

(1) ARG Maps...

people of Afghanistan and international community see such a move as an obstruction in the way of electoral reform," Shah Sultan Akifi, head of the Electoral Reform Commission said.

In addition, a major cause for concern is the continued influx of Afghan migrants to Europe. It is said that the economic recession and nonexistence of clear economic prospects and the failure of government leaders to deliver on pledges are among the reasons Afghans are leaving the country.

"There are more than a million internally displaced people, six million Afghans in 75 countries of the world and another six million who returned to the country have made us look at our capabilities. 250 new employees were increased in our ministry. Security threats are the main reason for Afghans leaving," Islamuddin Juraat, spokesman for the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled said. Afghans also want government to take steps to curb corruption and kangaroo courts. (Tolo News)

(2) HPC Hopes...

said every stakeholder's sincerity was vital for result-orientated parlays.

A delegation of the Afghan government held face-to-face talks with Taliban representatives for the first time in Murree, a tourist resort near Islamabad in July.

Pakistan hosted the talks while Chinese and US representatives attended the talks as observers.

Members of the Haqqani network were also present in the July talks but a second round of the dialogue was suspended after revelation that Taliban's leader Mullah Omar had been dead and his death was concealed.

After the suspension of peace talks, Taliban insurgents intensified their attacks, killing and wounding hundreds of Afghans in bomb, suicide attacks and clashes in Kabul and other provinces of the country.

The series of violent incidents prompted President Ashraf Ghani to announce that Afghan officials would not participate in Pakistan-brokered peace negotiations.

But Islamabad repeatedly offered to help resume the process if Kabul and Taliban desired so and Kabul kept asking Islamabad to stop aiding the insurgent group.

On Dec. 27, Pakistan Army Chief Gen. Raheel Sharif visited Kabul and held talks with President Ghani and CEO Abdullah.

Both the sides agreed to hold talks with reconcilable Taliban and those not taking the path of peace would be dealt with in accordance with a mutually agreed framework.

The two sides also agreed to call the quadrilateral meeting this month. (Pajhwok)

(3) Afghan Forces...

guest house in Kabul last month, highlighted the Taliban's strategy of seeking high-profile targets in the capital while at the same time stepping up its campaign to seize district centres in provinces such as Helmand.

It is also a stark reminder of the difficulty Afghan officials face in their attempts to revive the stalled peace process, which broke down in July. Officials from Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States and China are due to meet in Islamabad on January 11 to discuss how to lay the groundwork for possible talks with Taliban militants.

The insurgent movement says it is not interested in new talks so long as foreign troops remain in Afghanistan. (Reuters)

(4) ECSC Set...

Based on President Ashraf Ghani's recent decree on bringing reforms in the election law, the selection committee is tasked to recommend at least 21 candidates for the membership of the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan (IEC) and another 15 candidates for membership of Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC). From the figure, seven will be nominated as IEC commissioners and five others as ECC commissioners. (Tolo News)

(5) Putin Names...

peninsula from Ukraine in March 2014, after protests in Ukraine forced its pro-Moscow president to flee to Russia.

Since then, the West has accused Russia of aiding insurgents in eastern Ukraine. Moscow denies actively assisting the rebels.

The United States and the European Union have since imposed wide-ranging sanctions against Russian

individuals and companies. Moscow has reacted by restricting food and other goods from the EU.

The document says that the United States and the EU have supported an "anti-constitutional coup d'etat in Ukraine", which led to a deep divide in Ukrainian society and a military conflict.

It also names the expansion of NATO as a threat to Russia's national security and said that the United States has expanded its network of military-biological laboratories in neighboring to Russia countries.

The document, which serves as a basis for planning strategy related to national security by different state bodies, does not mention Syria. On Sept. 30, Russia began air strikes against anti-government rebels opposed to the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, a Russian ally. (Reuters)

(6) China...

and regular military exercises between American forces and their allies in the region. Washington is assertively siding with China's rivals in a dispute over a group of islands in the South China Sea.

