

**(1) Ghani Nominates...**

Assadullah Khalid was appointed as head of the NDS by the former president in September 2012. He was minister of tribal and border affairs before he was appointed as head of the NDS.

Khalid was wounded in an assassination attempt in Kabul in 2012. (Tolo news)

**(2) Election Results...**

consider the complaints of provincial IECC offices.

To a question, she said: "All votes of Maidan Wardak province are likely to be invalidated because above 75 percent fraud in this province." She did not provide information about the election results of other electoral districts, but said that the IEC could not announce the final results, pending an ongoing review of complaints by the IECC.

Ali Reza Rouhani, IECC spokesman, also said initial election results would change and final results announcement depended to IECC's decision.

The results of some provinces the IEC had announced may be accepted but the results of some electoral districts may totally change, he added.

The IECC has earlier invalidated all votes of Kabul but the government and the IEC rejected the decision and asked for its reconsideration.

About the invalidation of all Kabul votes, Rouhani said, "We have not yet received we had requested from the IEC, our stance is still the same." The IEC has so far announced initial results of 30 provinces, triggering protests by failing candidates and their supports in many provinces. (Pajhwok)

**(3) Protesting...**

Deputy Governor Abdul Qadem Niyazi said the Ghor Cement Factory was yet to be handed over to the government.

"The factory is still run by the private sector, if there is any plan to get the factory back by the state, it will take four months time," he said.

"If we ignore this issue, then the workers have legal right to raise their voice, it is premature to protest," he said.

The Ghor Cement Factory was handed over to the Afghan Cement Company for 49 years, but the contract was revoked in August under a presidential order. (Pajhwok)

**(4) Uncertainty on CE...**

New National Front and a potential presidential hopeful, said he had already explained his position on the issue.

Haq's party has separated ways with the Grand National Alliance over differences on the Chief Executive Post and changes in the Constitution.

In a statement, Haq's party said due to differences on the continuation of Chief Executive Post, creation of a prime minister post with three deputies, devolving powers from the centre and changes in the government structure had widened the ideological gap between the New National Front's members and members of the Grand Alliance.

Shaida Abdali, another presidential hopeful, said the Constitution allowed only two deputies to the president and if there was a plan for amendment in the Constitution, the people of Afghanistan should be asked in this regard.

He said the Constitution authorized the President to choose two deputies but if some parties and alliances wanted more deputies and a prime minister post, something they could do only by amending the Constitution.

When asked about the continuation of the Chief Executive Post, he said their electoral team would be formed based on the existing Constitution and no plan in violation to the supreme law would be made.

Another presidential hopeful Mohammad Hanif Atmar said: "Every step we take would be central to the national unity. The people noticed our performance in the past and

they know us better and would trust our strategies and ideas," he said.

Referring to the change in government structure offered by the Jamiat-i-Islami Afghanistan (JIA), he said he supported the creation of a prime minister post. "I believe the JIA has strong reasons for the change in the government structure and it should be brought under consideration."

Meanwhile, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, head of the Hizb-i-Islami Afghanistan (HIA), they would introduce a joint president candidate with other political parties and movements.

He said the HIA had already contacted all presidential hopefuls and their joint teams known as MAISAM would decide about a joint candidate.

MAISAM is a Pashto acronym used for a grand gathering of National Unity.

Incepted two months back to work for introducing a joint candidate, MAISAM is comprised of HIA and other political parties and figures.

The HIA is against the Chief Executive Post in future and insists any change to the system should be brought through constitutional amendment.

The HIA has also sent a message to the Taliban to be part of MAISAM for upcoming presidential election and their response for a meeting in a third country is awaited.

Election oversight institutes

However, election oversight commissions, political experts and the IEC have termed the CEO position in the presidential election in conflict with the country's Constitution. According to the Constitution, a presidential election ticket is comprised of one candidate and two deputies and only a ticket of three individuals has the right to run for presidential poll.

Yousuf Rashid, executive chief of the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FFFA), said if a group included the CEO position in its presidential election ticket, it would be against the law.

Pointing to the national unity government and creation of the CEO post, he said, "The IEC in 2014 was unable to announce clear result of the presidential elections, and the country was moving towards a crisis and that was the reason the international community intervened and created the national unity government."

"The unity government was also not able to hold Wolesi Jirga and district council elections and pave the way for a Loya Jirga to amend the Constitution."

He said election tickets promised the CEO post in order to attract more supporters and division of seats, but it was not a solution. "It is a clear violation of the Constitution", he said. "Unfortunately the IEC is split and it has never made a good decision, if the commission is really a responsible organ, it should release a statement and make it clear any move in conflict of the law would not be acceptable, but unfortunately it the election commission only watches and wait for orders from others," Rashid said.

