

### (1) Problematic ...

to fine contract violators and these regulations will be soon introduced."

The minister said old contracts were being thoroughly investigated and those having problems would be cancelled. Expressing his concern over the lack of security environment, transparency and accountability to monitor contracts, Saba said it was not possible for the Ministry of Mines to develop the mining industry.

Saba said the most problematic sector was coal mines where most law violations were taking place, but there was no law governing the coalmines sector. "Reforming all sectors will take time, it may take another three years for the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum to become an effective organ."

According to the Ministry of Mines, the TAPI gas pipeline project will be completed until 2019 and the gas will be started supplying through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India in 2020. Saba said the commencement of TAPI project was a great achievement for the Afghanistan Ministry of Mines as the much-awaited project was finally launched due to efforts by the ministry.

He also said the Jablus Siraj cement factory, which had been closed for 20 years, was being revived due to his ministry's efforts and the factory would practically start producing cement this solar year.

The factory's revival would produce jobs for hundreds of people. (Pajhwok)

### (2) UN Condemn...

The Taliban, who have been battling the government for over 15 years, mainly recruit children in provinces bordering Pakistan and other areas where the fighting is fiercest, she said.

Noting that the majority of Afghanistan's population is younger than 18, Zerrougui said child soldiers are "deprived of the minimum of their basic rights."

"They are not going to school, they are deprived of access to health. They are targeted by armed groups and they are prevented from having hope for the future."

Zerrougui spoke to reporters a day after the New York-based Human Rights Watch released a report accusing Taliban forces of boosting the number of children in their ranks since the middle of last year, in violation of international laws.

The report said insurgents "have been training and deploying children for various military operations" in Afghanistan, including making and deploying bombs.

It found that children between the ages of 13 and 17 were given military training in madrassas, or religious schools. Boys began indoctrination as young as six years old, and by the time they were 13 "have learned military skills including use of firearms, and the production and deployment of IEDs," a term for roadside bombs, HRW said.

It said the Taliban had recruited child fighters since the 1990s, but had expanded the practice with new madrassas and training centers in the country's north. The Taliban condemned the HRW report in an emailed statement Wednesday, saying that it banned the recruitment of children as fighters.

The use of child soldiers is illegal in Afghanistan, which ratified the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994, committing the country to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Despite the downward trend marked by the U.N., the government is still struggling to curtail the practice. Earlier this month, officials confirmed that a 10-year-old boy had who had been declared a hero after fighting the Taliban was shot dead by insurgents while on his way to school. Child Soldiers International, a London-based charity, accused the government in a report released last June of slow progress in dealing with child soldier

recruitment. The report, which was presented to the U.N. Security Council's working group on children and armed conflict, said recruitment was mainly driven by poverty, but also filial duty, patriotism and honor. (AP)

### (3) Afghan Taliban...

Gossman said.

The Taliban had briefly overrun the provincial capital of Kunduz during its offensive operations in the north in September.

The findings are based on interviews it conducted with relatives of 13 children recruited as Taliban soldiers during the past year, says HRW, adding it verified these claims through interviews with civil society activists, political analysts and the United Nations.

Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, in a written statement sent to reporters has denied it is adding children to its ranks.

"Children are neither recruited nor allowed to participate in Taliban jihadi activities in the battlefield or even in its administrative affairs," Mujahid asserted.

Child civilian casualties The United Nations says conflict in Afghanistan continues to have a devastating impact on children and it continues to record high levels of child civilian casualties.

U.N. Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui visited Afghanistan this week to review implementation of an Action Plan the Afghan government signed with the United Nations in 2011 and a road map to compliance in 2014 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in its national security forces.

Speaking to reporters in Kabul at the end of her five-day trip on Tuesday, she said Afghan officials recognize there is a problem and they are in the process of addressing it.

"People recognize that they have shortcoming that they have lack of capacity that they are acting under very difficult and complex circumstances that they are dealing with competing priorities and they do not have always the resources, expertise and the capacity to cover them all. So, this for me is half of the work done," said Zerrougui. (VoA)

### (4) Upcoming EU ...

binding decision by the 28 European leaders.

The summit will also focus on issues including migration, Syria and Libya.