Beijing is accusing Washington of meddling in regional issues and deliberately stirring up tensions in the South China Sea on which the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have overlapping claims.

On December 21, China called on the United States to respect the East Asian country's principal "interests" and concerns, and refrain from what it terms as "shows of force" close to its islands in the South China Sea.

In a telephone conversation with his US counterpart John Kerry on Monday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Washington needed to stop selling munitions to Taiwan and also put an end to its military patrols near the Spratly Islands, known as the Nansha Islands in Chinese. (Press TV)

(7) Afghanistan...

group stages. The final is what we came for and we have to win it for the people of Afghanistan," Segrt said.

He also praised the hosts and their coach Stephen Constantine for the work they have put in.

"At the same time, I saw the work rate of the Indian players and it is tremendous. They will give us a hard time on the pitch without a shadow of doubt. India can be proud of their national team. They are compact and have a very good coach who knows how to run proceedings." (IANS)

(8) Afghans ...

Saturday, Constantine opined that the hosts will have to be at their best in Sunday's showdown. "Afghanistan are the favourites because they have 15 players who play mostly in Europe. There is a huge gap between Asian and European players," the India coach said.

"In fact, after the match against Guam almost all had raised eyebrows saying how we lose to a Country who has a population of 90000 people. But what all didn't realize that it was a Team comprising of US-based Players.

"But we will be playing at Home and I hope the fans cheer behind us and we can use it as an advantage," Constantine added.

The British coach also warned that the Indian defenders will have to be at the top of their game in order to keep the in-form Afghan strikers at bay.

"It's hard to predict as to which area the match would be decided. It will be decided on all parts of the field. It is going to be a very difficult game. They are a Team who can score goals and we need to be careful," he analysed.

Referring to India losing the momentum, in the second half of their semi-final against Maldives, Constantine said, "In football, when you are in control of the game, you tend to become a bit sloppy. That's what happened in the semi-final. And if that happens in the Final, we will have to pay the price."

"Obviously with such a young squad and with such little time to prepare in the championship, it feels nice to be in the Final. We took each game as it came. I want the players in the team to feel competition from who are not in the squad. We now have a group of Players who fight and compete for positions," he added.

Talking about India's chances in the final, the coach said, "They are a very good side. We will fight form the first to the last minute. If we play at our best and they don't have a good day, we can win."

"Afghanistan is certainly a good side, but they are not unbeatable. We cannot afford to make silly mistakes like we did in the semi-final." With striker Robin Singh ruled out of the final with an injury, India captain Sunil Chhetri will have to play a key role for the hosts upfront. But Constantine asserted that the entire team will have to pull together as one unit in order to lift the trophy.

"Sunil (Chhetri) is an important Player as is Pritam Kotal, Narayan Das, Arnab Mondal, Augustine Fernandes and all the others including the substitutes. One is useless without the other. If Sunil plays well and others don't, he won't get much of the ball. Sunil is a great captain and leader but I never focus on one player," he said. (IANS)

(9) Turkmenistan...

biggest international transport and transit center, contributing to the effective development of interstate relations on the whole Eurasian continent with the possibility of efficient use of all modes of transport - rail, air, sea and road transport.

The UN General Assembly has recently adopted the resolution on development of transit transport corridors proposed by Turkmenistan, which creates a basis for cooperation between all modes of transport on building continuous chains of freight transportation along the interregional transport corridors. (Agencies)

(10) Taliban Claims...

not yet commented on the insurgent claims.

At a news conference in Kabul on Saturday, however, Defense Ministry deputy spokesman Dawlat Waziri neither rejected nor confirmed growing claims being made on local television talk shows that the Taliban is in control of most of Helmand.

"We should all accept that there is a war going on in Afghanistan," Waziri said, urging critics to respect these sacrifices. "Our security forces, including army, police and intelligence personnel, are getting killed every day while undertaking heroic acts of defending their country."

