

(1) Obama Proposes...

assistance, the State Department said, would focus on promoting economic growth by investing in viable sectors, including agriculture and extractives, improved governance, a better system of justice and alternatives to the illicit production of narcotics.

The US promised to work with international partners to sustain gains in health and education and support women and girls through the critical transition period and beyond. It will continue working together with the Afghan government to make progress on fundamental reform objectives.

Committed to supporting progress in these areas, the US will continue to incentivize progress by conditioning a portion of assistance on government enactment and implementation of reforms, including respect for the rights of women and minorities, improved governance, anti-corruption efforts and legislation to support private investment.

For Afghanistan, the overseas contingency operation (OCO) request of \$136.2 million reflected the transition to a Kabul-centric diplomatic footprint, the State Department said, adding US personnel were engaged in capacity-building, stabilisation and development plans essential to strengthening the Afghanistan's ability to take full responsibility for its security.

The request is \$58 million below the 2015 level as the number of department and interagency personnel is decreasing, and aviation costs for 2016 will largely be funded from 2015 resources. (Pajhwok)

(2) US Defence ...

presence in Afghanistan.

The Senate panel will hold a hearing on Wednesday to consider Carter's nomination. He is likely to easily be confirmed. He suggested the US should try to foster more cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. (Pajhwok)

(3) Private Sector's...

by custom staff.

Azizi said the objectives behind seminar were seeking ways of enhancing government revenue, eliminating corruption and promoting awareness about tax the calculation system. Officials said under the new system taxpayers would get forms from the department concerned and mention their tax obligations therein. The system of tax payment should have been implemented in 2008.

But some businessmen adapted to the system and others offered excuses that they did not know how to follow it. He said the MoF was trying to control corruption by introducing modern revenue collection systems. Deputy Director of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) Khan Jan Alokzai said administrative corruption had badly damaged the government and the state.

"Investors want to benefit the government and people through paying taxes, but state revenue unfortunately end up in corrupt individuals' pockets," he regretted.

He demanded the government punish the corrupt and pledged that those who violated the law would never get support from ACCI. (Pajhwok)

(4) Qatar Denies ...

Qatar, said his government would honour the commitment it had held out to the United States on the release of the Taliban.

He said the released insurgents were under strict monitoring and measures had already been put in place to limit their activities under the agreement.

Al-Attayah expressed the views at a time when media reported last week that one of five Taliban commanders was trying to contact other insurgent leaders to return to the battlefield.

The reports were received with outrage by the US. "This report is troubling, but wholly predictable," remarked Congressman Ed Royce, Chairman of House Foreign Affairs Committee.

"None of these individuals (five Taliban) has returned to the battlefield; none of them is allowed to travel outside of Qatar and none has engaged in physical violence," the White House press secretary told a news conference.

In fact, Josh Earnest said, each of them at was still in Qatar, where they were subject to monitoring and other mitigation measures limiting their activities. He added the US had been in touch with the Qataris about the mitigation efforts. (Pajhwok)

(5) Afghanistan ...

are trying to find each other"

Rashedi expressed concern over ISIS

existence in the provinces of Afghanistan neighboring Iran.

He said that ISIS is a joint threat to Afghanistan and Iran and that his country has preparedness to combat ISIS.

He assured that there is cooperation between the soldiers on the joint border between Afghanistan and Iran, saying that "Soldiers from both sides are meeting each other and have good understanding and cooperation"

He added that ISIS is not that strong but has confused people through its propaganda war in social media.

Iran has joint border with Herat, Faryab and Nimroz provinces of Afghanistan.

DAESH operation has been reported in Nimroz's neighboring Helmand province which apparently is concerning Iran. (KP)

(6) EU Invites ...

Government in place, we look forward to working as partners to produce ambitious reforms. A new Government calls for a new kind of relationship. My meeting with President Ghani marked the beginning of a new relationship between the EU and Afghanistan", stated EU Ambassador Mellbin after the meeting. "We welcome the Government's paper on »Realizing Self-Reliance«. It sets out an ambitious and robust reform package, and we look forward to its implementation.