The leaders will discuss all the elements of the EU's response to the migration and refugee crisis, focusing particularly on the state of implementation of the orientations agreed in December.

The summit is expected to underline the need to protect external borders, fully apply the Schengen Borders Code and further accelerate work on the European Border and Coast Guard proposal.

The EU leaders are expected to welcome access for Syrian refugees to Turkey's labor market and initial steps to implement the EU-Turkey Action plan, while calling for further efforts to stem migration flows from Turkey and tackle traffickers and smugglers networks. (Xinhua)

### (5) Japan, UNICEF ...

mortality in Afghanistan."

Iyer, who received the grant, hoped: "Provision of these vaccines will make a tremendous difference in our joint efforts to reduce infant and child mortality in Afghanistan." "While great progress has been made in recent years, this country still has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world, with one child in every 10 dying before their fifth birthday..." he added. Chief Representative of JICA Afghanistan Office Eiichiro Cho remarked: "It is doubtless that 2016 marks the most important year for the polio eradication initiative not only in Afghanistan but also globally. JICA is committed to assist the government's effort toward eradication of the disease..." (Pajhwok)

### (6) Seven People ...

medicine department and the incident is under investigation" said MoI spokesman Sediq Seddiqi.

The incident, which was kept under wraps for four days, has sparked concern among residents in the area who have called for a full investigation into the matter. (Tolonews)

### (7) Etisalat Afghanistan ...

bottom to the customer experience, are some of the key elements of Etisalat success story.

Etisalat management reiterated that the company would remain committed to help individuals/business to increase their profitability with their cutting-edge digital technology, invest in innovation and empower the people of Afghanistan to move to a better tomorrow. (PR)

### (8) Baghlan Violence...

But those whose personal interests are at stake say the insurgents have been given privileges."

Without naming anyone, he alleged the pact had been violated by the elements whose financial interests were under threat from the implementation of the agreement that did not provide concessions for the militants.

Article 9 of the agreement says: "If security and intelligence organs find documentary evidence against a suspect, he/she would be treated in accordance with the law of the land."

If allowed by President Ashraf Ghani, Mangal is ready to sign similar pacts in other parts of the country for the improvement of security. People were very happy during the first three days, he said, adding power pylons would not have damaged if the deal had not been violated.

A security operation is underway in Dand-i-Ghori and Dand-i-Shahabuddin areas for the past few days. According to reports, a large number of people have suffered casualties in the ongoing offensive.

Peace & tribal elders A number of Afghans underline the need for giving tribal elders a proactive role in the government-led reconciliation process -- an issue that has been paid no attention.

Mangal also supported tribal elders' involvement in the peace process. The elders should be made a bridge between the fighters and the government, as they lived among the local people. "Those tribal elders who feel insecure or have bad track records could do nothing."

"First and foremost, we must have a strong will to enforce peace -- a process that stems from the people, not from the rulers" the minister remarked. Tribal elders were aware of people's problems and thus they could play a good role in the peace process, he believed.

"Some of the rebels are not ideological opponents of the government, but they are obsessive opponents, because their demands are rejected and they are sidelined. As a result, they are averse to the government," Mangal explained.

"Whenever I visit rural areas and villages, I tell tribal elders we should focus on local support for the peace process. Tribal elders' involvement can ensure real and lasting peace," insisted Mangal, who has also served as Helmand governor.

He went on to ask the government to pay greater attention to the protection of tribal elders, who had lately been terrorised -- something that could create widen the distance between the government and the people. Pakistani ID cards

Pajhwok's findings show Pakistani border forces entered 15 kilometers inside Afghanistan in the Angor Ada area of southern Paktika province. They have been asking local residents to get Pakistani ID cards. Similarly, Pakistani security officials in the Torkham border town also offer identity cards to residents of eastern Nangarhar province. The ID cards are issued for six months if a Pakistani national stands guarantee for the recipient.

Mangal said he was aware of such ID cards issued to Afghans

and occupation of some areas by Pakistani forces. But he insisted only a limited number of people had received the cards. The issue has been shared with the president and the National Security Council (NSC).

Mangal was pretty convinced that true Afghans would never accept Pakistani ID cards, because they did not want to lose their own identity. However, he thought some people might have received the cards under compulsion.

