

(1) Govt. Committed...

"We are committed to reforms in our system ranging from police salaries to accountability," he remarked, adding Japan could help his country in creating more job opportunities.

Misawa felicitated the president over the formation of the unity government and peaceful transition of power. He also welcomed Afghanistan's active diplomacy and assured his country long-term support for Afghanistan. (Pajhwok)

(2) Govt. Decides...

to try to negotiate with the Taliban to end the war.

Sources say the government has decided to appoint as head of the HPC one from among three influential individuals being considered for the slot to replace Salahuddin Rabbani.

They are Pir Syed Ahmad Gillani, the founder of the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan, Pir Syed Ishaq Gillani, the founder of the National Solidarity Movement of Afghanistan and Anwarul Haq Ahadi, a former minister and elected leader of the Afghan Social Democratic Party. Earlier it was said President Ashraf Ghani is likely to appoint his uncle Dr. Abdul Qayyum Kuchi as the HPC chief, but now it is said he has denied the post citing health issues.

The government sources say Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah wants someone from his camp to replace Rabbani.

They add the president has been given a list carrying several names to choose one of them as the HPC chief. The list includes both the Gillanis and Ahadi and one of them is likely to be chosen, the sources say.

A source close to Ahmad Gillani told Pajhwok Afghan News the spiritual leader had high chances to be appointed as the HPC chief and he had recently increased his visits to the Presidential Palace.

But some sources say the Presidential Palace is likely to appoint Ishaq Gillani due to his close relations with Abdullah and that he is deemed an acceptable choice for the position by the US, the UN and the EU.

But Syed Ishaq Gillani rejected the claim if he had been offered the post during a contact with Pajhwok Afghan News, saying he was unaware of the subject.

A Taliban source said if Hamid Gillani was appointed as the HPC chief, it would help the rebels take a stance on peace parlays.

Political expert Mohammad Hassan Haqyar said non-existence of a strong and sincere peace body resulted in failure of the process. He said positive changes in the policy and leadership of the HPC were direly felt.

He said the peace body should be comprised of individuals acceptable to all parties to the conflict, believing Ishaq Gillani and Ahadi could not be seen impartial because they had served in the government.

But another political analyst, Inayatullah Kakar, said Pir Ishaq Gillani was a neutral person and had spiritual following. His exclusiveness was his acceptance to all jihadi groups, he said.

Kakar said Ishaq Gillani had made efforts in the past for peace and his wife had been an active peace advocate and he had no criminal record.

"Ishaq Gillani maintains international relations and he is regarded as a reasonable politician by neighbouring countries and the Taliban view him as a sincere person." (Pajhwok)

(3) New Swiss ...

further improve ties between the two countries.

Ashraf Ghani wished him success in his new job in Afghanistan.

Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani was also present on the occasion. (Pajhwok)

(4) Taliban Enhances...

greatest economic incentives to oppose any meaningful process of reconciliation with the new [Afghan] Government," the report said.

The Taliban has so far not commented on the report. (VoA)

(5) Work on ...

Township would be constructed on international standards. The location is strategic and the new project can turn into a hub of trade," Massoud said, adding that the government was prepared for the construction of the

township.

Work on the construction of the project was set to begin in April last year, but could not be materialized due to opposition of some influential and violent protests staged by the residents of the locality.

Masood acknowledged that some powerful individual did not want the implementation of the project because it was against their personal interest.

But he assured that the New Kabul Township project would go on and all hurdles would be removed in this connection. (Pajhwok)

(6) ICRC Concerned...

on the battlefields had increased by "30 percent" in 2014, while casualties this year illustrate a two-fold increase than the previous year.

"Last year in 2014 we have seen an increase in our program of evacuation of war wounded by 30 percent," Marti stated.

The Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoI) acknowledged the increased insecurity in 2014, but emphasized that serious plans have been considered in the past few months to ensure security of the citizens.

"We had security issues last year in some of the provinces, but now the situation has improved," MoI spokesman Sediq Sediqqi said. "All the plans that we have considered for the coming spring are aimed at improving the security situation."

ICRC has operated in Afghanistan for the past 25 years to serve the victims of war. The organization warns of worsening conditions of war victims if humanitarian aid is decreased.

(7) PCs Claim...

strengthening democracy, ensuring good governance and combating corruption in provincial departments.

