

### (1) Talks Underway...

believed. The proposed reforms would be shared with the parliament for approval, he concluded. (Pajhwok)

### (2) 75 Percent ...

remaining in their posts. Raiwand 3 spokesmen said the majority of respondents voiced concerns about possible vote rigging in the upcoming parliamentary elections. Of the 2,571 respondents, 910 said they would not take part in the elections. "Eight hundred and fourteen people in the survey expressed doubt in the capacity of the electoral commissions and another 1,843 of the respondents, which makes 72 percent of all respondents, expressed dissatisfaction over the past performance of the electoral bodies," Rawand 3 representative Shah Aqa Kapisayee said on Friday.

Discussing the methodology of the survey, Rishad Huwaida, another member of Raiwand 3, emphasized the diversity of respondents. "Thirty percent of our respondents constitute women, which is a point of pride, because despite major problems, the women showed a readiness to participate in the survey," Huwaida said. "Seventy percent of the respondents are males and 75 percent of them are educated and the remaining portion are illiterate."

The survey also questioned respondents about their opinions on the Afghan political system and ideas that have been promoted as potential reform strategies recently. "In the survey we asked public opinion about changing the presidential system to a parliamentary one; 1,801, which makes 47 percent of the interviewees, responded positive to the issue, but 1,349 of them, making up 53 percent of the total, showed opposition," Rawand 3 member Eltaf yousufi said.

Finally, 39 percent of respondents reportedly identified security as the top government priority in their minds, while another 26 percent have stressed on the removal of administrative corruption. Twenty four percent say rule of law is the top priority, while just nine percent said job creation.

According to Raiwand 3, the survey results will be forwarded on to the Presidential Palace, the office of Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah as well as the United Nations in hopes that they will consider its findings in decision making. (Tolonews)

### (3) Freed Taliban...

contact with the group. The Qataris were cooperating with having conversations with the US national security team on the issue, he acknowledged. "We continue to have confidence that there are measures to place to substantially mitigate the threat that they pose to American national security."

Meanwhile, the Pentagon also exuded confidence the Taliban leaders would not be successful in their efforts. "We remain confident, as we were when we sent them there, that the assurances we received are sufficient enough to help us mitigate any future threat that these individuals might pose," Pentagon Press Secretary Rear Admiral John Kirby said.

Responding to questions, Earnest said the US had no regret on the release of the five prisoners last year in return for the freedom of Sgt Bowe Bergdahl. "Of course not," he said, when asked if the Obama administration had any regrets on swapping the Taliban. (Pajhwok)

### (4) Anti-Blasphemy...

the sentiments of the people. At least 12 people including the cartoonists were killed in a gun attack on Charlie Hebdo's satirical magazine in Paris after the magazine published cartoons of Prophet Mohammad. (Tolonews)

### (5) President, CEO...

president may issue a decree on summoning the Wolesi Jirga, which rose for its 45-day winter recess two days back, he added. At least 17 ministers-designate are yet to get votes of trust. The Wolesi Jirga -- like the Meshrano

Jirga -- was due to start its break on January 20.

But the assembly had to postpone its vacation to approve the budget and finalise the trust vote process. The jirga approved the budget and endorsed nine ministers, rejecting 10 of the presidential choices. (Pajhwok)

### (6) Wolesi Jirga's ...

performance of local departments."

Enraged by the parliamentary move, Paktika provincial council members also shut their offices. Niamatullah Babari, the provincial council deputy head, said evaluating local governance was their right.

He said the council would remain closed for a month to press the president to respond positively to their demand.

But a resident of Sharan, the provincial capital, Obaidullah, said some of council members were also involved in corruption.

Joining the protest, Ghazni council head Khaliqdad Akbari said he has closed his office. Depriving the provincial council of its monitoring role would pave the ground for more corruption, he feared. (Pajhwok)

### (7) Afghanistan Shares ...

still be felt in the business market as nearly 80 percent of the companies were not operating or were closed in the past six months.

Nusrat also added that the situation could be further affected as the cabinet is not fully approved by the parliament house and the lawmakers are currently on leave due to winter holidays.

However, he said ACCI is optimistic that the government of national unity will take certain steps to provide better facilities for the businesses and investors which could help the market to grow and as a result employment opportunities will become available for the labors and workers. According to the ACCI report lack of infrastructures and electricity are the main barriers which are creating challenges for the investors in the country.

He called on the government of national unity to take strict steps specifically on infrastructures and security in a bid to improve situation for investment and business in the country. (KP)

### (8) Germany ...

governor of Qal-e-Zal district, said, "The new library has more opportunities for young people to find the books they need for their studies and leisure. With new facilities for the public, the library promotes a new culture of reading in our district."

