

Jalalabad Clear 20°C 3°C	Ghazni Clear 7°C -6°C	Kandahar Clear 15°C -2°C	Mazar Clear 17°C 8°C	Herat Clear 18°C 2°C	Bamayan Clear -1°C -8°C	Kabul Clear 13°C -1°C
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Daily Outlook Weather Forecast

US Commander

Taliban Failed to Hold Ground in 2015

WASHINGTON - As Afghan forces got better in their performances in 2015, the Taliban were unable to hold ground, a top US military official said on Tuesday.

"Our assessment of their (Afghan forces) performance in 2015 is that they had mixed results," Brig. Gen. Wilson Shoffner, deputy chief of staff for communications, said during a media interaction at the Pentagon. They applied and learned lessons from one operation to the next. They got better, he said, praising the Afghan forces' ability to integrate their air and artillery. "It required more time to get forces in position, and



then it required more time to stabilise the situation. They did get somewhat better at crisis response, but that remains one of their weaknesses and one of the areas they're going to have to continue to focus on," he

added. On the other hand, the official claimed, the Taliban did make some temporary gains. "But they were not able to hold ground and they were not able to govern." And in almost every case, the Afghan security forces were able to retake the ground that the Taliban took, whether it was a roadway or a district center or key terrain. The Afghan security forces bounced back and retook that," he said. The best example of that was the fact that the Afghan security forces retook Kunduz City, with a population of over 300,000 people, in just seven days, Shoffner said. (Pajhwok)

Peter Semneby

Sweden to Spend \$1b in Herat over Next Decade

HERAT CITY - Sweden has decided to spend \$1 billion in western Herat province over the next decade to empower women and strengthen the education and the private sector, the country's envoy said on Wednesday.

Swedish ambassador in Kabul, Peter Semneby, who has been in Herat over the past two days, told a press conference here that good investment opportunities existed in Herat and his country would spend \$1 billion for women empowerment, education and private sector in the province in the next 10 years.

Their assessment showed that the province was a proper place for small and big investments which could provide work opportunities



for many people, he said.

Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) chief for Herat, Saad Khatibi, said the Swedish ambassador had promised him ...*(More on P4)...(8)*

Defence Ministers Meet in Paris on Anti-IS Fight

PARIS - The defence ministers of seven countries leading the battle against the Islamic State group met in Paris on Wednesday to review strategy as the jihadists spread their influence around the globe.

The French and US defence ministers, Jean-Yves Le Drian and Ashton Carter, hosted the meeting attended by their Australian, British, Dutch, German and Italian counterparts.

British Defence Secretary Michael Fallon said it would look at ways to "capitalise on the setbacks that Daesh (an alternative name for IS) has suffered in Iraq and tighten the



noose around the head of the snake in Syria."

But the coalition must also face up to the spread of IS around the world, notably in Libya where political chaos has allowed the group

to build a 3,000-strong force. Russia, a staunch ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, was not invited to Wednesday's meeting, though US Secretary of State John Kerry met ...*(More on P4)...(9)*

Cabinet Approves Land Sale to Alokozay Group



KABUL - The Cabinet has decided to sell 144 acres of government land near the Kabul International Airport against \$350 million to the Alokozay Group of Companies (AGC) for establishing six factories.

A statement from the Office of Administrative Affairs said the decision was made during a Cabinet meeting chaired by President Ashraf Ghani on Tuesday.

The statement added Finance Minister Eklil Hakimi presented the meeting a report about the land's handover procedure.

The land worth \$350 million

would be allocated to six industrial factories to be run by the AGC, the statement said.

The Cabinet also approved the contract of selling the land to the AGC and ordered the head of the High Commission for Investment (HCI) to sign the contract with the company following the Cabinet directives.

In February 2015, the HCI had confirmed the AGC's request to purchase the 144 acres of land for \$348 million.

Afghanistan Investment Support Agency ...*(More on P4)...(10)*

Kandahar Customs Revenue up by 2.2b Afghanis

KANDAHAR CITY - Some residents and traders have criticised the performance of the transport and customs departments of southern Kandahar province, but officials of the said departments claim their revenue has increased due to better management.

Both transport and customs directors on Tuesday provided information to people during a meeting about their performance. But the two officials faced a volley of questions from participants of the meeting.

Kandahar Customs director Saleh Mohammad Nikzad said his department had collected 4.9 billion afghanis in revenue. He said the customs department in 2014 had collected only 2.18 billion afghanis in revenue. The fiscal year ends on December 22, 2015.

Nikzad linked the increase in customs revenue to reforms in his department, the prevention of tax evasion and ...*(More on P4)...(13)*

Desk Study of Kabul-Peshawar Motorway Completed

PESHAWAR - Pakistan's National Highway Authority (NHA) has completed the desk study of the Peshawar-Kabul motorway project, the Senate was informed.

Consultants were being hired to prepare feasibility and preliminary design of the ambitious project, the federal minister of communications told the upper house.