Mangal claimed regional countries in one way or the other were behind lawmakers denying the oversight role to the provincial councils, but said all the councils nationwide had adopted a unified stance over the issue.

The statement said that Huber met with representatives of 18 Provincial Councils from across Afghanistan to reach out and listen to concerns related to the Provincial Council Law.

During the meeting also local governance and EU assistance to all provinces was discussed.

As to the National Unity Government's agenda for sub-national governance, the EU sees the legitimacy of the government to a large extent also depending on local governance, Huber added. Accordingly, the EU in Afghanistan has recently raised this with the relevant Afghan authorities. (Pajhwok)

(8) ADB Pledges...

developing road infrastructure, increasing facilities on transit routes and constructing a 108-kilometre road from Baharak to Ishkashim districts in northeastern Badakhshan province.

The minister thanked ADB for its continued assistance to Afghanistan and assured the bank of transparency in projects during their implementation. The minister said the Public Works Ministry would implement the road projects.

It will be the fourth installment of ADB's assistance for Afghanistan's infrastructure development, explained the minister, who added earlier ADB assistance had helped in completing several projects in the country.

Thomas Panella said they would support a unified strategy on development of transportation systems in Afghanistan.

The bank has so far provided \$1.2 billion in grant to Afghanistan for construction of roads and railway lines. (Pajhwok)

(9) Afghanistan to ...

to find out about, and taste, the world's best dishes, while discovering the best of the agri-food and gastronomic traditions of each of the exhibitor countries. (Wadsam)

(10) Breshna Takes...

investigation," Attorney General spokesman Basir Azizi said. "The attorney will strive to ensure that the bills are paid, but if the money isn't paid, we will introduce the debtors to the court." (Tolnews)

(11) Govt. Employees ...

governor's office and other departments' workers staged the protest in Kart-i-Lagan area of Lashkargah, the provincial capital.

One protester Abdul Samad told Pajhwok Afghan News they had been allotted plots measuring 48 acres of land eight years ago. But the scheme had been put on hold since then under various excuses and in the meantime, boundary walls were built on the plots by high officials during night time in an attempt to grab the land.

"Low ranking employees even cannot complain after they were threatened by the governor and today the employees who attended the demonstration were marked absent."

But deputy mayor Ahmad Masoud Selab rejected the allegations of protesters and said the land belonged to the government and it would be distributed through the municipality to deserving people. He also said a joint commission had been formed to resolve the issue. (Pajhwok)

(12) Militants Find ...

while others joined an insurgent group.

"I know many people who have lost their lives travelling abroad illegally after joining the insurgency because they could not find work," Gholam Rahman, head of the Paktika labour union, said at a debate in the southeastern province's Yusuf Khel district.

Mohammad Wasil, head of youth affairs in Paktika's department for information and culture, said young men were targeted by insurgent groups, but were also drawn to them by the power conferred by weapons.

"The [insurgents] target unemployed youngsters and provide them with weapons, motorbikes and various other benefits, in order to recruit them into their ranks," he told the debate on January 28.

Mohammad Nabi Hamdard, the head of the statistical office in Paktika, said that 35 per cent of young people in the province were unemployed.

"If young people were provided with work... they would not be targeted," he added.

Employment also featured in an IWPR debate hosted by the department for women's affairs in the southern Helmand province on January 24.

"We have educated young people, with bachelor's and master's degree and doctorates, but there is no work for them," said Farid Ahmad Farhang, deputy head of the provincial information and culture department. "Young people are forced to take up arms and fight the government due to the lack of work."

Jamila Niazi, the head of the women's affairs, department, said that "if unemployed young people were provided with work, security would be 90 per cent guaranteed".

In Kunar in eastern Afghanistan, Shafiqullah Wiyar, head of the provincial labour and social affairs department, said the situation there was particularly dire.

"In percentage terms, some 80 per cent may be unemployed," he said, noting that for every vacancy in his own department, there were 30 or 40 applications.

Mohammad Hanif Khairkha, the local government head in Sarkano district, said the government needed to sponsor ambitious scale infrastructure projects as a way of generating jobs.

"When hydroelectric dams are built, factories will be built. When factories are built, people will find work in them," he said. "So I believe it should be a government priority to provide people with job opportunities."

Asked about reintegration programmes for insurgent fighters who defected, Khairkha said, "The government and the public each have a responsibility - the government should work transparently to create jobs, and the public should help raise awareness among young people and prevent them being recruited by the armed opposition." (IWPR)

(13) Resumption of ...

customs offices was not possible. Karbasian put the total export of the country up to Monday at \$44.992 billion and said the figure showed an increase of 22% as compared to the same period last year.

