

(1) Ghani Cancels...

a violation of Criminal Law of Afghanistan. Officials of anti-corruption bodies had also strongly criticized the government for what they said releasing a corrupt person from jail. According to them, this act of government would lead to a big public mistrust in government's years of efforts to curb corruption. (Tolonews)

(2) Turkmenistan...

end of 2018. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) project could help ease growing energy deficits in Asian giants India and Pakistan. For Turkmenistan, which has been hit by low energy prices and is dependent on China for the vast majority of its gas sales, TAPI is a key opportunity to diversify its exports. (Agencies)

(3) Ghani Visits ...

In addition, he stressed the need for a strong coordination between the police departments of Kabul and Logar. Also, Ghani directed the relevant ministries to build proper office buildings for all district governors. During his visit, Ghani also met with a number of civil servants, representatives of different ethnic groups, women, tribal elders and provincial council members. The participants shared their concerns with the president on different issues, including insecurity, land grabbing, illegal extraction of mines and lack of employment, especially for women. (Tolonews)

(4) India to ...

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(5) Hamid Karzai ...

figures, intellectuals and scholars to the world. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, the executive officer of Hamid Karzai Foundation, said that they will not get involved in the politics. He added that the process of sending youths abroad for education would be transparent and away from religious, tribal and area differences. Spanta said that Hamid Karzai Foundation has begun functioning with the support of foreign countries, adding that a number of educational organizations have promised them scholarships separate from those allocated for Afghanistan through government. He made a call on national businessmen and those who are able to help for extending hand to Hamid Karzai Foundation. (KP)

(6) Daesh Flag...

to extend the operation to other districts of Nangarhar. Daesh have had a significant presence in Achin over the past few months. However scores of senior Daesh commanders have been eliminated during special raids conducted by the National Directorate of Security (NDS) during the past six months. (Tolonews)

(7) Taliban Local ...

statement said, adding that Din has confessed involvement in several armed clashes with the security forces in Qaisar. According to the statement, the detainees were travelling from Afghan Faryab province to Quetta city of Pakistan. The Taliban insurgent group, which has been waging an insurgency of more than one decade, has yet to make comments. (Xinhua)

(8) IOM Distributes...

to have been affected. To date, roughly 17,000 families have been verified. Access in some of the affected areas remains a challenge due to difficult terrain and security concerns and IOM is coordinating with local partners

to ensure that aid reaches affected communities. Nangarhar, Kunar and Nooristan, are the other provinces hard-hit by the earthquake besides Badakhshan, the epicenter of it. (KP)

(9) Aid Workers ...

attacks against NGOs in 2014. Meanwhile international attention has shifted to Iraq and Syria, says Philippe Bonnet, who has just completed his tenure as Afghanistan head of the French NGO Solidarites International. "This is attracting youngsters, who are more prone to following current trends," he says. Crises in South Sudan and the Ebola epidemic in west Africa also soaked up limited humanitarian resources in the last year, added Guilhem Molinie, country director for Doctors Without Borders (MSF).

Another Western official in Kabul said that NGOs "moved in five years from a few thousand volunteers to just a few hundred". To attract employees, charities are offering short contracts -- sometimes as brief as six months.

"They leave just as they begin to understand the mission," Patrick, head of a Western NGO in Kabul who declined to give his last name, told AFP. The staff shortages combined with increased risks means many groups have scaled back work outside cities -- such as the World Food Programme (WFP), which withdrew in September from Badakhshan, a once-calm northeastern province, after an attack on five of its trucks.

"Physically, expats can no longer go to many places, but NGOs are trying to find alternative means," said Fiona Gall, the director of Acbar, a group that represents more than 130 NGOs working in Afghanistan. Instead, charities are now working via telephone or bringing local workers from conflict areas to where they are based for discussions.

"There are creative ways but it's not as satisfactory as you going," she said. Despite the setbacks, the number of registered NGOs in the country has remained relatively steady -- 274 today compared to 293 two years ago. But NGOs warn that scaling back staff could reverse recent gains, especially in the health sector, where their work has been critical.

