media outlets and journalists. He said the draft would bring about needed coordination between media and security forces.

The NSA said the president had ordered security forces to take needed measures for the protection of media. (Pajhwok)

### (7) Obama's Pick...

might make.

Senator John McCain, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said cutting U.S. troop levels from 9,800 to 5,500 as planned could undermine efforts to both bolster Afghan forces and combat al Qaeda and Islamic State militants.

"It's time to immediately halt U.S. troop withdrawals and eliminate any target date for withdrawal," McCain said.

Nicholson said he agreed with plans by the outgoing commander, General John Campbell, to keep as many troops in Afghanistan for as long as possible before reducing them to 5,500 U.S. troops, as ordered, by Jan. 1, 2017.

But he also said preparations for that drawdown would need to start in the coming months.

A blunt Pentagon report released last month said the security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated in the second half of 2015, with Taliban militants staging more attacks and inflicting far more casualties on Afghan forces.

The grim outlook prompted Obama in October to scale back his drawdown plans, which had previously seen the United States drawing down to an embassy-based presence by 2017. The White House has also recently given the military broad authority to target Islamic State in Afghanistan.

Nicholson said the Taliban came at the Afghan forces "more intensely than perhaps we anticipated."

"Because of that, we did not make the advances we projected we thought we would make," he said.

Nicholson listed capability gaps within Afghan forces including in intelligence, air support and the evacuation of wounded forces from the battlefield.

Asked about Nicholson's remarks, Defense Secretary Ash Carter told reporters he expected Afghan forces to be "much stronger this season." (Reuters)

### (8) Kabul-Berlin...

government has some concerns regarding the migration issue, which would be shared during next week's visit of German interior minister to Kabul, he said. (Pajhwok)

### (9) Europe Must ...

on refugees' rights.

According to reports, nearly 160,000 Afghans have reached Europe in 2014 through smuggling routes and have applied for asylum. (Pajhwok)

### (10) Agriculture ...

of producing 154,000 different types of seedlings would be also established to provide enough seedlings for the farm and market.

Four greenhouses would be specified for vegetables from where women would supply their produce to the local market and eight working rooms and clod storages would be also constructed on the farm, Bari said.

The farm would be irrigated for six months from the Zahir Shahi canal and for the remaining six months, tube well water would be supplied to the farm where 15.5 kilowatts of solar power system was needed to be installed, she said. (Pajhwok)

### (11) Pentagon to ...

The majority of the 1,800 or so photos will remain unreleased after US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter in November invoked his authority under the 2009 exemption provision. The ACLU said it would continue to seek the release of the remaining photos.

The US government opposes publicly releasing the photos, saying the images could provoke a violent backlash and place US forces and personnel abroad at heightened risk of attack.

The still-classified images consist of collection of photographs taken by the Pentagon from September 11, 2001, to January 22, 2009, and relate to the treatment of "engaged, captured or detained individuals," according to court documents.

In 2004, a major scandal broke when the media published photos

of US soldiers torturing and sexually humiliating prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. As a result, 11 US soldiers were convicted in court martials between 2004 and 2006. (sputniknews)

### (12) Iran Sending ....

Iranian-organized militias, either out of religious conviction or to regularize their residence status in Iran.

"Iran has not just offered Afghan refugees and migrants incentives to fight in Syria, but several said they were threatened with deportation back to Afghanistan unless they did," said Peter Bouckaert, emergencies director at Human Rights Watch.

Funerals for Afghan fighters killed in Syria are frequently held in Iran, sometimes attended by Iranian officials. While Iran officially claims that thousands of Afghans living in Iran have volunteered to join the militias, their vulnerable legal position in Iran and the fear of deportation may contribute to their decision, making it less than voluntary.

Many said that the threat of arrest and forced conscription in Iran was an important contributing factor in their decision to leave Iran.

Other Afghans told Human Rights Watch that they had been detained by Iranian authorities and given the choice between deportation and fighting in Syria, and had chosen deportation.

Two Afghan boys, a 16-year-old and the 17-year-old, said they had fought in Syria, and another Afghan, Alireza Muhammad, who underwent military training but did not go to fight in Syria, said that he personally knew Afghan boys as young as 12 fighting in Syria in Iranian-organized groups, and that a 12-year-old boy he knew had been killed in the fighting.

