

(1) Obama Calls

around the world to remain unwavering in the fight against terrorist organization and said that as a result of Thursday's ministerial-level meeting, many partners agreed to deepen cooperation against foreign terrorist fighters by sharing more information and making it harder for fighters to travel to and from Syria and Iraq.

Meanwhile, like Wednesday's speech, Obama sought to strike a balance between raising vigilance against those who starts getting radicalized and a sense of inclusiveness for different faiths.

"We have to ensure that our diverse societies truly welcome and respect people of all faiths and backgrounds, and leaders set the tone on this issue," he said, stressing that hatred towards people with different faith "feeds into terrorist narratives." (Xinhua)

(2) Officials Mark

jhwok Afghan News at least 300 Afghan refugees had returned from Pakistan after an attack on a military school in Peshawar.

About two months ago, at least 150 people were killed and 142 others wounded in an attack on a military school in Peshawar. Pakistani security forces started harassing and forcing Afghan refugees to leave the country after the incident.

Faqiri added that so far 5,400 families with only 500 of them having legal documents had returned from Pakistan. Most of the families returned belonged to eastern province but some of them are the residents of Kabul, Logar, Paktia and Paktika province, he added.

Each of the families would receive an amount of \$195 to buy their needs after they registered with the government, Faqiri said.

"Currently 8,000 families live in Shaikh Mesri and Chamtali townships in Nangarhar province. But we have no more capacity for new refugees for now," he said, adding that 3,000 acres of land had been allocated for refugees in Behsood district but work on the project was yet to be started.

The governor's spokesman Ahmad Zia Abdulzai said there was no more capacity for returning refugees in the province and the government must take measures to provide facilities for new returnees.

"The number of returning refugees has been increasing everyday and most of them interested to live in Nangarhar. There is no extra capacity in the city as it becomes congested," Abdulzai said.

He said that the acting governor has shared the issue with the president during a video conference last week. President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani has ordered relevant organs to visit Nangarhar and find solution to the refugees' problems. (Pajhwok)

(3) Nangarhar Mayor

(IDLG) said. IDLG spokesman Tawab Ghorzang told Pajhwok Afghan News late on Thursday that the mayor had been removed from his position by his department after President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani's orders.

The president wanted people of Nangarhar be served in a better way, he said, adding that deputy mayor had been assigned additional charge as acting mayor of the province.

New mayor, he said would be introduced soon. Some days back, the president held a video conference with governors of eastern provinces in which Attaullah Ludin, the governor of Nangarhar, complained about the inefficiency of the mayor. (Pajhwok)

(4) DAB Branch

Police officials in Kandahar say an investigation has been initiated into the incident.

The exact amount taken by the staff members of Spin Boldak Branch is not identified yet but Fazal Ahmad Azimi, General Manager of Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB) in Kandahar says that there were over 50 million of Afghans in the bank by the time the incident took place, adding that the wall locker of the branch was locked following the robbery until further instructions.

He said that the robbery was done by Spin Boldak Branch Manager Sayed Agha and two other staff members of the branch.

Azimi added that the incident took place Tuesday following which the staff members of Spin Boldak Branch escaped to Pakistan which is on the border with Spin Boldak.

He said that the robbers have taken their families with them to Pakistan. (KP)

(5) Kerry Sees

an unprecedented level of effort

to try to produce cooperation. And thus far, there are some signs of real results with respect to that," Kerry told reporters in a joint media appearance with the Pak Interior Minister Nishar Ali Khan.

Kerry said that the two Pakistani leaders are committed to going after terrorists, all forms of extremism in Pakistan. "We are grateful for Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's commitment to this, for General Raheel's efforts. They've been real. And they are making good on that in their initiatives in the western part of the country and elsewhere, and in their cooperation on counterterrorism. They are committed to the evolution of their own democracy, to the strengthening of it, and to trying to be a partner in the region for peace and stability of the region," he said.