Infant mortality has dropped from 93 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2001 to 66 today, according to the World Bank, a gain credited to aid groups among others. "Children are often the first to benefit from the work of health programmes," said one Western aid worker.

Money is not the problem -- some 16\$ billion poured into the country from international coffers between 2012 and 2015, with similar pledges promised over the next two years. But the management of those funds is a hurdle for NGOs seeking to attract foreign workers.

Donors are sending money through the government, Acbar's Gall said, meaning "there's a huge amount of bottle-necking and funds are not being dispersed as rapidly as they should be".

Meanwhile catastrophic, headline-grabbing attacks such as a bungled US air strike on a MSF hospital in Kunduz last month both reinforce the challenges and underscore the need for aid.

The charity, which lost 13 staff in the bombing, has said it will not pull out of Afghanistan, but "it's very destabilising", Molinie told AFP.

The consequences for Afghans in Kunduz province have been devastating: the hospital was the only major trauma centre in a region that has been rocked by unrest.

Even in Kabul, risks have increased for NGO workers, with the Taliban regularly striking at the airport, hotels, restaurants and foreign compounds. (Agencies)

(10) Food Suppliers...

may have faced similar drastic price hikes for food and water and other goods purchased from Supreme, which had a series of contracts to supply Australian troops in Australia.

The long-running fraud, which resulted in Supreme and related entities having to pay US authorities some \$US96 million (135\$ million) in fines, \$US48 million in restitution and \$US10 million in criminal forfeiture, operated by using a "middleman" company it set up in the United Arab Emirates.

The middleman company called Jamal Ahli Foods Co was then used to mark up prices for fresh fruit and vegetables and other locally produced foods sold to the US, according to a statement from the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The scheme, which the FBI says ran from 2005 to 2009, was also used to obscure the inflated price that Supreme was charging the US for water.

Supreme's clients were not aware that Supreme controlled Jamal Ahli Foods Co while it was acting as a so-called independent company lifting the prices of goods purchased in Dubai, says the FBI.

The company has denied other clients were impacted by the fraud.

But this week Fairfax tracked down Australian national and former general manager of Jamal Ahli Foods Co, Keith Martine who called on Australian Defence authorities to conduct a full audit of all their dealings with Supreme and its related companies.

Mr Martine said he feared that Australia may have been "ripped off" in their dealings with many suppliers contracted to service troops in Afghanistan. "Don't forget Australia was fed by the Americans. Where we had ground troops, we would almost certainly have been supported by the US DOD (Department of Defence)," he said.

Mr Martine, who worked first for Supreme but then moved to manage Jamal Ahli Foods in Sharjah in the UAE in 2007, said he had raised concerns with company officials about the potential conflict years before the fraud was uncovered.

"I was told they knew about it and it was being sorted out," he said.

"It was a double profit. It didn't start until about 2005 when they started buying fruit and vegetables through Jamal Ahli Foods. It was just a logistic centre at first."

Mr Martine who left Supreme around 2010 said he understood he had been flagged to give evidence to the US investigators in connection with the fraud. But he said before he travelled to the US to give evidence but Supreme settled the matter and agreed to pay the fines.

Supreme Group's head of marketing Ana Seixas on Friday said Supreme group "refutes those allegations".

She said however she would need more time to gather specific details as the contracts were finished some time ago and the weekend was about to start in Dubai.

Australian troops first deployed to Uruzgan province in Afghanistan in large numbers in 2006 and 2007 and relied mainly on the Dutch military to supply food on the shared base. Fairfax understands the Dutch had some contracts with Supreme for food supply.

From 2007 to 2009 Australia also began to enter into a series of "limited tenders" for food and beverages with Supreme related companies worth about 130,000\$ according to the Australian Government Tenders website.

When the Dutch pulled out of Uruzgan in 2010, Australia took over more responsibility for the base and entered into larger contracts with Supreme-related companies.

Asked to provide details of contracts with Supreme, the Australian Defence Department said it would not be able to respond in detail until next week as the relevant files had to

be located.