Waziri also confirmed that Afghan army commandos freed about 60 people Friday night from a Taliban prison in two districts (Greshk and Nahr Siraj) in Helmand, a southern province that borders Pakistan. The hostages included security personnel.

During their decade-long combat mission in Afghanistan, NATO forces struggled to keep the Taliban from its traditional heartland in Helmand.

A United Nations assessment also showed the Taliban expanded its influence to areas of Afghanistan in 2015 that had not seen any insurgent activities since 2001.

According to Western and Afghan officials, the Taliban, which controls or has a significant presence in roughly 30 percent of districts across the country, now holds more territory than in any year since 2001, when the puritanical Islamists were ousted from power after the 9/11 attacks, The Washington Post reported earlier this week.

About 7,000 members of the Afghan security forces were killed as of November, with 12,000 injured. Those numbers show a 26 percent increase over the total number of dead and wounded in all of 2014, the Post reported, quoting a Western official with access to the most recent NATO statistics.

A spokesman for NATO's Resolute Support mission, while condemning civilian casualties in Friday's Taliban suicide car bombing on a French restaurant in Kabul, said that approximately 6,500 civilian deaths and injuries were caused by insurgent attacks in 2015. (VoA)

(11) PTI React...

about the treatment of an Afghan Taliban leader at the Shaukat Khanum cancer hospital in Lahore - which was subsequently taken out of context and also misinterpreted by segments of the Pakistani media.

"The chairman was discussing the issue of free treatment of 70 percent of cancer patients at the Shaukat Khanum hospital and that a number of these patients are Pathans including Afghans. That is one reason why the chairman decided to raise funds to build the second Shaukat Khanum cancer hospital in Peshawar."

Mazari went on to say: "In passing, he also referred to receiving a letter from an Afghan Taliban leader who had apparently received treatment at the Lahore hospital."

Mazari said: "The hospital does not ask for political or religious affiliations of its patients who all receive

the same quality care whether it is free or being paid for, the revelation that an Afghan Taliban leader had been treated at the hospital only came about when that person sent a thank you letter. At the time that he was undergoing treatment there was no information about his political or religious associations except that he was an Afghan in need of treatment." (Tolo News)

(12) Attack on Kabul ...

terror group perpetrated the attack," Mol Spokesman Sediq Sediqqi said.

But in a statement Friday night, the Taliban claimed responsibility to the attack.

According to political analysts, the Taliban, by conducting such attacks, want to score political points in the peace talks.

However, immediately after the attack, President Ashraf Ghani condemned the incident and said that insurgents who shed the blood of the people will not be included in talks. (Tolo News)

(13) Mol Calls ...

win the cup. He said if celebrations are held, that they be done calmly. Meanwhile, Peter Segrt, the team's German coach, was upbeat Saturday and said the team was going to go all out on Sunday to bring home the cup.

"We respect the Indian [team]... I have big respect for the coach and for the players. We will try to beat them in the final... We want to win this cup. The message is clear for the players; nobody from this team is going in to final to lose this game... When you get in the final you want win it," said Segrt.

Sunday's match will be the third time that Afghanistan and India meet each other in the SAFF finals. Afghanistan beat. (Tolo News)

(14) Saudi Executes...

would save them from committing more evil acts and prevent chaos.

Islamic scholars around the world hold vastly different views on the application of the death penalty in Islamic Shariah law. Saudi judges adhere to one of the strictest interpretations, a Sunni Muslim ideology referred to as Wahhabism.

Influential Shiite figures and groups across the region were swift to condemn al-Nimr's execution, with Saudi Arabia's regional rival Iran describing it as "irresponsible."

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Jaber Ansari was quoted on the state-owned English-language Press TV warning that the Saudi monarchy would pay a heavy price for its policies. A senior Iranian cleric, Hossein Nouri Hamedani, said in a statement broadcast on state television that the region should expect "both Shiite and Sunni Muslims to react."