"Unfortunately, we don't have cooperative neighbours. Those meddling in our internal affairs are harming themselves," the minister said, when asked which border offered cause for concern. (Pajhwok)

### (9) Pakistan Probe ...

Kunar province abutting Pakistan before being assigned to govern Herat. However, President Ashraf Ghani months ago removed him from office in a bid to improve provincial governance.

The missing Afghan politician is a vocal critic of Pakistan's alleged interference in Afghan internal affairs and its secret support to the Taliban insurgency, charges Islamabad denies.

Taliban denies involvement The Taliban has denied involvement in the kidnapping.

"There are enough problems for us [the Taliban] to deal with inside Afghanistan and our policy also does not allow us to conduct operations on a foreign soil," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told VOA when asked whether the insurgent group was behind the abduction of former Afghan governor.

Criminal gangs are blamed for acts like kidnapping for ransom in parts of Pakistan, particularly the largest city and commercial hub, Karachi. But such crimes are not common in the nation's capital.

Officials do not rule out the possibility of internal Afghan rivalries. Extremists linked to the Pakistani Taliban who are waging a bloody insurgency against the state could also be behind Wahidi's kidnapping.

However, some Pakistani officials and critics appear unhappy over the former Afghan governor's arrival in the country without giving prior information to local authorities to ensure his personal security. (VoA)

### (10) Power Pylons ...

Pajhwok their technical team was only 200 metres from the location in northern Baghlan province where the pylons were blown up by the insurgents.

Ahmad Javed, a resident of the Wazghari village of Dand-i-Shahabuddin area, said the militants had left the area, which was currently being controlled by security forces.

Government officials accused the Taliban of destroying the pylons, while the rebels denied the allegation and said the towers had been hit by rockets fired Afghan forces.

On the other hand, Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid claimed the fighters had inflicted 19 casualties on soldiers and destroyed three tanks in Dand-i-Shahabuddin. He said two militants were also injured. (Pajhwok)

### (11) Maimana ...

ground and don't know what happened later on."

He blamed the government for failing to improve the security situation, saying people had no one to lodge their complaints with. The explosion shattered windowpanes in four shops and a vehicle.

Provincial police chief, Col. Syed AqaAndarabi, said he had come to hospital along with the governor and other officials to donate blood to the injured. "Militants shed the blood of people and we donate blood to them."

Security officials, meanwhile, accused militants of involvement in the incident, but no group so far claimed responsibility for the attack.

It was the third explosion happening in front of crowded Azizi Bank branch in Faryab during the past one year. At least 10 people had been killed and 30

others injured in the two early blasts.

According to the latest UN report, 3,545 Afghan civilians were killed and 7,457 others wounded in 2015. It said civilian casualties increased to a record high last year, showing a four percent increase over 2014. (Pajhwok)

### (12) 51 Suspected ...

their birds." Sources said however, that security forces would not allow the media to photograph the foreigners after they arrived.

A source said that when the foreign hunters landed at Herat airport their plane was held for an hour but then the foreigners were allowed to disembark and received a warm welcome from Herat airport officials.

Azimi said however, "these Arab men have projects in Farah province and they are investing in these projects and these men are transferring workers that they have hired to work on the projects in Farah province."

This comes after a foreign registered plane believed to be from the UAE landed in Herat late last year reportedly without clearance. Ten high-end vehicles and other goods were seized by officials and a number of passengers were detained.

The vehicles and the detainees were subsequently released on orders of government.

The practice of illegal falconry in the western parts of the country has raised concerns in the past. However, Herat officials maintain that the mostly-Arab visitors are there on official business regarding projects they are investing in. (Tolonews)

### (13) Dozens of ...

As well as the fighting in Helmand, Taliban operations in the northern provinces of Jowzjan, Kunduz and Baghlan have also severely stretched government forces and caused heavy casualties over recent days.

In the worst incident in Helmand this week, insurgents in captured military Humvee vehicles packed with explosives launched a suicide attack on a checkpoint in the district center of Sangin on Sunday, killing seven soldiers and 15 policemen.