However, as an interim response, Defence on Saturday confirmed it had established a "direct contract with Supreme Foodservice GmbH (Supreme) for the provision of catering and messing services for forces at Camp Holland in TarinKowt, in Uruzgan

The contract ran from December 2009 until December 2013 and involved regular compliance audits to manage the risk to the Commonwealth and in accordance with procurement guidelines, a Defence spokesperson said.

The Australian Government Tenders website lists Defence as having a series of open tenders with Supreme-related companies for domestic kitchenware between 2010 and 2013 worth some 130\$ million. (Agencies)

(11) US to Sentence...

statement in August that Hamidullin had been convicted by a US federal jury of conspiring to shoot down US helicopters and to kill US and Afghan soldiers as well as of providing material support to terrorists in November 2009. He faces up to life in prison when sentenced.

According to the DOJ, Hamidullin joined the Taliban militant group in 2001 and by 2009 commanded a group of insurgents operating in Afghanistan. (Sputnik)

(12) IS Frees 37...

the country's conflict began. They lived mostly in 35 villages in Hasakeh.

In February, IS overran many of the villages, but Kurdish forces later expelled them.

IS has captured hundreds of hostages, including Christians from different denominations, in territory it controls in Syria and Iraq.

Elsewhere, the Britain-based Observatory said at least 10 civilians, among them a child and a woman, were killed in air strikes on rebel-held Douma, outside Damascus.

The group said the strikes were believed to have been carried out by Russian warplanes, but could not confirm. (AFP)

(13) U.S. General ...

Iraq with 14 air strikes on Thursday, and also hit the militant group with nine air strikes in Syria, the U.S. military said on Friday.

Brown told reporters that an agreement signed with Russia to avoid possible mid-air collisions was working well, and no incidents had been reported.

"They don't want a mid-air and neither do we," he said. He said the agreement did not hinder U.S. forces from carrying out strikes where needed. (Reuters)

(14) Children ...

accused of having perpetrated ethnic massacres, recruited and killed children and carried out widespread rape, torture and forced displacement of populations to "cleanse" areas of their opponents.

Hunger experts from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) have warned of a "concrete risk of famine" before the end of the year if fighting continues and aid does not reach the hardest-hit areas.

While some aid has reached two districts in Unity -- Buaw and Koch -- other areas are cut off. Some 3.9 million people are in critical need of aid -- a third of the country's population and a massive 80 percent rise compared to the same period last year, the UN said.

Civil war began in December 2013 when President Salva Kiir accused his former deputy Riek Machar of planning a coup, setting off a cycle of retaliatory killings that have split the poverty-stricken, landlocked country along ethnic lines. (AFP)

(15) Russia Begins...

the plane crash. As several U.S. media reports cited unnamed sources as saying that a planted bomb might have caused the crash of the Russian plane, and Britain, Ireland and many other

countries have suspended their flights to and from the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh over terrorism concerns.

An Egypt-led investigation group, with experts from Russia and France, is working on the cause of the plane crash. (Xinhua)

(16) 19 Killed in...

Yemen hit their home, the official SPA news agency said.

The Saudi-led coalition, in which the United Arab Emirates has played a key role, has been battling rebels who since last year have controlled the capital Sanaa and much of northern and central Yemen.

The UAE, which has lost 68 soldiers fighting as part of the coalition, on Saturday welcomed the first of its troops returning from Yemen, the official WAM news agency said.

They were replaced by a second group, it added, without specifying numbers.

Thousands of Emirati soldiers have reportedly been deployed in the war-ravaged country, the first time the Gulf country has sent ground forces to a conflict abroad.

Western sources this week indicated that only a limited number of UAE special forces will now remain in Yemen. (AFP)

(17) U.S. President ...

the country's rural interior and hampering socio-economic development. Laos, one of the smaller nations of the ASEAN group, is seeking to be removed from a list of the world's least developed nations by 2020. (Xinhua)

Kenya's Security Forces Nab Al-Shabaab Militants in Vast Forest

MOMBASA - Kenya's security forces have arrested several Al-Shabaab members in the ongoing operation in the vast forest in the coastal town of Lamu which the militants have been using as their hideout.