Kerry said after the meeting that "...we have a lot of challenges. A lot has happened in the last year's that has emboldened some of the extremists. It's something that Pakistan is deeply concerned about. We've had long conversations about it. I look forward to continuing the cooperative effort on the economy as well as the cooperative effort in counterterrorism and democracy building." Khan said there are a number of positive developments which have taken place over the last few weeks and over the last few months which point to a very positive outlook for US-Pakistan relationship and for their joint fight against extremism. "Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have never been better, and that is a very, very positive development. I think Afghanistan and Pakistan working in close hands and in close cooperation, it will do wonders for the cooperation in the field of counterterrorism," he said. (Pajhwok)

(6) Elections without

Afghanistan's strongest allies, is a major contributor of financial aid, and has assisted Afghan authorities in past elections.

When asked about whether the national unity government should hold parliamentary elections scheduled for June, Ambassador Stagg said: "I think it would be a big mistake until you have got properly organized and reformed institutions." "I personally think that it will take quite a long time get to a new arrangement for running an election which gives people confidence, that won't suffer the same problems as the last three elections, all of which were seen by the people of Afghanistan as fraudulent and producing outcomes that were not very legitimate," he added.

"It is not in Afghanistan's interest to rush into elections, particularly when the last election has not yet been fully resolved," Ambassador Stagg said. "We haven't yet got a government from an election that started on April 5, 2014."

Despite the fact that electoral reform was a key component of the agreement that brought President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah together to form the national unity government, no action has yet been taken on reforming the country's electoral system. Now there is growing clamor for reform among Afghan civil society groups and the international community.

How best to go about that reform remains a question unanswered, though. The Afghan government seems bent on forming a collaborative reform commission, but seems hung up on selecting those to comprise it.

"My personal view is that your interest may be in approaching this quiet slowly and actually deciding through quiet a lot of discussion to decide what is the right mechanism to embed democracy in a slower timeline than people might wish, I think you should focus on quality not speed," Ambassador Stagg said. According to a member of the committee selecting individuals for the intended Electoral Reform Commission, discussions about electoral reform have already been conducted with national and international institutions, including the European Union and the United Nations. It is not expected representatives from the Presidential Palace, Chief Executive's office and civil society groups will be a part of the commission. "We hope that in the next week, the Electoral Reform Commission will be formed," selection committee member Muhammad Nateqi told TOLONews. "Government spokesmen had a meeting with civil society institutions yesterday, where they announced that the commission might be formed on Wednesday."

On Wednesday, election monitoring groups and other civil society organizations were said to have sub-

mitted the names of their 11 desired representatives to the Presidential Palace. "We want the national unity government not to keep the representatives of civil society groups in the margins and they must keep them involved in the decision making process," Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan head Yousuf Rasheed said.

The reform commission was expected to be formed after the government's cabinet was assembled. However, with the cabinet still incomplete, it appears now the reform commission has been substituted as a top working priority. (Tolonews)

(7) Accusations of

the new government. The Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee has banded together with Provincial Council leaders from around Afghanistan to call attention to the malfeasance of Acting Governors and lobby Kabul for new appointments.

Since the national unity government was formed last September, only three governors have been introduced - one in Kunduz, one in Farah and one in Paktika province. The remaining 31 provinces of the country continue to be governed by appointments made by Hamid Karzai.

"At the moment, in Zabul, most of our local officials are accused of having a hand in corruption and there is no observation or any accountability to the central government," Zabul Provincial Council head Atta Muhammad Haq Wayand said on Thursday.

The Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, headed up by Ahmad Rashed Behroz, has ratcheted up the pressure on the central government, suggesting the acting governors and their behavior is directly contributing to the deterioration of rule of law and government credibility in many parts of the country. "We have our concerns," Mr. Behroz told TOLONews. "With the continuation of acting governors in the provinces, accountability and transparency will be questioned, and that is why we are concerned."