Nine soldiers were also killed in combat in Sangin, while another nine died in fighting in Musa Qalah district, northeast of Sangin, the officials said. In other incidents, 10 policemen were killed fighting in Gereshk, a road junction north of the district capital LashkarGah, while two more were killed on Monday night in Khan Nashim in the south of the province by a man wearing a police uniform.

The Taliban, which the United States now estimates controls or threatens around a third of the country, have overrun large parts of Helmand, leaving beleaguered government forces in district centers like Sangin and Marjah barely clinging on to a few official buildings.

Heavily mined roads have prevented reinforcements and supplies arriving, leaving many units cut off.

"Right now, some 250 police and 300 soldiers are surrounded by Taliban in Marjah and our forces are providing them support from the air," one of the officials said. "Roads to Sangin are mostly blocked with explosive devices and we cannot send reinforcements."

The outgoing U.S. commander in Afghanistan, Gen. John Campbell, recently ordered several hundred American troops to the province to bolster the defense, although they will be restricted to an advisory role unless they come under attack themselves. (Reuters)

### (14) 2 Injured, as ...

police district, said a second shop was also torched. A loss of nearly 100,000 afghanis was inflicted on shop owners, he reckoned.

He said the firefighters, informed at around 7:58am, arrived in the area at 8:03am. The fire was extinguished in time, otherwise it could have damaged nearby shops, he added. (Pajhwok)

### (15) Turkey Accuses...

not target Islamic State (IS) group but opposition groups fighting against the Syrian regime.

On the same day, the Kremlin dismissed accusations of Russian air forces in Syria attacking hospitals, calling the allegation unacceptable and baseless.

"We categorically deny and do not accept such statements, especially because those who make such statements are unable to prove their allegations in any way," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. (Xinhua)

### (16) U.S. F-22 Stealth...

about two hours. The fly-over came in the wake of the DPRK's launch on Feb. 7 of a long-range rocket, which Pyongyang claimed was a peaceful space program but which Seoul and Washington denounced as a prohibited test of ballistic missile technology, followed by the fourth nuclear test on Jan. 6.

Four days after the DPRK's nuclear detonation last month, the U.S. military sent a long-range B-52 bomber, capable of delivering nuclear bombs, over South Korea's airspace from the U.S. air base in Guam. (Xinhua)

### (17) Syrian President...

Local community advertisement campaigns have started mushrooming in the capital Damascus, urging the young men to join the military service. (Xinhua)

### (18) U.S. Needs ...

the U.S. president tried to hype up the differences among regional countries including China. But China and the South China Sea were not mentioned in the joint statement, a clear indication that ASEAN refused to allow the meeting to be hijacked by the U.S. (Xinhua)

### (19) G20 Trade...

of trade ministers and the working group will allow G20 members to hold in-depth talks on topics including trade and investment mechanisms, global trade expansion and multilateral trading system development. Efforts will be made to let the G20 play a bigger role in global economic and trade governance, fighting trade protectionism and driving global trade back to strong growth, Shen said. (Xinhua)

### (20) Austria to ...

90,000 it received last year. Around 90 percent of the migrants, many of them fleeing conflict in the Middle East, keep heading north after entering Austria, trying to reach Germany and other destinations, authorities say. (Reuters)

### (21) Suicide Bomber...

escaped unharmed from a gun attack by Al-Qaeda militants on their convoy.

Three of the attackers were killed and four guards protecting the convoy were wounded in a gunfight, according to the governor's aide. (AFP)

### (22) Australian PM ...

Key's offer. "John Key will be here tomorrow," Turnbull told reporters in Brisbane. "He is a very good friend of Australia. We will be talking about these issues together, but I don't want to foreshadow any changes to our policy."

Australia's tough immigration policies provide that anyone intercepted while trying to reach the country by boat is sent for processing to camps in Nauru and Papua New Guinea's Manus Island. They are never eligible to be resettled in Australia. (Reuters)

### (23) U.S.-ASEAN ...

When asked to comment on Obama's remarks, Hong said the United States is not a party concerned with the South China Sea issue and should be cautious with its words and actions.

He said the United States should help create a sound atmosphere for talks and the pursue of a peaceful solution to disputes, rather than playing up tensions and sowing discord in the region. (Xinhua)