International law applicable in Syria prohibits both government forces and non-state armed groups from forcibly recruiting children under 18 or using them in hostilities. (ANI)

### (13) 175 Girls in ...

Program on Thursday received their certificates in Mazar-e-Sharif, the capital of northern Balkh province. The participants who completed the course vowed to use their skills and knowledge in promoting the rights of women and boosting their capacities.

"We completed a three month course with the main focus on topics related to leadership and empowerment of women," a graduate Malalai said.

"The program provided us a platform to prove our knowledge, as women we have the capability to lead our country in the future," another participant Sumaira said.

Program participants expressed their satisfaction over the topics they learned during the course and said they were committed to serving their country and utilizing their skills to defend women and contribute to women's empowerment. (Tolonews)

### (14) Cooperation...

support.

At the meeting, the president assured the families of his government's efforts to arrest, investigate and bring the perpetrators to justice, the statement said.

"We will never talk to militants from a weak position, but from a strong position with the support of people," the president said.

"We will take revenge of the bloodshed of innocent people," the president said, adding that over the past one week, 300 militants had been killed by security forces across the country.

Regarding assistance with the victims' families, the government has talked to MOBI group officials and they are working on a draft to create a cooperation fund for the freedom of speech, the statement said.

As much money as the government pays for a victim of security personnel, the same would be paid to the victims of Tolo TV, the statement concluded. (Pajhwok)

### (15) Militants Enjoy...

him about the status of terrorist safe havens inside Pakistan.

"Have you seen any progress in this whole problem with sanctuary for the Taliban in Pakistan? And how serious do you view that problem as it is today?" McCain asked.

Nicholson said the US was not satisfied that there was adequate pressure put on the Haqqani network. The recent operations in Northern Waziristan have helped, as well as stationing of additional soldiers in tribal areas have helped.

"Some of this has pushed some fighters into Afghanistan, which has contributed, perhaps, somewhat to...for example, in Nangahar, some of the issues there," he said.

"So, it's a mixed story, and it's one

that requires continuous engagement by the Pakistan military, and with General Raheel Sharif and continuous engagement at the operational and tactical level. And then, increasingly, we want to encourage the Afghans and the Pakistan military forces to work more closely together against their common enemies," Nicholson said. (Pajhwok)

### (16) Pakistan, Afghanistan...

the difference this has made, and the support from the country's security forces. It is now clear that accessibility is no longer a barrier or interruption. But the job is not finished yet. We need continuous support from security forces," Mr Olive said, adding that there is still a need for improving surveillance in some areas.

The Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Eradication, Senator Ayesha Raza Farooq told the meeting that the virus had been confined to just three places in the country including the Khyber-Peshawar corridor, Karachi and Quetta.

However, she cautioned, the rest of Pakistan is still at high risk high and said there is a need for focusing on delivering high quality campaigns and vaccinating every child to ensure the virus does not spread.

"We believe we can finish the job in 2016," she said.

Secretary Ministry of National Health Service Mohammad Ayub Sheikh said the ministry had started the new year with a resolve to achieve the targets set.

"With strong political commitment from the government and with support from all our partners, I believe we will defeat the virus this year", he said.

National Emergency Operations Centre Coordinator Dr Rana Safdar told the meeting that the next four months are critical in stopping the virus from spreading. (Agencies)

### (17) Tajikistan Starts ...

the remaining 7.0 percent were produced by six other cement plants operating in the country.

Meanwhile, the press center of the Customs Service under the Government of Tajikistan said last month that Huaxin Gayur Cement Co., Ltd signed an agreement with Afghanistan's construction company Shamal Sharq in early December 2015 to supply 500 tons of cement to Afghanistan. 12 trucks carrying 370 tons of cement proceeded via the Panji Poyon border crossing on the Tajik-Afghan border in late December 2015. "Tajikistan's current annual requirements in cement are estimated at 2 million tons," Bobozoda said, noting that three other cement plants are expected to be introduced into operation in the country this year.

By improving the country's cement sector, Tajikistan expects to become a net cement exporter. Earlier, Tajikistan imported cement in large quantities from Pakistan, Iran and China. (Asia-Plus)

### (18) NATO Looking...

Cold War and cuts in defence spending among European Allies had now practically stopped.