He said gas condensates with \$13.065 billion (43% growth),

petrochemicals with \$12.454 billion (29% growth) and other commodities with \$18.800 billion (7% growth) were the main export items.

China with 26%, Iraq with 17%, the United Arab Emirates with 10%, Afghanistan with 7%, India with 6.7% and other countries with 33% were the major importer countries, he added.

He also said wheat, automobile, corn, rice and soya bean were the main imported items, adding that China with 23%, UAE with 23%, South Korea with 8%, Turkey with 7%, India with 7% and other countries with 30% were the main countries where Iran imported its required commodities. (FNA)

(14) Passport Issuing ...

the documents carefully, which normally takes two weeks time, he added.

Meanwhile, Rahimullah Rahmati, director Religious and Hajj Affairs, said that 472 people had been registered the current year to travel to Saudi Arabia for Hajj. He said the ministry of interior should expedite passports process for pilgrimages to avoid delay in their departure to the holy land.

Acting Governor Abdul Majeed Khogyani asked the ministry of interior to cooperate with provincial passport officials to avoid inordinate delay in passport process. (Pajhwok)

(15) 18 Development...

have benefitted from the development projects, which would multiply economic activities in the area.

Since its inception in the province, the NSP has disbursed 1,501,944,111 afs for implementation of 1,825 infrastructure projects in various sectors such as transport, water and sanitation, irrigation, power, livelihoods and education.

It said that implementation of the projects has enabled thousands of residents of Farah to access basic human needs. (Pajhwok)

(16) Gathering ...

abad.Civil Hospital Director Dr. Humayun Zahir confirmed receiving one body and six injured persons. The injured, he said were in stable condition.

Meanwhile, Education Director Mohammad Asif Shinwari said five students of Bibi Hawa High School have been wounded in the same blast.

According to Shinwari the students were on their way to school when the blast occurred. (Pajhwok)

(17) 1 Dead, Female PC...

become a trend in government departments. Rahmati lamented most people believed they could not get their problems resolved in government offices without paying kickbacks.

He said change in leaderships at local departments held key to eliminating corruption, saying officials holding positions for decades had developed relationships that paved the ground for corruption and illegal demands. (Pajhwok)

(18) Work on Building ...

deprived farmers from irrigation water.

"Stones and sands cannot resist floods and the new dam will help solve our problems," he hoped.

Wazir Khan, a district council member, expressed satisfaction over the construction of the dam and said that residents would maintain security of the project. (Pajhwok)

(19) Attack on Police...

Zabihullah Mujahid who claims to speak for the Taliban outfit in contact with media claimed that a group of suicide bombers stormed the police station in Kunduz city, inflicting huge casualties on police personnel, a claim rejected by Hussiane as baseless.

Hussiane and Interior Ministry spokesman Sediq Sediqi have both rejected Taliban claim, saying all the five attackers had been killed either in their blasts or police shots in just 20 minutes. (Xinhua)

(20) Two Taliban ...

Taliban have not yet commented about the operation so far. (Tolnews)

(21) Killer of ANA ...

cident but their statements are issued about recent achievements. Taliban insurgents in different

parts of the country occasionally establish checkpoints to find soldiers and other government officials and abduct them.

Hundreds, possibly thousands of soldiers and other government officials have been martyred this way by the Taliban insurgents after the fall of their government in 2001. (KP)

Egyptian Army Kills 22 Militants in Sinai

NORTH SINAI - At least 22 militants have been killed as the Egyptian army launched several raids on their hideouts in northern Sinai province, a security official said on Tuesday.

The army killed 15 Jihadists in an air raid late on Monday in three villages of Sheikh Zuweid city, the official told Xinhua on condition of anonymity, adding that three militants were killed and eight others arrested in clashes with the armed forces on Tuesday.

Also, the armed forces targeted with a motor shell a car carrying militants, killing four of them.

The militants, disguised in military uniform, were forcing the passers-by to stop to inspect them, the official said. Killing civilians by extremists has become common in the Sinai Peninsula over accusations of spying for either the Egyptian or the Israeli army, the official added.

