

Afghanistan news round up w/e January 27th 2012
By Caroline Cameron, Great North News Services

Afghan calligrapher creates world's biggest Koran

AN Afghan calligrapher has created what is being billed as the world's largest Koran. The ambitious project has been heralded in Afghanistan as a historic achievement, and potentially eclipses another massive Koran unveiled just two months ago. Mohammad Sabir Khedri, the master calligrapher behind the Afghan project, spent five years working with nine of his students to complete the Koran, which measures 2.28 meters by 1.55 meters. The Koran, which cost \$500,000 to create, weighs 500 kilograms and its 218 pages of cloth and paper are bound by a leather cover made from the skins of 21 goats.

Avalanches kill 14 in Afghanistan

AVALANCHES have killed at least 14 people in a mountainous region of north eastern Afghanistan. Authorities said that heavy snowfall has also blocked roads in Badakhshan province, making many districts inaccessible. Rescue teams were working to get to stranded residents.

Pakistan denies reports of reopening NATO supply routes to Afghanistan

PAKISTANI Foreign Office denied reports of reopening the NATO supply routes to Afghanistan and said that there is no ultimate decision about the reopening of supply routes so far. Addressing a weekly press briefing in Islamabad on Thursday (Jan 26) afternoon, the Foreign Office spokesperson Abdul Basit said that the conditions of reopening supply routes have not been decided yet. The supply routes were closed in November last year following a cross-border attack by the NATO which killed 24 soldiers of the Pakistan Army.

France pledge to Afghanistan despite killings

FRANCE appeared to lessen the prospect of an early withdrawal from the 10-year war in Afghanistan, stressing its commitment to the country after an Afghan soldier killed four of its troops. Defence Minister Gerard Longuet and Chief of Defence staff Admiral Edouard Guillaud flew into Afghanistan for emergency talks a day after the president threatened to order a swift exit of its 3,600 troops on the ground. Paris reacted furiously after an Afghan soldier on Friday shot dead four unarmed soldiers and wounded 15 others as they completed a work-out on the training base they shared with Afghan troops.

Drone strike kills top Al-Qaeda figure

US officials have told Western media that a top Al-Qaeda operative was killed in a CIA drone strike earlier this month. Unnamed US officials told the AP and Reuters news agencies the strike inside Pakistan on January 10 targeted Aslam Awan, described as an "external operations planner" for Al-Qaeda. Pakistani officials could not confirm Awan was killed in the drone attack in the border province of North Waziristan, but US officials quoted by Western agencies say he was. The strike is reportedly one of the first in some six weeks after US forces mistakenly killed 24 Pakistani border troops, triggering a chill in relations between Pakistan and the United States.

Ancient Jewish scrolls found in north Afghanistan

A CACHE of ancient Jewish scrolls from northern Afghanistan that has only recently come to light is creating a storm among scholars who say the landmark find could reveal an undiscovered side of medieval Jewry. The 150 or so documents, dated from the 11th century, were found in Afghanistan's Samangan province and most likely smuggled out - a sorry but common fate for the impoverished and war-torn country's antiquities. Israeli emeritus professor Shaul Shaked, who has examined some of the poems, commercial records and judicial agreements that make up the treasure, said while the existence of ancient Afghan Jewry is known, their culture was still a mystery.

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Reuters.</p>