In Iraq, influential Shiite militia Asaib Ahl Al-Haq called on the government to reconsider allowing Saudi Arabia to keep its newly reopened embassy in Baghdad; the Saudi embassy was reopened Friday for the first time in more than 25 years.

A Saudi lawyer in the eastern region of the kingdom told The Associated Press that in addition to al-Nimr, three other Shiite political detainees were executed Saturday. The lawyer spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal.

In Lebanon, a top Shiite cleric condemned al-Nimr's execution, describing it as "a grave mistake that could have been avoided with a royal amnesty that would have helped reduce sectarian tensions in the region." Sheikh Abdul-Amir Kabalan, deputy head of the influential Supreme Shiite Islamic Council that is the main religious body for Lebanon's 1.2 million Shites, said the executions "will have repercussions in the coming days."

The Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah issued a statement calling al-Nimr's execution an "assassination" and a "ugly crime." The group added that those who carry the "moral and direct responsibility for this crime are the United States and its allies who give direct protection to the Saudi regime and cover its crimes against its (Saudi) people and people of the region."

Anticipating protests in eastern Saudi Arabia, where minority Saudi Shites are concentrated, Saudi activists there called for peaceful rallies. Small groups of protesters took to the streets in neighboring Bahrain, which has seen low-level violence since 2011 when the tiny island-nation's Shiite majority held mass protests to demand greater rights from the Sunni-led monarchy.

Advocacy organization Reprieve, which works against the death

penalty worldwide, said two out of the four Shiite activists executed were teenagers when they were arrested. Reprieve said Ali al-Ribh was 18 years old and Mohammed al-Shuyokh was 19 at the time of arrest in 2012. Both were convicted on charges related to anti-government protests held in eastern Saudi Arabia. (AP)

(15) Task Team...

Department reported the figure to be 149. But the team found in fact that 224 schools closed down in Kandahar.

The report also shows the existence of thousands of ghost teachers among the official figure of 260,000 teachers employed by the administrative structure of the ministry of education.

The report says that 40,000 teachers employed as such are contractors and other professions.

The report also argues the statements by former education officials that around 11 million students are getting education at schools across the country - only nine million are actually registered at schools. The report says that of those nine million, only about eight million actually attend class.

The report also states there are over 1,000 incomplete projects belonging to the ministry of education - despite these projects having been reported as complete by the ministry. In addition, the task team found that millions of dollars has been embezzled within the ministry of education under the pretext of printing new school books. However piles of books lie stockpiled in the ministry.

The report states that 110 projects related to the ministry of education still remains incomplete despite the ministry claiming in 2007 that the projects were completed.

The report also criticizes \$15,000 a month salaries to a number of individuals who are appointed as advisors.

The report states that between 2013 and 2015, 340 people were paid a total of \$100 million USD collectively. The report also discloses that scholarships were offered to certain individuals, that ghost training seminars were reported in some provinces and that houses were rented for schools at huge expense.

However, critics are asking why government is silent on this matter and not disclosing details.

"For the sake of social justice and the clarity of the case, the issue must be investigated seriously," Ghulam Hussain Fakhri, head of the High Office of Anti-Corruption and Oversight said.

Meanwhile, a top government official speaking on condition of anonymity said that political issues have resulted in the report being kept secret. (Tolo News)

(16) Funeral Held...

who also served in the Air National Guard.

NYPD Commissioner Bill Bratton, Mayor Bill de Blasio and others attended the funeral Mass for Lemm at St. Patrick's Cathedral on Wednesday morning. Cardinal Timothy Dolan presided over the service.

Lemm leaves behind a wife, teenage daughter and young son. (Agencies)

(17) 5.8-Magnitude...

like Noida, Ghaziabad, Gurgaon and Fridabad. People ran out of their offices and houses. No report of any casualty or damage to property has come so far from anywhere in the state.

No damage to property or death has been reported so far.

A powerful earthquake of magnitude 6.2 had struck northern Afghanistan on December 25 near the border with Tajikistan.

The quake was at a depth of 126.5 miles (203 km) and centered 51 miles (82 km) southeast of the town of Feyzabad in the mountainous border area.