We share the President's vision to increase aid effectiveness and look forward to working with him and his Government in realising this vision. We will move towards a new kind of partnership, working together to ensure the conditions are in place for an EU State Building Contract with Afghanistan", said the EU Special Representative.

A State Building contract will help Afghanistan strengthen its capacity to pursue its own policy objectives and gradually take full responsibility for its future development. If successful, the contract will allow Afghanistan to receive donor funds more efficiently. This will ensure that more aid money reaches ordinary Afghans.

"The EU will continue to focus on priority sectors such as agriculture, health, policing and rule of law, and democratisation. At the same time, the EU will continue to progressively increase the share of its support managed by the Afghan state. This requires a substantial increase in national capacity to manage public finances in a transparent and accountable way.

The EU will also continue to promote a joint, coordinated approach with other donors. We will shortly start laying out a road map to assess where Afghanistan meets the criteria and to identify the extra conditions required to channel more EU aid directly to the Afghan state.

There is a strong push from the international community to refresh the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF). Here, by offering incentive funds, the EU will encourage the Afghan Government to deliver more results faster", concluded Ambassador Mellbin. (PR)

(7) Stalemate over...

protest rallies were staged in most of the provinces against the Wolesi Jirga's decision barring provincial councils from overseeing the performance of provincial entities. Last week, the lower house amended the law on provincial councils by a majority vote, barring PCs from evaluating and overseeing the performance of local government

The decision sparked protests by PC members in several provinces and they closed their offices to put pressure on the lower house to reverse its decision.

Acting in compliance with orders from President Ashraf Ghani, the Independent Directorate of Local Government (IDLG) has launched work two days ago on a policy outlining oversight role for provincial councils. (Pajhwok)

(8) Minister of Mine

only alternative to alleviate poverty is to change our traditional economy into a modern economy," President Ashraf Ghani's Special Advisor for Good Governance and Reforms Ahmadzia Massoud said. "Inclusive utilization of natural resources is crucial to the foundation of our economy."

According to Minister Saba, the best strategy for developing Afghanistan's mineral sector would be to approach extraction in a phased approach. He argued the government should begin focusing on identifying and extracting small resource deposits and only later stepping up to middle and mega resource deposits. (Tolonews)

(9) U.S. Commander ...

complaints from a U.S. government watchdog, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), which accused the Pentagon last week of depriving American taxpayers of vital information about the \$65 billion program to bolster the Afghan army and police. But Campbell softened his stance on Monday. His headquarters in Kabul has declassified most of the information that has been withheld, while only keeping secret those details related to the combat readiness of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) units, officials said.

The U.S. military mission in Afghanistan "has since gone back and separated data releasable to the public from classified ANSF readiness data based on the SIGAR's request to release more information to the public," a military officer said.

"General Campbell has not changed his position in regard to the importance of protecting ANSF readiness data, which remains classified," the officer said.

The U.S. military mission "is fully committed" to cooperating with the inspector general, he said.

For six years, the Pentagon has publicly reported a range of data to the inspector general about U.S. aid to Afghan forces and the state of the country's troubled police and army. The information has provided an important measure for assessing the progress of the Afghan forces and the effect of Western assistance. (AFP)

(10) Tajikistan, Finland...

at a meeting of senior representatives of the Main Geology Directorate under the Government of Tajikistan and the Geological Survey of Finland.

According to the Main Geology Directorate press center, these trilateral surveys are expected to be carried out in the framework of an appropriate document that was signed in Istanbul, Turkey in December last year.

Representative of the Geological Survey of Finland, Yukka Multala, noted that short-term courses on GIS and ArGIS systems designed to store and analyze geographical data and work with maps and geographic information will be organized.

We will recall that the Main Geology Directorate of Tajikistan and the Geological Survey of Finland signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation (MoU) in Dushanbe in September last year. The document was signed in the framework of the project, Mineral Resources for Development in Tajikistan, designed for 2014-2017.

