Taliban Storms West Afghanistan District, Kills Dozens

HERAT - Hundreds of Taliban fighters stormed a district in Afghanistan's western Badghis province, with both Afghan government forces and the insurgent group suffering dozens of casualties, provincial officials said.

The district of Bala Murghab has been a recurring hotspot of fighting in the past two months, and officials have previously warned that it could fall to the Taliban without reinforcements.

Fighting in Afghanistan has escalated ahead of the usual spring season, as both sides seek to increase leverage in talks on a peace settlement.

The Taliban killed 36 members of the government forces and captured several security checkpoints in attacks that began on Wednesday night, Waris Sherzad, district governor of Bala Murghab, said late on Thursday. Fighting was ongoing, he said.

More than 30 Taliban were also killed, said Jamshed Shahabi spokesman for Badghis' provincial governor.

Taliban spokesman Qari Yousuf Ahmadi said it attacked from four directions, capturing five checkpoints.

Afghanistan's defence ministry, in a series of tweets, said its forces chose to "tactically retreat" from the checkpoints to prevent civilian casualties. The ministry said it called in multiple air strikes on Taliban positions.

On Friday, the defence ministry said Afghan forces had forced the Taliban to retreat from some checkpoints and that all key areas remained under its control

The conflict in Badghis has been particularly intense along with northern Kunduz province and Helmand province in the south in recent weeks. Both sides took heavy casualties in

...(More on P4)...(12)

Khalilzad is Negotiating a Peace Agreement, Not a Leave Agreement

KABUL - NATO Secretary General says the alliance will make decisions on its future presence in Afghanistan following ongoing negotiations with the Taliban.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg expressed the issue while addressing a conference following the last meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Foreign Ministers' session, on Thursday.

"We have just finished a meeting of NATO's Foreign Ministers with a discussion about fair burden sharing in the Alliance." Stoltenberg said.

We are making major progress, including with four consecutive years of rising defence investments, and deploying more forces for NATO – with more than 20,000 troops serving in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Iraq, he said.

Tens of thousands more forces deployed across the Alliance to support our collective defence, but there is more work to do, he added.

The meeting also addressed the threat of terrorism, and what more NATO can do to fight against it.

...(More on P4)...(11)

Women in Remote Baghlan Areas Lack Basic Health Services

PUL-I-KHUMRI - Women in remote parts of northern Baghlan province lack access to even basic health services due to the absence of female health professionals and healthcare centers, rights activists say.

Women's rights institutes, activists and residents of rural areas of Baghlan province say thousands of women in the province continue to lack access to primary health services.

They criticize the Public Health Ministry for not conducting awareness programs and providing health facilities to people in remote parts of the province.

Razia Noori, Baghlan Human Rights Commission director, told Pajhwok Afghan News that the lack of healthcare centers in remote areas of the province remained a great challenge for women.

...(More on P4)...(13)

Daesh Social Media Operators Among 16 Held in Kabul, Nangarhar

KABUL - Intelligence agents have arrested 16 Daesh (Islamic State) rebels, including six social media operators, in Kabul and eastern Nangarhar province, the spy network claimed on Thursday.

An official of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) told Pajhwok Afghan News 10 Daesh fighters were detained while carrying 1,250 explosives in Batikot and Achin districts today.Six other IS operators of social media networks were held in Kabul, the source said, requesting not to be named. The insurgent outfit has not yet commented on the arrests. (Pajhwok)

Outlook Horoscope

Aries (Mar. 22-Apr.20)

lans to work at home at least part of the time might be firming up for you, Aries. Your mind is very much on home and family right now, so you might be thinking in terms of leaving the rat race of the city and creating your own office. Success is highly indicated, so it's well worth going for. If you start planning today, you might have it worked out soon.