Meanwhile, the national unity government has done much the same of what they did when questions were raised around the delay in forming the cabinet: defended themselves as being more focused on quality appointments than speedy ones.

"Our work is ongoing regarding the governors...as you have seen, some of the governors have been introduced and work is ongoing for other provinces as well," national unity government deputy spokesman Jawed Faisal said. "The government will introduce the governors after evaluating them."

However, for those living in provinces where local governance has ground to a halt, promises of ongoing work and rigor in evaluations means little in the face of their immediate problems. Ishaq, a resident of Daikundi, told TOLONews that he has spent months trying to seek justice against a man who murdered his father, but officials have done nothing. "I really searched, I wrote a lot of applications, but when I go to the province, nothing was done and criminals are freely moving around in Daikundi and Ghor," Ishaq said. According to Provincial Council members around the country, due to the lack of oversight power they have, customs revenues have also been embezzled by the spillover governors' administrations. (Tolonews)

(8) Ghani Prepares

coalition, the Taliban's nemesis since being ousted in 2001, wrapped up its combat mission at the end of 2014. What is more of a surprise, however, is that Pakistan, long regarded with suspicion and animosity by Afghan leaders, appears to have taken the critical steps needed to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table.

According to senior Pakistani military and political officials, preliminary meetings, intended to pave the way for the ones expected to happen with Afghan leaders, began between U.S. officials and the Taliban on Thursday in Qatar. They are expected to continue on Friday. Meanwhile, in preparation for negotiations with the insurgent group, President Ghani has already met separately with former President Hamid Karzai, a number of Afghan Jihadi leaders, his Vice Presidents, tribal elders and a number of women's advocacy groups.

Previously, a number of political parties and Jihadi figures criticized the government's strategy in pursuing peace talks. But with the news of talks on the horizon, and clearly improved relations with Pakistan,

many have expressed new support for the national unity government.

"The president has taken firm steps to bring peace, we are a part of them and we support them," Mahaz Millie Deputy Chairman Sayed Hamid Geelani said on Thursday. "That is why the president has met with Peer sahib and other jihadist figures and has done some consultations, so that the talks are held constructively and the nation is represented with the cooperation of all figures."

According to those who met with Ghani, the president is keen on making the peace process as transparent as possible. "The president has mentioned in his talks that the peace talks will not be held in secret and details of the process will be shared with the people," said Sayed Husain Anwari, Chairman of the Hezb Harakati Islami political party.

Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah has also assured that the peace process will be open and geared toward preserving the gains of the past 13 years. "The national unity government is committed to proceed with the peace process program, but it must be in transparency," Abdullah said. "It should be through a program that will protect the achievements and dignity of the people of Afghanistan and will not result in insecurity."

The biggest remaining concerns when it comes to the peace process seem to reside among women's advocacy and human rights groups, who fear a deal with the Taliban could mean sacrificing some of the social and legal progress the country has made since 2001.

"We support the peace talks, but the national unity government must consider women in these peace talks and women must be included in the decision making process," Afghan Women Network member Sonila Aslami told TOLONews.

Afghan officials have said the talks expected in the coming weeks will be held between representatives of the Afghan government and Taliban in either Islamabad, Kabul, Beijing or Dubai. (Tolonews)

(9) Pakistan Reiterates

could soon be a move towards reconciliation with Taliban opening direct talks with the Ashraf Ghani government in a departure from their longstanding position of not engaging Kabul.

Pakistani authorities lately renewed their efforts to nudge Taliban towards dialogue with the Afghan government and seem encouraged by the initial response from the insurgent leadership.

There is also regional support for the process. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi had during his visit to Islamabad last week offered to "facilitate and play constructive role" in reconciliation. He had also appreciated Pakistan's role vis-à-vis Afghanistan and said: "Pakistan has an irreplaceable role in resolving the Afghan issue. Pakistan has a strong will for playing a constructive role for its resolution."