The document reportedly aims to promote expansion of bilateral cooperation between Tajikistan and Finland on development of the current geoport, exchange of information, conducting geophysical surveys for development of mineral resources, etc.

Established in June 1938, the Main Geology Directorate of Tajikistan represents the country's geological survey.

The Geological Survey of Finland (GTK) reportedly produces and disseminates geological information for industry and society that promotes systematic and sustainable use of crustal resources and the national geological endowment. Its research programs are geared to creation of innovative technology and applications. GTK is an agency of Finland's Ministry of Employment and the Economy. (Asia-Plus)

(11) Ghani Orders ...

ministries' officials and Afghanistan Land Authority (ALA) experts at the Presidential Palace on Monday evening.

A statement from the palace said the meeting conferred on ways how to develop the agriculture sector, especially wheat production, and problems facing the sector and their solutions.

It quoted President Ghani as saying Afghanistan lacked a prudent strategy that could develop the agriculture sector and enhance wheat yield.

For self-sufficiency in wheat crop, Ghani said Afghanistan needed a multifaceted policy and organised plans to accomplish the crucial economic task.

The president directed experts to evolve within two weeks a multifaceted policy under which measures were taken in the upcoming spring to help Afghanistan stand on its own feet in food crops production.

Ghani hoped self-sufficiency in wheat production would resolve many economic problems being faced by Afghans. Once autarky was attained, the president said he would shift his attention to promoting other agriculture products. (Pajhwok)

(12) Female Activists...

Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah to form the National Unity Government (NUG) was to allot four cabinet seats to the women, something not seen in the so far new cabinet.

Ghani, who promised four seats for women, introduced only three women as the NUG cabinet nominees, of which, two of them were rejected by the Parliament because of dual citizenship and incomplete documents while the third nominee, who was Khatera Afghan for Higher Education Ministry, failed to win a vote of confidence from the House of Representatives.

"We participated widely in the elections and now we demand our right which is nine ministries," activist Mahbooba Saraj said, adding that over 30 percent of women participated in the election.

"At least those four promised seats should be given to us," she added. Announcing their joint declaration to be presented to the government, the protestors warned of wide-ranging protests throughout the country if their demands were not listened.

"The government should avoid differences between men and women," Hasina Safi, head of Afghan Women Network (AWN) said. (Tolonews)

(13) Kandahar ...

Pajhwok Afghan News, Mines Director Eng. Khan Aqa Tarakhel said previous and latest surveys showed 30 different kinds of minerals existed in the province's more than 17 areas. These minerals include fluorite, chromite, iron, gold, copper, marbles, talc, zinc, sulfur, kunzite, coal, stucco, gemstones and others.

Insecurity and lack of professional workers hinder efforts at surveying and mining the riches, but a decade-long contract has been awarded to a local company for extracting fluorite gemstone deposits. A survey has been completed and the extraction process launched.

Industrially used as a flux for smelting and producing glasses and enamels, fluorite deposits are found 160 kilometres from Kandahar City, the provincial capital, in the Nesh district's Bakhot area.

The director said the fluorite deposits were currently being mined by "Amania Mining Company" and the firm had recently exported 2000 tonnes of fluorite to foreign countries to find market for it there.

Two mines of lead and zinc are up for bidding and some initials work has been done and the remaining process is expected to be completed soon. The mines have been found in Shah Walikot district.

Two talc deposits have been put under bidding. One of the deposits is estimated to hold 10,000 tonnes of talc and the second 7500 tonnes of talc, a widely used substance known as talcum powder in loose form.

Talc powder is a household item globally sold for use in personal hygiene and cosmetics amid some suspicions its use promotes certain types of diseases.

The Kandahar mines official admitted no company had so far come forward to participate in the bidding process, rejecting claims that 90 percent of minerals were lost to unprofessional digging.