Taurus (Apr.21-May 20)

Information about possible careers and investments might come to your attention today, Taurus. You may give a lot of thought to these matters, especially since your thinking is changing along with the times. This is a good day to explore new avenues your life could take over the next six months, and make final decisions, if appropriate.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Gemini, you're likely to be giving a lot of thought to your future. You're probably wondering how best to increase your financial standing. You may be thinking in terms of making some investments in land or property. If you've been considering buying a home, this is a good time to do it. Any paperwork involved now should be finalized swiftly and smoothly.

Cancer (June 21-July 20)

If communication has been difficult for you in the past, Cancer, today you may find things a bit different. You may have a deeper understanding of the motives of others, making it easier for you to deal with them. Your intuitive abilities are operating at a high level, so you're likely to form new bonds based on what you sense about others.

Leo (July 21-Aug. 21)

Inside information may come your way today that starts you thinking about improving your financial standing, Leo. You might hear of career and investment opportunities that you've never considered before. You're an adventurous soul. You might consider jobs that would have your grandmother reeling!

Virgo (Aug. 22-Sep 22)

You could meet new friends at a social gathering, Virgo, people who could become valuable business contacts. You might learn of new and different investment opportunities that reflect the changing times, and these could capture your imagination. Your understanding of others runs deep, so relations should be congenial. You're in the right mood to make the necessary decisions unhesitatingly.

Libra (Sep 23-Oct. 22)

You're by nature a person who likes to look toward the future. Today is a very special day for you. You might wonder what the next few months hold, Libra. You're trying to answer this question by looking within and coming up with insights about you and your goals that you've been too busy to see before.

Scorpio (Oct.23-Nov.22)

Today your spiritual and career goals may come together, Scorpio, enabling you to make a living without compromising your ideals. New opportunities may come your way to make new friends with people who share your beliefs and interests. You might reflect nostalgically on the past and yet look to the future with great optimism. Good luck!

Sagittarius (Nov.23-Dec.20)

Sagittarius, you're looking forward to making a new start. Your intellect is working in harmony with your intuition. Your mind is clearer and more focused than it was, and you're thinking of expanding your horizons and creating new career opportunities for yourself. You're feeling passionate about life, ready to face just about anything. The only challenge right now is to stay grounded in reality.

Capricorn (Dec.21-Jan19)

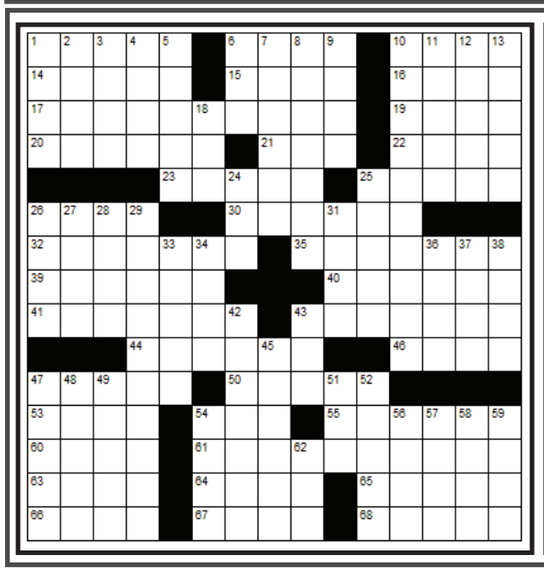
The position of the planets could have you doing a lot of soul searching, Capricorn. You're looking deep within to discern your true goals. You might be pleasantly surprised by what you find. Increased communication and deeper understanding enhance your relationships. Many of your aims are likely to be spiritual in nature.

Aquarius (Jan 20-Feb.18)

Today you might take time out from all the recent excitement to take a good look at your working life, Aquarius. Is it satisfying? Is it contributing not only to your own well-being but also to that of the planet? You're likely to decide to change your profession in some way, either through augmenting the job you have or taking on an entirely new one.

Pisces (Feb.19-Mar.20)

Increased communication between you and those around you, particularly the partner in your life, brings a new understanding between you. Your head and heart seem to be in better accord, so you're feeling especially optimistic right now. This optimism isn't just related to career and financial matters but to private matters, especially your romantic life, too.