The suspects, who include two Tanzanians, were arrested by security personnel combing Boni Forest and handed over to anti-terrorism police unit officers.

Director of operation in Boni James Ole Serian confirmed on Saturday that the police arrested the two who were enroute to Somalia to join the Al-Shabaab terror group this week.

Ole Serian said five Al-Shabaab hideouts have been destroyed in the ongoing operation led by Kenya Defense Forces (KDF), noting that the operation is successful and that they have secured the area.

"We have arrested a few Al-Shabaab suspects who we have interrogated and handed them over to the police, people will be able to see them when they are arraigned in court," said Ole Serian.

He added that the government had mapped out 13 areas in the area believed to be a hotbed of jihadists linked to multiple terror attacks in Tana River, Garissa and Lamu counties in the last two years.

Police and military officials said the insurgents had permanent bases deep in Boni forest, where they lived with their families and hunt game for food to train and plot and carry out attacks in the Country. (Xinhua)

Myanmar's President Says Election Results will be Respected

YANGON - Myanmar's president said his government and the military, which gave up power only five years ago, would respect the results of historic elections Sunday that are expected to be won by opposition leader Aung San Su-kyi's party.

"I heard that there are worries whether the outcome of the election would be respected. Our government and the military want to repeat that we will respect the outcomes of the free and fair election," President Thein Sein said in a speech broadcast on national

television late Friday night. His remarks are aimed at signalling to the international community that the government is sincere about holding free and credible elections despite concerns about voter list irregularities, intimidation and disenfranchisement of a large section of the population -- Rohingya Muslims who have been denied citizenship and made ineligible to vote.

"According to the outcome of the election, we will work together in the new political arena," said Thein Sein, who is also the chairman of the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party, which is aligned closely to the military.

Concerns about the military's lurking influence stems from events in 1990, when it refused to accept results of elections that were won overwhelmingly by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party. The junta continued its rule that had begun in 1962.

After intense international pressure, the military called elections in late 2010, which the NLD boycotted, citing unfair rules. By default, the elections were won by the USDP, made up of former military figures. It formally took over power from the junta in 2011. (AP)

British Plane Almost Hit by Rocket Near Sharm Al-Sheikh in August

LONDON - A British passenger jet came close to being hit by a rocket as it came in to land at Egypt's Sharm al-Sheikh in August, British media reported on Saturday, although the UK government said it concluded the incident was not a deliberate attack.

The pilot of the Thomson flight from London to Egypt took evasive action after spotting the missile coming towards the plane as it flew to the Red Sea resort, the Daily Mail reported.

The rocket was believed to have come within 1,000 ft (300 m) of the plane, an unnamed source told the paper.

Britain confirmed the incident had occurred but played down its significance as investigators try to pin down the cause of a Russian passenger plane crash over Egypt's Sinai. Western officials believe it was brought down by a bomb after taking off from Sharm al-Sheikh on Oct. 31. "We investigated the reported incident at the time and concluded that it was not a targeted attack and was likely to be connected to routine exercises being conducted by the Egyptian military in the area at the time," the Department for Transport said in a statement.

A government source also said the rocket was not thought to have come as close as the report suggested.

This week British Prime Minister David Cameron halted flights to and from the Egyptian resort on concerns that the Russian jet had been downed by a bomb. Flights resumed on Friday to bring home stranded tourists in the resort, where about 20,000 Britons were on holiday. (Reuters)

India Successfully Testfires Supersonic Cruise Missile

NEW DELHI - India Saturday successfully testfired its BrahMos supersonic cruise missile from a test range at Pokhran in the western state of Rajasthan, a top defense official said.

"BrahMos missile system, the most lethal and potent weapon system for precision strike available with Indian Army, has proved again its effectiveness in today's successful launch," Sudhir Mishra, chief of BrahMos Aerospace, told the media.

The missile has a strike range of 290 km and can travel at a speed of Mach 2.8.

The Indian Army has already inducted the missile in its arsenal. (Xinhua)