Political experts

Shahla Farid, a political science lecturer at Kabul University, said, "The government had promised to hold a Loya Jirga and make the CEO position legal, but unfortunately it did not happen."

About election tickets that include the CEO position, she said if a Loya Jirga was held and the CEO position was made legal, then election tickets could include the position but now it was against the law.

IEC

The IEC says based on the election law, an election ticket for presidential polls should have one candidate and two deputies and a candidate with three deputies also has the right to run for president.

The commission says it would act according to the law.

According to the IEC, the next presidential elections would be held on April 14 in 2019.

President Ashraf Ghani, former na-

tional security advisor Mohammad Hanif Atmar, ex-ambassador to India Shaida Abdali and lawmaker Abdul Latif Pedram have already announced to their intention to stand in the 2019 presidential election.

A number of prominent political figures have resigned their government positions to form their election tickets or support another ticket.

Mohammad Hanif Atmar, National Security Advisor, Eklil Hakimi, finance minister, Hekmat Khalil Karzai, deputy foreign minister, Sayed Sadat Mansor Naderi, urban development minister, Abdul Hakim Norzai, deputy National Security Advisor, Mohammad Omar Zakhilwal, Afghan envoy to Pakistan and Mohammad Shaida Abdali, Afghan envoy to India have so far resigned from their positions.

Establishment of the national unity government

After the first round of 2014 presidential election produced no clear winner, the ballot went to a run-off between then leading candidates Ashraf Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah.

But the second round turned seriously divisive and led to the intervention of former US secretary of state John Kerry.

Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah later signed an agreement based on which the CEO post was created and the position was expected to be changed to a Prime Minister position through a Loya Jirga meeting within two years of the government. However, the responsibilities of the CEO are still unclear as the government five-year term is going to end in five months.

Some people believe the president avoided to hold a Loya Jirga because it could lower his authority if the CEO position was changed to a Prime Minister. (Pajhwok)

**(5) Iran to Build...**

Earlier in November, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif underlined that his country will make its utmost efforts to help the Afghan government to successfully hold peace talks in the country. "The Islamic Republic of Iran has always supported peace talks in Afghanistan under the guidance and partnership of the Afghan government and it will use all its capacities to help the Afghan government along this path," Zarif was quoted as saying in Fars News Agency as saying during a meeting with former Afghan President Hamid Karzai in Tehran. (KP)

**(6) Experts Ask US to...**

Another lower house member Nasrullah Sadiqzade Neili also said the Americans had come to Afghanistan to serve their own interest and were now leaving for the same cause.

He said it seemed the US had been fully assured in Abu Dhabi talks that there would no threat to its interests from Afghanistan. But the US should ensure Afghanistan would not return to its past, he said.

Wolesi Jirga speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahim said the Afghans had never wished the presence of foreign troops in their country because they wanted to live in peace.

He said if peace returned, the Afghans would not want foreign troops to stay in their country for a single day. (Pajhwok)

**(7) Ghani Orders Merger...**

institutions would be merged based on the decree issued by President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and the Ministry of Public Works would be responsible to deal with the responsibilities of the first degree employees of the mentioned institutions until the merger process and modifications of the legislative documents are completed.

Another committee would also be established and would be led by the Second vice President for the execution of the process of merging the institutions and to particularly monitor the merger of budgetary formations of the mentioned institutions. The Office of the President also add-

ed that another committee would also be established and led by the Ministry of Public Works to prepare a plan for the merger of the formation and budget of the mentioned institutions.

According to ARG Palace, the committee would work in close coordination with the Independent Directorate of Administrative Reforms and Civil Services and the Civil Services Administration of the Ministry of Finance and present recommendations in this regard to the Presidential Palace in coming six months. (KP)

**(8) Wolesi Jirga...**

Arian Youn (4,444 votes)  
Lailuma Wali Hakimi (3,253 votes)  
Saima Khogyani (2,671 votes)  
Dewa Niazi (1,688 votes)

Faridoon Khan Momand, Amir Mohammad Yar, Mirwais Yaseeni, Hazrat Ali, Arian Youn, Lailuma Wali Hakimi and Saima Khogyani have retained their Wolesi Jirga seats while are new faces.

Haji Zahir Qadeer, Asmat Shinwari, Syed Akram, Amir Jan Dawlatzai, Abdul Qahafar, Fareshta Anwari and Pir Bakhsh Girdiwal, who had won the previous polls, could not make it to the new Wolesi Jirga this time around.

The panel said the results announced were preliminary and they could be referred to the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) in case of objections.