Relationship between Islamabad and Kabul, particularly security and intelligence cooperation, has improved markedly since Ashraf Ghani succeeded Hamid Karzai in the presidency. Kabul cooperated with Pakistani authorities in an unprecedented way after the tragic Peshawar school incident. But now Afghanistan is looking towards Pakistan for helping it reach a settlement with the Taliban insurgents, besides other security steps for preventing the militants from using Pakistani soil for launching attacks in upcoming fighting season. (Pajhwok)

(10) Gen. Raheel

operation against militants in both the countries.

Gen. Raheel along with Director General (DG) of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Lt. Gen. Rizwan Akhtar arrived in Kabul on Tuesday for a one-day official visit.

The government had said messages conveyed in talks with President Ashraf Ghani by a visiting Pakistani delegation were positive and reflected Islamabad's resolve toward cooperation with Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism.

According to media reports Gen. Raheel Sharif on Wednesday met a military commission of the US congress and discussed issues related to terrorism and his recent visit to Afghanistan.

Gen. Sharif told US congress men that Pakistan was not favoring any militant outfit. "Our armed forces have been fighting terrorist groups in the North Waziristan Agency (NWA) irrespective of whom they are and where they belong to." He informed the visiting US delegation that army dismantled Tahrir-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) network in

the tribal area and a large swath of the lawless region was under army control. (Pajhwok)

(11) Taliban Refute

2013, aimed at talking to the US ahead of withdrawal of most American troops the following year.

The reports of talks between Taliban and US come at a time when President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani had held meetings with former president Hamid Karzai, Jihadi commander Pir Sayed Ahmad Gilani, Ismail Khan, his two vice presidents and other tribal elders in Kabul the other day, a statement from the palace said.

During the course of meeting, the president noted that all stakeholders would be onboard regarding any development of talks with Taliban. It has been decided that the president would hold meetings with people from different walks of life. (Pajhwok)

(12) US Refutes

reconciliation process which can lead to a stable and secure Afghanistan," Psaki said. (Pajhwok)

(13) Marble Traders

from across the globe and establish business linkages.

In order to give impetus to Afghanistan's Stone industry, FICCI arranged to set up 16 stalls for the Afghanistan pavilion under the Trade Commerce and Investment Confidence Building Measures of Heart of Asia process. During the exhibition and follow up visits to marble processing facilities in Rajasthan, a total of \$ 12 million worth potential deals for 16 Afghan businesses were materialized. Two Afghan businesses identified machineries for cutting and polishing of marble from Rajasthan Udyog, an Indian machinery manufacturer. These machineries are expected to be shipped in the course of next three to four months. Center for Development of Stones (CDOS), a premiere institution for development of stone industry in India expressed willingness to work with Afghan businesses and institutions to build capacity in this sector. R K marble, one of the largest producers of marble in India, has shown interest to buy as much marble as it can be supplied by Afghan businesses. USAID/ATAR also organized a visit to three factories in India coinciding with Afghan participation in India Stone Mart. This was very successful and generated interest among participants to invest in machineries for cutting and polishing. FICCI, ATAR and Afghan Marble Association have also planned to organize a capacity building program for Afghan Marble Industry with assistance from UK AID (DFID) and USAID / ATAR.

Afghanistan Marble industry is still at a nascent stage and modern excavation techniques are not in vogue. This sector is growing at a rate of 60% annually since 2008, according to AISA. Afghanistan has huge deposit of Marble and granite but investment in this sector remained poor primarily due to lack of favorable enabling environment, security situation and lack of information to potential investors in these sectors. USGS GPS survey 2009 reported Afghanistan has 66 marble and granite reserves and according to some studies Afghanistan has 9 billion tons of reserves. US Geological Survey estimated Afghanistan's marble reserve to the tune of \$ 200 billion. Afghanistan's current production is estimated to be over 200,000 tons and has the potential to grow exponentially.