The quake was felt in the Afghan capital Kabul and the Pakistani capital Islamabad but there were extensive damage. (Monitoring Desk)

(18) Afghanistan ...

wickets, Amir Hamza and Dawlat Zadrani 2 wickets each and Mohammad Nabi and Rashid Khan took 1 wicket each.

Afghanistan is still leading the series 2-1 and will face Zimbabwe during the 4th match of the series on Monday, 4th January, 2016.

The final match of the series will be played on Wednesday, 6th January, 2016.

Afghanistan will also play 2 Twenty20 matches against Zimbabwe with the first game scheduled for 8th January while the second game

will be played on 10th January. (KP)

(19) Bahadurzada ...

first while clearly out cold.

Bahadurzada's UFC record includes 1 Win and 2 Losses while his upcoming opponent's record includes 2 Wins and 2 Losses.

According to UFC Skill Breakdown, Bahadurzada has Willpower, determination, and one-punch knockout power while Thatch is a calculated stiker.

Bahadurzada's deal with UFC was confirmed for the first time on November 14, 2011, with the UFC officials saying the nature of the deal is a multi-contract one which entitles Bahadurzada to take part in UFC bouts for a long time.

Bahadurzada was born in Kabul, Afghanistan on April 17, 1984. He credits his character, fighting sense and ability to the war torn and dangerous environment he grew up in. After 15 years his family moved to the Netherlands in 1999. It was his grandfather that gave him the name "The Killer" when Siyar beat up kids who were older than him when he was younger. Siyar began to train under Martijn de Jong at the Tatsujin dojo. De Jong is well respected in the Dutch community as an MMA authority and quickly took Bahadurzada as his top student. (KP)

(20) France Quarrels...

and others who cannot - in opposition to the principle of equality set out in France's constitution.

French authorities have not said how many of those arrested over the Paris attacks are dual nationals. Prominent Socialist Party figures, including former Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault and Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo, have publicly expressed their disapproval, but Hollande has stuck to his guns.

"France must take the good decisions beyond traditional party divisions," the president said in his New Year's Eve speech. (AP)

(21) British ...

investigations, has received cases relating to more than 1,500 alleged victims of mistreatment and unlawful killings, according to the British government's website.

It is due to complete its investigations by the end of 2019, more than 10 years after Britain withdrew its last combat troops from Iraq following its participation in the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. (Reuters)

(22) Japan's Emperor...

times suffered from stress, like the Harvard-educated Masako, a former diplomat.

"From the start of this New Year, I pray for peace for our nation and for the world," Akihito told the crowd. (AP)

(23) Unaccompanied ...

ago from Egypt where he lived with his family the last three and a half years, after escaping from the nightmare of the Syrian civil war.

His hometown, Hama, the fourth-largest city in west-central Syria, was one of the main arenas of the armed conflicts. (Xinhua)

(24) Lack of ...

countries their own national spaces and European space at the same time, people will integrate in other places," she insisted. Giudicelli said that the attacks in Europe, especially in France recently, were the consequence of actions taken abroad. What's more, the European societies are not prepared on the soil of Europe to face the possible consequences of governments' external policies. (Xinhua)

(25) Iranians Not ...

The average age of Iran's aviation fleet stands at 22 years, and Iran needs to purchase new planes, Khodakarami said, reiterating that however, there is no interest in Iran for the Russian planes.

It was announced here in November that Iran continued talks with the leading French Airbus company to buy passenger planes and Tehran would order Airbus aircraft during President Hassan Rouhani's upcoming state visit to Paris. (Xinhua)

(26) Structural ...

eraging, reducing costs and shoring up weak growth areas to foster emerging growth engines, Lou wrote.

Measures will be taken to promote reforms in state-owned enterprises, the fiscal and financial mechanisms, social welfare system, labor force market, science and technology management, land system and urbanization as well as agricultural modernization, Lou pointed out. (Xinhua)