Tarakhel said except fluorite mine, no contract had been awarded for extraction of other minerals in Kandahar. "When there is no extraction activity, how 90 percent is lost?"

He said mines in Kandahar were located away from people's homes and residents could not illegally dig them. However, he admitted Shah Maqsood gemstone deposits were illegally dug up in Khakrez district's Darweshan area, but said it was on a small scale.

Some residents extracted and smuggled the stones (up to three kilograms) to Kandahar City to eke out a living. Shah Madsod stone is locally used in making prayer beads.

He said companies were reluctant to obtain contracts for extraction of the gemstone owing to insecurity, adding the issue had been shared with the Khakrez district chief and security organs, who promised to prevent illegal mining.

The director spoke about the department's revenue collected this fiscal year. He said their income stood at nearly 13 million afghanis, with two million afs coming from the fluorite extraction.

He blamed their failure to survey mines on the dearth of skilled individuals in the department concerned. If the relevant ministry helps appoint professionals, the department will complete surveys next year.

Another big problem preventing mining was insecurity that kept at bay local and foreign investors, the official said.

Tarakhel informed two salt mines had been discovered in front of Kandahar Airfield and in Takhta Pul dis-

trict. Another one has been found in Shah Walikot district.

"To survey these mines, we need professional experts," the official said, explaining the Shah Walikot mine, if large in size, could be used for power generation.

Coalmines in Kandahar were surveyed in 1965 and 1970 by local and foreign geologists, but no follow-up surveys to determine their volume and quality could not be carried out due to decades of conflict. (Pajhwok)

(14) Hundreds Attend...

The decision sparked protests by PC members in various provinces, with some closing down their offices.

Some 600 people took part in today's protest rally in Charikar before noon. They marched from the Zangal Bach area to the city square.

Ghulam Bahauddin, the council head, said the provincial bodies should be given back their right to oversee activities of local departments.

He said the rally was attended by people who had voted for provincial council members and they wanted the oversight role to be given back to their representatives.

He said these protests would continue in various provinces until the people's demand was met.

Another participant, Mohammad Ismail, a Charikar resident, said they had voted for PC candidates in order to protect people's interests and rights.

"How can they protect our rights when they lack power and the right to monitor performance of local departments," he asked.

Two days ago, President Ghani directed the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) to investigate PCs oversight role and draft legislation for approval from the parliament.

The IDLG said Ghani met representatives of provincial council members and entered an agreement on how they should monitor activities of provincial government departments. (Pajhwok)

(15) Drugs ...

Abdullah Ahmadzai, the provincial police spokesman, rejected the allegation as baseless.

Farahnaz Pamiri, who represents Shaghnan district on the provincial council, said it was catastrophic to see the amount of contraband and drug addicts rising so sharply.

"Easy access to drugs has caused our women and children to become addicts. The number of addicts is rising and it is smugglers who provide drugs to them," she added.

Talibuddin Qadiri, deputy head of the provincial council, also complained the number of addicts in his district Wakhan was also on the rise.

"Two years ago I witnessed that intelligence operatives detained some smugglers."

He said some addicts were even selling their bodies, land and family members in order to get drugs.

Badakhshan police chief Lt. Gen. Baba Jan assured people police had increased efforts to combat the illegal commerce in the province.

"Despite having a complicated geography and rugged terrain, Badakhshan has attracted more smugglers. One reason is that the province is the shortest route to Central Asia. But police hasn't been idle," he added.

According to Baba Jan, police had seized one ton contraband and some ten smugglers in the last three months. Dr. Mohammad Noor Khawari, head of public health department, acknowledged the number of addicts had doubled and reached 300,000 over the past five years.

Unemployment and insecurity, he said, were the main reasons. Khawari urged the government to build more rehabilitation centres in the province.

Mohammad Razzaq, a farmer in Argo district, said once he stopped poppy cultivation, but the government did not pay any heed to his needs, which forced him to return to poppy production.

He said if the situation continued like this he would have no choice but to continue with the cultivation. This year, at least 4,500 hectares of land were cultivated with poppies, but 1,410 hectares have been cleared.