Egypt's armed forces have been battling an insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula since the ouster of Islamist President Mohamed Morsi in July, 2013. So far, hundreds of police officers and soldiers have been killed in armed attacks in response to a government crackdown on Morsi's supporters that left hundreds dead. Thousands of Morsi supporters have been jailed.

Sinai-based al-Qaida-inspired Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM) group, which recently pledged allegiance to the Islamic State militant group, claimed responsibility for most of the attacks against security forces in the Sinai Peninsula.

The ABM group, which was founded in 2011, was designated as a terror organization by Egypt and the United States.

Security forces have been intensifying anti-terror military operations in Sinai in the wake of recent attacks on security forces that killed at least 33 people late January.

On Monday, the ABM released a video purporting to show the beheading of 10 Bedouin men, over allegations of providing the Egyptian army with information about their bases.

The video, posted on the group's Twitter account, also showed the assassination of two Egyptian soldiers by masked militants in Arish.

After two years of attacks against security forces in Sinai, the extremists turned to kidnap and behead civilians.

In early January, seven kidnapped civilians were found dead, three of them beheaded, on Rafah-Arish international road.

In the latest video, one of the victims confessed to spying for the Israeli army.

According to Mohamed Nour al-Din, former interior minister aide, the video was meant to "terrorize residents of Sinai, to push them away from cooperating with security forces" after the army managed recently to erode the ABM influence in the Peninsula. (Xinhua)

Nigerien Parliament Approves Troops Deployment

NIAMEY - Nigerien Parliament on Monday unanimously approved deployment of troops to Nigeria alongside other forces from neighboring countries to fight against Boko Haram sect.

Nigerien Constitution stipulates that before deployment of the country's defense and security forces for external operations, the government must

get parliamentary approval.

The approval comes at a time when Niger's eastern regions of Bosso and Diffa that neighbor Nigeria, have come under persistent attacks since last Friday from Boko Haram which has been operating from its Nigerian bases.

The attacks have caused a total of seven deaths among the defense and security forces, and left many civilians and soldiers injured.

The attacks were quickly contained by Nigerien forces, assisted by their Chadian counterparts. During the confrontation, about 100 Boko Haram fighters were killed, security sources said.

A total of 8,700 soldiers from countries neighboring Nigeria, mainly Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin are expected to be deployed to Northern Nigeria to fight against Boko Haram which, since 2009, has killed over 15,000 people.

Niger's Speaker Hamadou Salifou said by authorizing the troops deployment to Nigeria, Niger will be responding to at least three cardinal principles; guaranteeing the security of its citizens, expressing solidarity with a friendly country, Nigeria, and honoring its international engagements by promptly responding to the African Union call for the creation of a regional force to fight against Boko Haram. (Xinhua)

Oil to Remain At \$55 in 2015: IEA

PARIS - The International Energy Agency, IEA, said on Tuesday that it predicts the price of Brent oil to remain at an average of \$55 a barrel throughout 2015.

The IEA, in a report titled "Medium-Term Oil Market Report", said Brent will only climb to \$60 in 2016, adding that the benchmark is not expected to surge anywhere above \$73 before 2020.

The report emphasized that rapid slide in oil prices over the last nine months will not last much longer. However, it added that the rebound will be limited and won't feature prices at the heights of the last three years.

IEA's price assumptions mark a steep downgrade from its last year's report, when prices of \$100 a barrel in 2015 and 2016 were expected.

Oil prices have slumped more than 50% since June amid a surge in oil supply led by U.S. shale oil production and sluggish demand.

This has already taken a toll on the oil industry, with project delays, layoffs and cancelled spending. The economic impact of lower prices on the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has been severe.

OPEC said Monday that demand for its oil will increase to 29.2 million barrels a day this year. That is still below the group's output quota of 30 million barrels a day, but a significant upward revision from previous forecasts. (Press TV)

UK Prison Vote Ban Breaches Rights: European Court

LONDON - The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that the rights of more than a thousand prisoners in Britain were breached when they were prevented from voting in elections. The case was brought by inmates who were behind bars during various elections between 2009 and 2011.

The court ruled Tuesday that Britain's policy of banning convicted prisoners from voting violated the right to a free election - a decision consistent with its previous calls for a legal change in Britain. However, the court rejected the applicants' claims for compensation and legal costs.

The ruling does not compel Britain to change its law to give voting rights to prisoners. On Tuesday, the Ministry of Justice said it believed the topic "should ultimately be decided in the U.K." (AP)