The alliance chief said they had visibly increased NATO's presence in the eastern part of the alliance and to the south, they had agreed to increase the presence of AWACS early warning aircraft over Turkey, as they continued to augment Turkey's air defences.

"We have tripled the size of the NATO Response Force to more than 40,000 troops, and at its core is our new, very high readiness 'Spearhead Force' that is now operational, ready within days to deploy to wherever it is needed. I was really impressed when I saw it in action at its first deployment exercise in Poland."

He said the alliance was improving its intelligence and early warning systems to combat hybrid warfare, speeding up decision-making and enhancing cyber defences. "Last year, we conducted around 300 allied exercises, including the largest and most complex one in over a decade."

The NATO chief said they would continue to step up exercises this year and would remain transparent in what they do.

He said over the last two years, Russian air activity close to NATO's European airspace had increased by around 70 percent. In response, he said, allied aircraft scrambled over 400 times to intercept Russian aircraft. "We have made substantial progress with our new Alliance Ground Surveillance system." (Pajhwok)

### (19) Thousands of ...

fled their homes, fearing the clashes could escalate. Most of the shops had been closed in the area, he said. But the district chief said the villages

captured by the Taliban last night had been retaken and security forces were advancing on insurgent positions. (Pajhwok)

### (20) Taliban Say...

would not scuttle efforts to repair the power pylon.

Earlier, local officials blamed the Taliban for destroying the pylon in Dand-i-Shahabuddin area, but the militants rejected the claim as misleading. The rebels insisted the tower had been hit by the local security forces.

The attack in Baghlan cut off 250 megawatts of electricity supply to the capital. Important facilities in Kabul, including hospitals, are being provided thermal electricity.

Breshna Shirkat spokesman Tawhidullah Tawhidi said a technical team, equipped with the required tools, was in the area. But ongoing clashes at the site do not allow them to start repairing the tower. (Pajhwok)

### (21) Snow Blocks...

province has been blocked in Pul Band Shawi area, he said.

Snow clearing contractors have been trying to reopen the roads, but snowstorms are hindering their job, the Bamyan governor's spokesman, Abdul Rahman Ahmadi, said.

Likewise, snowfall has disconnected Dara-i-Sauf Bala and Dara-i-Sauf Pain districts from the provincial capital of Samangan province.

Over 30cm thick snow has fallen in Dara-i-Sauf Bala district, closing the road leading to the provincial capital, Aibak, the district chief, Ahmad Ali Hasani, said.

The snowfall also blocked the road to coalmines in Shabashak area of the district, he said, adding that they had launched removing snow from all roads.

Meanwhile, Fakhruddin Mubariz, the Dara-i-Sauf Pain district chief, said roads leading to 40 villages had been blocked since last night in Zerki, Maqsd and Foad areas of the district. (Pajhwok)

### (22) Abducted Child...

confessed to killing the child after abducting him for ransom money.

Farshid was playing with other children in the street before evening time when gunmen kidnapped him, a relative of the victim, Mansoor, said adding that Farshid had been stoned to death before being thrown into the well.

The orphan child was the only male member in his family consisted of his mother and two small sisters, Mansoor said.

Separately, Taliban fighters abducted four civilians traveling from Khashrod district to Zaranj, the capital of Nimroz, provincial police chief Brig. Gen. Dilawar Shah Dilawar said.

However, a Taliban spokesman Qari Yousuf Ahmadi said the four captive people were police including a deputy commander of a checkpoint in Khashrod district. (Pajhwok)

### (23) Prices of Gas ...

of dealers are offering sub-standard gas."

He had purchased the gas for 40af per kilo in the wholesale market, the dealer argued, saying he could not afford to sell it at a cheaper rate.

But Mohammad Hussain, another dealer in Taimaniarea, sold a kilo of gas for 38af. Last week he sold the same quantity of gas for 45af.

"Driven by mercenary motives, some gas dealers have no sense of justice. The quality of gas is the same," he commented, saying he had received no complaint regarding quality.

The wholesale price of the gas is 34.5af in Kabul, he added.