Counter-Narcotics Director Col. Musadiq says eight heroin labs have been destroyed and three tonnes of drugs, including opium, torched this year. Thirty smugglers were detained.

Afghanistan has more than a million addicts and the country still holds first position in opium production world-wide.

According to Russian officials, out of eight million addicts in the country, 1.5 million use drugs produced in Afghanistan. It is said 70,000 people

lose their lives as a result of drug abuse in Russia. (Pajhwok)

(16) 200 Raisin...

southern and southwestern provinces.

Hamdam said since launched seven years ago, NHP has worked improving quality of various fruits, including grapes. Last year alone, 50 modern raisin processing plants were installed in central and northern provinces for farmers as part of the project.

The proposed plants would introduce new techniques in preserving and producing good quality raisins by replacing outdated techniques farmers currently use.

Construction work on the plants would start early new solar year in Sar-i-Pul, Jawzjan, Balkh, Parwan, Kapisa, Ka-bul, Herat, Samangan and Kunduz provinces.

Each plant is estimated to cost \$8,000, with farmers contributing 25 percent to the expenditure, Hamdam said. Each plant, he continued, would have the capacity of producing 5,000 kilograms of raisin annually. (Pajhwok)

(17) Quran Memorisation...

said the Islamic education centre had eight rooms where 560 students could attend classes simultaneously. In addition to Islamic subjects, students would also study science books, Jafar added. Another education official, Maulvi Mohammad Nabi, said 162 seminaries were functional in the province but they were not registered despite requests from scholars. A teacher at the center, Abdur Rauf, hoped the project would resolve their problems. But he said that a water supply system and a boundary wall were badly needed. He hoped officials would also pay attention to the needs. (Pajhwok)

(18) 11 Militants ...

said gunmen fled the scene after committing the crime. (Pajhwok)

(19) Taliban ...

Wahabi militant in the area.

Habibullah, a tribal elder from Bakhtikot, verified the shrine bombing. "The mausoleum was 200 years old." He said people from Afghanistan and Pakistan often visited the mausoleum. (Pajhwok)

(20) 4 Detained, ...

recovered two kilograms of heroin and 5.5 kilograms of opium from their possession. The detained individuals are being investigated.

He assured residents of better law and order situation and demanded their cooperation to further improve security across the province. (Pajhwok)

(21) Death Toll from...

Kiev launched military operations to silence pro-Russia protests there in mid-April last year. Condemning indiscriminate shelling attacks which have led to major civilian casualties, the UN official urged all the parties involved in the conflict to consider an "utmost priority" the protection of civilians' lives. Back in September 2014, representatives of Ukraine, Russia, and the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Lugansk inked a ceasefire deal in the Belarusian capital, Minsk. The truce has been violated on an almost daily basis by both the Ukrainian military and pro-Russia forces. Violence intensified in May that year after the two flashpoint regions held local referendums in which their residents voted overwhelmingly in favor of independence from Ukraine and joining the Russian Federation. Kiev, the United States and the European Union accuse Moscow of involvement in the chaotic situation in eastern Ukraine and have imposed a series of sanctions against Russian and pro-Russia figures. Moscow rejects the accusation. (Press TV)

(22) Final Nuke ...

10th round of negotiations between Iran and the six world powers was held in Vienna from November 18 to 24, where the seven nations decided to extend the talks until July after they failed to strike an agreement. The latest round of the nuclear talks between the two sides was held at the level of deputy foreign ministers in Geneva, Switzerland, on January 18. The remarks came after the US congress (mostly grabbed by the Republicans) threatened to impose new sanctions against Iran, an issue which has been described as a redline by Tehran in the interim nuclear agreement reached with the world powers in November 2013. In response Zarif and Parliament Speaker Ali Larjani warned that the Iranian legislature would reciprocate any new US sanctions with intensifying nuclear activities, including enriching uranium to the 60% grade for industrial use. (FNA)