In a written reply during the question hour, the communication ministry told the house the process of hiring consultants was underway. The cost of the project will be finalised after the feasibility. Land for the project, undertaken on Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's instruction, had not been acquired so far, the statement added. (Pajhwok)

Parliament Rises for 45-Day Winter Break

KABUL - The Afghan parliament, after completing the fifth constitutional year, is all set to rise for a 45-day winter break from today (Thursday). Under Article 107 of the Constitution, the National Assembly shall hold two regular sessions annually. The term of both regular sessions shall be nine months every year, and when needed, the Assembly shall extend its term. Extraordinary sessions during recess shall be convened by Presidential order.

Wolesi Jirga secretary Irfanullah Irfan told Wednesday's



session the lower house had conducted 51 general, two summoning, 15 questioning, three information seeking sessions and one behind closed doors and 30 normal general sessions since Oct. 8, 2015.

During the period, the Wolesi Jirga had approved 39 draft laws, legislative decrees, and draft budget, nine international agreements and rejected seven legislative decrees and a ...*(More on P4)...(11)*

Plans Devise to Improve Security Situation in Helmand: Qahraman

ASHKARGAH - The newly-appointed president's special representative for Helmand security, Abdul Jabbar Qahraman, on Wednesday said he had prepared several plans to improve the security situation in the restive province.

Qahraman, a lower house member from Helmand, has been appointed as President Ashraf Ghani's special envoy for security matters of Hel-



mand through a presidential decree.

Qahraman told reporters in Lashkargah, the provincial capital, that effective plans had been devised to improve the security situation in Helmand.

"My visit to Helmand has three reasons -- improvement of the coordination between security forces, the elimination of ...*(More on P4)...(14)*

NATO Top Leaders of Helmand Military Corps Replaced

KABUL - Following a surge in insurgent attacks, the commander and senior officers of the 215th Maiwand Corps in southern Helmand province have been replaced.

"They've got some leaders that need to be replaced, and they've got some leaders that are corrupt and need to go. The Afghan security forces are making these changes," the Resolute Support mission's

spokesman said.

Brig. Gen. Wilson A. Shoffner told Pentagon reporters via teleconference from Kabul the 215th Corps commander, two brigade commanders and several key staff members had been replaced.

In order to meet a shortfall of about 25,000 troops, the Afghan National Army would have focus on recruiting, Shoffner said, adding the Afghan forces would reduce the number of checkpoints in the country.

The Afghans were rebuilding the entire corps because of soldiers quitting and equipment breaking down. "It's going to take time for the rebuild of the 215th Corps," he added. Corruption by corps leaders involved the sale of supplies and cash payroll irregularities, the spokesman explained. (Pajhwok)

UK Labour MPs Launch third Referendum Campaign to leave EU

LONDON - Members of Britain's main opposition Labour Party launched a campaign Wednesday to leave the EU at an upcoming referendum, the latest initiative as the debate over Britain's EU membership heats up.

The Labour Leave campaign is fronted by four veteran MPs and backed by millionaire businessman John Mills, the party's biggest individual donor in recent years.

While Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn was anti-EU before being elected to the top job last year, he now says the party will campaign for Britain to stay in the EU in a referendum expected to be held this year.

Kate Hoey, one of the Labour MPs launching the Labour Leave campaign, called the EU "anti-democratic, anti-socialist, unaccountable".

"I think this is going to end up in a situation where we have the establishment actually leading on this and the people rebelling and that's what we'll be working for," she said.

Two main movements ...*(More on P4)...(12)*

Manpreet Vohra Takes Over as Indian Envoy to Afghanistan

KABUL - Manpreet Vohra has taken over as India's Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

A 1988-batch Indian Foreign Service officer, Mr. Vohra has a post graduate diploma in international trade and a certificate in diplomatic studies from Oxford.

Vohra took charge in Afghanistan on January 19. His last posting abroad was as Ambassador of India to Peru and Bolivia.

Before coming to Kabul, he had served as Joint Secretary in the Development Partnership Division of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi.

He had earlier served in various capacities in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Ulaanbaatar and London. He has also served as Deputy High Commissioner of India in Nairobi and Islamabad. (ANI)



Ghani Leaves for Switzerland to Attend Davos Meeting

KABUL - President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani left Kabul Wednesday to attend the World Economic Forum annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, a statement released by his office here said.

During the two-day visit, Ghani, according to the statement, besides delivering a speech at the forum, will also meet NATO's secretary general, head of several states ...*(More on P4)...(15)*

Rabbani to Visit China

BEIJING - Afghan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani will pay an official visit to China from Jan. 25 to 28, as a guest of his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei announced the visit at a regular press conference on Wednesday.

This will be Rabbani's first visit to China since he became foreign minister, and it will also be the first high-level visit between China and Afghanistan this year.

Both countries agree that this will be a very important visit, Hong said.

During the visit, Rabbani will meet with Chinese leaders and hold talks with Wang Yi, according to Hong.

Last year, China and Afghanistan jointly celebrated the 60th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral ...*(More on P4)...(16)*