Across

1. Covered cisterns, 6. Chills and fever, 10. Temporary living quarters, 14. Skirt fold, 15. Went under, 16. Not under, 17. Incapable of being influenced, 19. Nil 20. Showy bloom, 21. Ill, 22. Decree, 23. Inhabited, 25. Road or bridge fees, 26. Smudge 30. Pervert, 32. Optimistic, 35. Gland secretion, 39. The first event in a series, , 40. Grins, 41. Slender stem-like structure, 43. Ceding, 44. Bivouac, 46. Anagram of "Note", 47. Declares, 50. Vagrant, 53. Chime, 54. 2,000 pounds, 55. Wears away, 60. Invigoration 61. Enemy, 63. Against, 64. Engage in logrolling, 65. Vice ___, 66. Observed, 67. Fraud 68. Glacial ridge, ,

Down

1. Potato, 2. Forearm bone, 3. Netting, 4. Part of a rachet, 5. Sedate, 6. An Old Testament king 7. Jabber, 8. Open a gate, 9. Barely managed, 10. Adhering to customs, 11. Utilize, 12. Award 13. Backsides, 18. Swerve 24. L., 25. Conditions, 26. Fired a weapon, 27. Bishop of Rome, 28. Not closed, 29. A certain cut of meat, 31. A flexible pipe, 33. Flowerless plants, 34. Relating to urine, 36. Hodgepodge, 37. A noble gas, 38. Feudal worker, 42. Terse 43. Consumer Price , Index, 45. Slogan, 47. Religious fathers, 48. French science-fiction writer, 49. High society 51. Regulation (abbrev.), 52. Beat back, 54. Checks, 56. 1 1 1 1, 57. Dagger, 58. Anagram of "Sees" 59. Sun, , 62. A high alpine meadow

Yesterday's Solution

A	P	E	D		A	B	A	S	E		E	N	V	Y
M	E	R	E		C	O	L	A	S		L	U	A	U
I	C	O	N	O	C	L	A	S	T		E	M	I	R
G	A	D		D	R	O	S	S		E	V	E	N	T
O	N	E	R	O	U	S		A	U	G	E	R		
			O	R	E		A	F	F	I	N	I	T	Y
T	U	F	T	S		T	I	R	O	S		C	I	A
E	R	A	S		J	U	D	A	S		H	A	R	P
A	I	R		P	A	N	E	S		W	I	L	E	S
T	A	M	A	R	I	N	D		G	O	D			
		S	C	A	L	E		C	A	M	E	R	A	S
D	A	T	U	M		L	L	A	M	A		O	U	T
U	R	E	A		E	L	E	M	E	N	T	A	R	Y
M	E	A	T		T	E	N	E	T		O	R	A	L
B	A	D	E		A	D	D	L	E		E	S	S	E

afford, agent, angel, angry award, catch, claim collusion dear, death, denial, first, foggy, free garden heart, house improvement, might node parking, patio pies, points, precaution right season, senior

M	H	A	G	E	N	T	G	A	R	D	E	N		
I	C	L	H	S	W	H	H	N	G	I	T	O		
A	T	A	T	U	K	G	L	G	N	M	E	I		
L	A	I	A	O	M	I	S	E	I	P	G	S		
C	C	N	E	H	M	M	E	L	W	R	R	U		
P	O	E	D	I	V	E	N	S	S	O	A	L		
D	A	D	P	A	R	K	I	N	G	V	T	L		
R	W	T	Q	F	L	N	O	S	A	E	S	O		
A	P	O	I	N	T	S	R	P	L	M	X	C		
W	N	R	N	O	I	T	U	A	C	E	R	P		
A	S	G	A	D	H	E	A	R	T	N	E	O		
T	S	T	R	E	E	T	R	K	O	T	Q	K		
F	O	G	G	Y	D	R	O	F	F	A	R	G		