In Baghlan, both projects together cost AFN 35 million, with the Baghlan Department of Education (DoE) receiving technical and financial assistance from Germany and its Regional Capacity Development Fund (RCDF) for Baghlan. In Kunduz, the projects cost a total of AFN 4.25 million, also financed by the German Government.

As part of Germany's cooperation with Afghanistan, the RCDF, which is financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), is implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. In six provinces in northern Afghanistan, RCDF supports its partners' development priorities in the provinces and districts, while at the same time providing training and coaching programmes for civil servants. With its broad range of activities, the RCDF aims at increasing Afghan ownership of the development process, strengthening state institutions and promoting transparency and inclusiveness. (Wadsam)

### (9) Civil Society Wants...

days back, the lower house of parliament decided that provincial councils did not reserve the right to supervise or evaluate the performance of local departments. (Pajhwok)

### (10) No Place for...

base." The head of the Provincial Council of Farah, Farid Bakhtawar, said that residents of Khak Safid had not allowed these fighters,

who had also shifted their families to the district as well, to station in the district.

"The Islamic State has failed to win public support in Farah," Bakhtawar said. "Their crimes, including the sale of women, have caused the people to stand against them."

Reports indicate that the Iranian border forces have deployed additional troops to their areas that border with Farah after rumors about IS surfaced.

But the Afghan border police officials say they have not yet received any formal information about the presence of IS.

"We have not received any formal information in this regard," said Gen. Mohammad Juma Adeel, commander of the border police for the western zone. "The patrolling of Iranian border guards is normal because they always protect their borders."

However, the Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoI) has repeatedly rejected the rumors, saying they were the same militants operating under new brands to create more attention and increase fears among the people. (Tolonews)

### (11) Doctor Praised...

"With the help of the equipment, we can cure the wound and fracture in four stages and the equipment has no superior in the world," Dr. Saadat told TOLONews on Friday. "The equipment is helpful in treating fractures made on someone's body during traffic accidents and war or as a result of a bullet wound," he added.

Esaruddin is an Afghan National Police (ANP) officer who was serving in Daman district of southern Kandahar province when he was wounded by a mine and lost one of his legs. Dr. Saadat's equipment has helped him in his recovery and he hopes to return to the battlefield to continue to serve his country. "I will return to the battlefield after healing," Esaruddin told TOLONews. "If we do not fight, then who will defend the country?"

Hajji Lalai is another ANP officer who served for 13 years. He also lost one of his legs as a result of an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast. "When my leg is healed, I will return to my job and defend the country until I am alive," Lalai said.

Another ANP officer Qasim praised the physical therapy work doctors like Dr. Saadat have had him do since getting injured. "The condition of my leg was critical, but now it is improving and I can walk," he said. (Tolonews)

### (12) US Judge Denies ...

threats from the Taliban group. He had vanished along with two ANA officers - Cpt. Mohammad Nasir Askarzada, and Cpt. Noorullah Aminyar late in September last year.

However the judge ruled that Ma. Arash did not qualify for certain protections because the Taliban is not a government, his lawyer said, nor had he proven that he would be persecuted, rather than legally prosecuted, by the Afghan government, the Associated Press reported.

"If he gets deported and hung for desertion, that's OK under the law," attorney Matthew Borowski said.

"We have no choice but to appeal to the Board of Immigration Appeals," the attorney said. The process could take several months.

Capt. Mohammad Nasir Askarzada, was allowed into Canada in December after proving he had relatives there but Capt. Noorullah Aminyar's case is pending before the same judge that denied Arash's claim.

Two Afghan policemen identified as 22-year-old Mohammad Yasin Ataye and 24-year-old Mohd Naweid Samimi had also vanished during a training visit in United States a week before the three Afghan army officers sneaked away from the training exercise.

The two were among the 31 Afghan police officers who are on a visit in United States to work with the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

There are no reports regarding the fate of the two missing Af-

ghan police officers so far. (KP)

### (13) Women Have...

when their lives were not directly at risk, women's livelihoods were impacted by the consequences of the violent conflict, he said, adding they had to support families when their husbands, parents, siblings or guardians died or became handicapped.

"Many lack access to paid work and financial resources, and this impedes their ability to provide for themselves and their families and makes them vulnerable to exploitation. Women displaced by conflict are also economically vulnerable and at heightened risk of exploitation," he noted.