The panel has already announced initial results from 30 provinces, saying the outcomes from the remaining provinces and the Kochi constituency will be unveiled soon. (Pajhwok)

**(9) Miller 'Has No...**

said about Afghan forces casualties but "Taliban casualties have been very dire as well".

"What I think is important is -- I have talked often about -- a political solution, not a military solution to this conflict. It is time for the hostilities to end and it will only happen through Afghans talking to Afghans," Miller said. "It is the time to end those hostilities to start talking to one another."

This comes as Miller visited Farah province on Thursday, where he said they are here in Afghanistan to support peace and stability and ensure a continued support to the Afghan people.

Miller said the foreign forces are in Afghanistan to help maintain peace and safeguard the country's national interests.

"We are here in Afghanistan to first and foremost to see peace, at some point, unity across Afghanistan and protect the national interests," miller said.

His remarks come amid reports on a possible withdrawal of a "significant number" of foreign forces from Afghanistan.

On Friday, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham called for immediate US Senate hearings on President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw all American troops from Syria, which prompted the resignation of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis.

Graham, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, told reporters he wanted to hear directly from Mattis at any hearing.

Mattis announced plans on Thursday to depart in a candid resignation letter to Trump that laid bare the growing divide between them.

A Senate hearing could also cover Trump administration officials saying on Thursday that there were plans to drawdown about 5,000 US troops from Afghanistan.

Graham, who over the past year or so has been a staunch supporter of Trump, has broken with him on the Syria decision.

Heading to a meeting of Republican senators, Graham said, "In lunch I'm going to ask for hearings like right now about Syria." Trump said Islamic State had been defeated there so it was time to withdraw US forces.

Graham made clear that he also was worried about a possible US troop

reduction in Afghanistan, where 14,000 troops are deployed in what is America's longest war at 17 years. The United States went to war in Afghanistan in 2001 in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, seeking to oust the Taliban militants harboring Saudi-raised militant Osama bin Laden, who led plans to carry out the attacks. (Tolo news)

**(10) Iran Deputy...**

increasing the number of asylum seekers worldwide, leaving Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Syria and Sudan with nearly 50 percent of the world's total refugee population. (Tolo news)

**(11) US Pullout from...**

achieve objective.

He met the Afghan president, the chief executive and the foreign minister during last week's recent visit to the neighbouring country. He said a final decision about the peace initiatives would be taken by the Afghans themselves. (Pajhwok)

**(12) Public Order...**

killed and five personnel of the force were wounded.

Nek Mohammad, an eyewitness, said: "I was heading to Takhar from Kunduz. The pick-up vehicle was attacked in Chahartot area where the militants opened fire at it and then hit it with a rocket."

He added several individuals traveling in vehicle suffered burn injuries. Toryal Kakar, a member of the provincial council, acknowledged the Kunduz-Takhar highway had been unstable for the past several years. (Pajhwok)

**(13) Kabul Residents...**

statistics reveal that around two million people in the country - mainly in northern and western provinces - suffered from severe drought this year.

The ANDMA deputy chief Mohammad Almas Sayas said a large amount of Afghanistan's waters flow to neighboring countries which is one of the main reasons behind lack of water in parts of the country. "Afghanistan's waters are not managed and they flow to neighboring countries. This is a big reason behind lack of water," Sayas said.

Recently, the United Nations said that \$115 million is needed to address the suffering and challenges raised from drought in Afghanistan. (Tolo news)

**(14) Afghanistan-Pakistan...**

said that Afghanistan's economic dependency on Pakistan has decreased following the establishment of new alternative trade and transit routes with a number of countries.

Tawfiq Dawari, deputy head of the ACCI, said trade and transit volume between Afghanistan and Pakistan has been decreasing during the last nine months.

"While we use Karachi port and have bilateral trade ties with Pakistan, our trade relations have been maintained with other countries as well and the reason is that we use other countries and international markets as well," said Dawari.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Embassy in Kabul said in a statement that there has been an increase in trade and transit volume between Afghanistan and Pakistan over the past year.

"Pakistan and Afghanistan continue to maintain up-ward trajectory of trade during last two years and has crossed \$2 billion mark in year 2017-2018," the embassy said in a statement on December 21.

The embassy said that "Afghanistan export to Pakistan increased by 29.53 percent during Pakistan's FY 2017-2018 that is from \$342 million in year 2016-2017 to \$443 million in 2017 and 2018".

"Afghanistan continues to increase its import from Pakistan, as Afghan imports increased from Pakistan by 18.33 percent from the period that was \$1.271 billion in years 2016-2017 to \$1.576 billion in years 2017-2018," the embassy said. (Tolo news)