Meanwhile, Ministry of Commerce and Industriesspokesman Musafir Quqandi said: "We have an open-market system, so we can't do anything. Whenever gas is sold at a higher price, we intervene in the market."

Per 560 kilograms of unpeeled oak accounted for 6,500af while the same quantity of cedar cost 6,300af, the same prices as last week's, said a firewood stall owner Khan Mohammad.

The rates of flour and sugar also fell while other food item prices remained unchanged during the week, Food Traders' Union head Fazal Rahman said.

A 49-kilogram sack of Pakistani flour sold for 1,340af compared with last week's price of 1,440af. The value of a 49-kg bag of sugar declined to 1800af from 1900af.

The prices of ghee, rice and tea remained stable. A 16-kg tin of Momin ghee stayed stable at 970af and a 25-kg bag of rice at 1650 af, he said. (Pajhwok)

### (24) Kabul Residents ...

Kabul. "There should be indoor fun

places for children in winter in order to enable them spend a good time there," said Daud, a young resident of the city. (Tolonews)

### (25) 5 Killed, 6 ...

wounded, he said, blaming the incident on reckless driving.

Separately, two people were killed and three others wounded when a car crashed into a truck on the Torkham-Jalalabad highway near Tokham dry port at 10am, eyewitness Naveed Ahmad said.

The governor's spokesman, Ataulah Khogayani, also confirmed the collision. (Pajhwok)

### (26) Women Among...

crash and six others, including two women, sustaining grave injuries were taken to hospital.

Traffic officials blamed the accident on reckless driving. (Pajhwok)

### (27) Explosives-Laden ...

vest escaped from the scene, but security forces were trying to capture him, he said. The explosives were defused and 300 kilograms of drugs were also recovered from the car.

Counter terrorism department manager Col. Karim said militants were under pressure from security forces and thus trying to carry out blasts, but security forces were fully ready to prevent such attacks.

The Taliban have so far issued no comment regarding the seizure of the car. (Pajhwok)

### (28) 10 Killed, 9 ..

occurred during the past 24 hours in Kapis'a's Tagab district and in Dand Shahabuddin area of Baghlan's capital, the ministry said in a statement.

Without providing further details, the defence ministry said some weapons and ammunition were also confiscated by security forces during operations in the two areas. (Pajhwok)

### (29) Migration ....

protect principles, but the time to protect people from the threat of terrorism and crime, he added.

In turn, Borissov said progress could be made if the EU closed its external borders until the situation of those migrants who are already here was settled. (Xinhua)

### (30) Kremlin Asks....

accusing Putin of being involved in alleged large-scale corruption.

On Thursday, White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said Zubin's statement "best reflected" the opinion of the U.S. administration.

Peskov said the personal insults against the Russian president are "signs of weakness and impotence," as well as attempts to undermine Russia's diplomatic stances on various international affairs. (Xinhua)

### (31) UN Security...

parties and renewed their call for all key actors and institutions in Somalia, including Parliament, to set aside their differences and engage constructively in the political process, without further delay," the statement said.

"The members of the Security Council recalled that individuals engaged in any acts which threaten the peace and reconciliation process in Somalia may be listed for targeted measures." (Xinhua)

### (32) AU Pledges ...

economic empowerment programs targeting the youth in order to halt illegal migration.

Kaloko said that creation of new industries, reforms in the education sector and regional integration are key to minimize exodus of young people to foreign lands. (Xinhua)

### (33) Dutch Jets...

to Iraqi fighters battling the militants. Extending the operation was made possible after the Dutch Labour Party, the junior partner in the coalition government, said this week it was open to the idea, creating a parliamentary majority.

The attacks in Paris in November, in which Islamic State claimed responsibility for 130 deaths, had already led France and Britain to increase their bombing campaigns in the region. (Reuters)

### (34) Opposition NLD...

government is so far made by the winning party. Appraising Aung San Suu Kyi's wisdom and far-sightedness, U Shwe Mann said he is willing to be made use of for the interest of the country and the people.

He further disclosed that he did made arrangement for a meeting between Suu Kyi and ex-Senior-General Than Shwe, the top leader of the previous military government, to create a favorable condition for the nation although he holds no power now but is still influential. (Xinhua)