Calling the protection of civilians a pressing priority for the Afghan government, the diplomat said people had suffered for over 30 years as a result of the war and continued to suffer today. "This past year was the deadliest year for civilians in Afghanistan since 2001," he said. (Pajhwok)

### (14) Govt. Appoints ...

advisor, Qazi Najjullah as 915 religious affairs advisor, Dr. Safiullah as cultural and media affairs advisor, Dr. Saifuddin & Muhammad Marawar both as tribal affairs advisors, Haji Muhammad Raza Fazil religious affairs advisor, Abdul Manan as Security affairs advisor, Abdul Sabor Tawhidi as governance affairs advisor and Asadullah as development and economical affairs advisor.

Previously, the executive chief of the government, Dr. Abdullah had hired five advisors for his self as well. (Pajhwok)

### (15) Daikundi Health...

they would quit their jobs. Subhan Naibi, provincial council's deputy head, said they had demanded sacking of the director. "I hope the health ministry will pay attention to improving the situation."

But Public Health Director Dr. Taimoor Shah Yousuf insisted hospitals were in better condition, compared to two years back. "The critics should also observe the improvement we have brought to hospitals. The situation is improving and the employees should not worry," he said. (Pajhwok)

### (16) NSP ...

been able to gain access to basic human needs upon completion of these uplift projects.

Since its inception in Sarepul province, NSP has covered 612 communities and implemented 1,815 projects in different sectors, while the work of another 500 projects is currently in progress. (PR)

### (17) 6 Police Killed ...

sibility for the roadside bombing. (Pajhwok)

### (18) 4 More Accused

Local Police and abandoned on the street in critical condition.

However, Talwar without describing weather the accused arrested were policemen or civilians said that they will be dealt with according to the law whoever they are.

The incident made the parents of the victim come to Kabul for justice as they were complaining that they are not being heard in the province.

This was not the only case where a child was raped in past two months but a five years old girl was raped in northern Balkh province earlier in December 2014 and a four year old was gang raped in Lashkargah, the provincial capital of southern Helmand province.

A government survey shows that there were around 65 rape cases recorded between March and September last year in which children between one to thirteen years old were raped. (KP)

### (19) Analysts...

However, he gave no further details of the overnight incident.

Separately, two motorcyclists sprayed a police guard with bullets in Lashkargah, the provincial capital, on Friday. Bacha Gul Bakhtiar, the police chief, said gunmen opened fire on the policeman in a vegetable market, killing him on the spot.

He, however, said intelligence officials in the area had detained the killers, who were being interrogated. (Pajhwok)

### (20) Thousands ...

coal and firewood, 16,000 sets of socks, 9,000 shawls, 9,000 blankets, two tonnes sugar and as many tonnes of tea were distributed among the deserving families.

He said that each family got three blankets, three shawls, eight pairs of socks, one kilogram of tea, one kilogram of sugar and 50 kilograms of coal.

Abdul Wahid, a resident of Ach Mili village, lauded the move and said the package would help the needy families.

A couple of months ago, some 554 flood affected families had been distributed aid items in Samangan. (Pajhwok)

### (21) Juvenile Offenders...

juvenile offenders complained the release of the "baseless news story" had tarnished their image and violated their rights.

Director of Justice Nek Mohammad Ahmadi, who also heads the centre, explained the inmates had been striking to push certain demands. Reports about the protest being sparked by sexual assaults were groundless, he said.

According to Ahmadi, four girls and 79 boys involved in murder, sodomy and elopements are held at the facility. Five boys were freed recently in compliance with a presidential decree.

Subsequently, the director continued, the remaining juvenile offenders also demanded their release under the same presidential directive. Ahmadi said the prisoners, who had closed the doors, went on strike on January 24 at 7:30am. But the four girls were taken out from the area within 20 minutes.

"I emphatically reject the allegations that the female prisoners were held hostage until 12:00 noon and that they were raped. The prisoners called off their strike at 11:00am." Human rights, security and judicial organs reviewed the situation and found the claim absurd. Shamsuddin Tanvir, an official of the Kandahar Human Rights Commission, said rape did not occur at the correctional centre and the media had quoted him out of context.

He told Pajhwok Afghan News the prisoners protested against lack of accommodation, playgrounds and other facilities.

Haji Niamatullah, a provincial council member, told Pajhwok he was unaware of the incident until he heard of it from the media. He said he wanted to get to the bottom of it. He added nothing had happened in the prison, but what two of his colleagues had spoken to the media did not represent the council's official position.

Human Rights Department's deputy head Zubaida said she had visited the facility and interviewed many female inmates, who repudiated the reports as malicious and misleading. Speaking to Pajhwok on condition of anonymity, four female inmates said the reports of sexual assault were false. They said: "We heard noises that male prisoners had escaped. Some of those prisoners wanted to take us out but we had already shut the doors. Then the police came in time."

Stern action should be taken against those media outlets and two provincial council members for the errant reports that would result in female inmates' dishonour. (Pajhwok)

### (22) 14 Rebels, ....

the bodies of six fighters remained at the incident scene and two of them had been identified as Uzbeks. Eight of other rebels were injured and three others arrested. During the operation, the military spokesman said, the security forces also seized three Kalashnikov assault rifles, six bombs, some explosives and 10 motorcycles. An Afghan National Army (ANA) soldier was also killed, Reza said, accusing the militants of murdering Haji Murad, Mullah Rahmatullah and Mawla for supporting the government in Nahrin area.

A resident of the area, Abdur Rasoul, said Afghan forces and militants used heavy weapons that killed one civilian and wounded four others when two rockets hit civilian houses.

But a Taliban spokesman Qari Yousuf Ahmadi claimed that 17 security personnel had been killed, 27 others wounded and three tanks destroyed in the Qaisar offensive. (Pajhwok)

### (23) 2 Groups of ...

as may as 124 incidents of kidnapping took place in districts and capital of the province in the progressive

year. Earlier, the resident of Kunduz held rallies against the growing insecurity in the province. (Pajhwok)

### (24) Italy Elects...

unemployment is soaring after six years of on-off recession.

After three inconclusive rounds of voting this week in which a two-thirds majority was needed, his candidate Mattarella was elected in the fourth round, when the required quorum fell to a simple majority.

As the ballots were counted out loud in the Chamber of Deputies, the 1,009 parliamentarians and regional officials eligible to vote burst into applause when Mattarella's name surpassed the 505-vote threshold, making him Italy's 12th president since World War Two.

Mattarella, 73, who is little known to most Italians, drew broad parliamentary support, garnering 665 votes. He is expected to be sworn in next week for a seven-year term, taking over officially for the 89-year-old Giorgio Napolitano, who resigned earlier this month.

"Keep up the good work, President Mattarella. Long live Italy!" Renzi tweeted after the vote. Even Pope Francis sent a congratulatory telegram.

The Italian president is a largely ceremonial figure, but he wields important powers at times of political instability, a frequent scourge in Italy, when he can dissolve parliament, call elections and pick prime ministers.

Center-right rival Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia party appeared in disarray after the vote.

Berlusconi ordered his party to cast blank ballots after accusing Renzi of betraying what he said was a promise to give him a role in choosing the candidate. Instead, more than 30 refused, opening a wound in the party. Renato Brunetta, Forza Italia's chief whip in the lower house, said the pact that Renzi and Berlusconi sealed last year to make institutional reforms was dead, but not all his party colleagues were so resolute and Berlusconi himself has yet to comment. (Reuters)

### Ukraine, Rebels Hold Fresh Peace Talks as Fighting Rages in East

MINSK/KIEV - Ukrainian and Russian representatives and separatist envoys met in a new round of peace talks on Saturday as fighting between Kiev's forces and the Russian-backed rebels raged on in Ukraine's east, claiming more civilian and military lives.

The main members of the so-called contact group - Ukrainian former president Leonid Kuchma, a Russian diplomat and an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe official - met at a state residence in the Belarussian capital Minsk, where they were joined by two separatist officials.

The sides have held only one inconclusive meeting since agreeing a ceasefire last September as part of a 12-point blueprint for peace. Much-violated from the start, that truce collapsed completely with a new rebel advance last week.

Both sides have accused each other of deadly artillery and mortar strikes on civilian targets in the past two weeks, including on a cultural centre in the main regional city of Donetsk on Friday which killed at least five people waiting for humanitarian hand-outs.

In a three-way phone call, Russian President Vladimir Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande discussed the situation in Ukraine which has brought the worst crisis in Russia-West relations since the end of the Cold War more than 20 years ago.

The separatists have set up self-proclaimed 'people's republics' while their forces, which Kiev says are supported by 9,000 Russian regular troops, have seized more than 500 square km (193 square miles) of territory beyond that agreed in the Minsk talks and threaten to seize control of the east's two main regions entirely. Heavy shelling continued on Saturday in Ukraine's eastern regions as the separatists sought to tighten a circle around government forces clinging on to control of the strategic rail and road junction of Debaltseve. Regional police chief Vyacheslav Abroskin, in a Facebook post, said 12 civilians had been killed on Saturday by separatist artillery shelling of the town, which lies to the north-east of Donetsk. (Reuters)