Afghan marble producers have not invested to improve the quality. Afghan quarries mostly employ blasting method for extraction as opposed to modern methods. Cutting and polishing is mostly done using hammers. Investment in machinery and technology will improve the quality of Afghan marble that can fetch premium price in the world market.

(PR)

(14) Access to

problems which need to be addressed."

Karokhel said purpose of the new draft was aimed at making journalists and common people access easy to information. (Pajhwok)

(15) Ghani Comments

statement said that Pakistan, Afghanistan and other regional states were willing to sincerely work together against the menace of terror. (Pajhwok)

(16) ANSF Launch

forces, police special forces, special military forces and 13 helicopters for air support. "This operation is not a day or two task," Commander of the

604th Zone Afghan Border Police Gen. Sultan Mahmood said. "This mission will continue until the enemies have been completely wiped." Helmand Police Chief, Nabi Jan Mullahkhalil, said the operation is being conducted very carefully so that the lives of civilians are not harmed.

The operation was launched after reports of increase in poppy cultivation surfaced in the southern parts of the country where insurgents have taken advantage to continue their insurgency with funds flowing in from the crop growing. (Tolonews)

(17) Wardak Police

attack every time. "On one hand we are fighting with well-armed insurgents while on the other we are getting meager salaries. In this state of affairs, we prefer to say goodbye to our jobs," he noted.

Abdul Wali Noorzai, police spokesman, acknowledged that police stipends witnessed decrease from 1,300 afs to 1,500 afs. The decrease in salary occurred because the province's rank had been lowered to second status in terms of security. (Pajhwok)

(18) Anti-Militants

Maiwand Military Corps, said Zulfikar operation was underway successfully. He said militant lost the ability to fight security forces back. (Pajhwok)

(19) Man Burns Himself

Feroz arrived to Kabul to complain and seek justice from the security organizations, but his attempt in seeking justice was neglected. According to his father, he then wrote a letter to his family and loved ones that he will set himself ablaze.

The Kabul police said that two suspects have been arrested in connection the case, but investigations are still underway to find the remaining perpetrators.

Feroz passed away while receiving treatment for his burns at a local Kabul hospital. (Tolonews)

(20) 2 Dead,

been evacuated to Shajoi Civil Hospital.

Last month, at least 22 passengers were killed and 33 others wounded in a road mishap in Zabul on Kabul-Kandahar Highway. Passengers and officials blamed surge in accidents on uneven roads and reckless driving. (Pajhwok)

(21) Eloped Girl

Waheed told reporters at the hospital.

Laila family's approach forced them to flee Kabul and live in Imam Sahib, he recalled. "We spent three days with our relatives and then we preferred to take poison to avoid the wrath of our families," he recalled. Sayyed Sarwar Hussaini, police spokesman, said that police had started investigation into the incident. (Pajhwok)

(22) Prices of Flour,

Fazal Rahman, the head of the Food Traders Union, said that 50kg of Pakistani flour was accounted for 1,240afs compared to last week's price of 1,250afs and the price of 16 litres of Shayesta ghee decreased from 1,000afs to 980afs.

Moneychanger Ahmad Shah said the buying rate of one US dollar was 57.40afs, while 1,000 Pakistani rupees accounted for 564afs. Last week's exchange value of the dollar stood at 57.30afs and 1,000 Pakistani rupees at 565afs. (Pajhwok)

(23) Yemen Parties

the Yemeni people, and to be accurate and objective". Since overrunning Sanaa unopposed in September, the Huthis have since expanded their control to coastal areas and regions south of the capital, but have faced fierce resistance from Sunni tribes and Al-Qaeda militants. (AFP)

(24) Kiev Accuses

ernment forces in east Ukraine also soured the mood as crowds gathered in Kiev for the first anniversary of the uprising that toppled a Moscow-leaning president but culminated in war. It has not only sapped morale but also deprived central and western Ukraine of access to an industrial region that provided about 16 percent of gross domestic wproduct, making the country's economic crisis even worse. (Reuters)

(25) Gulf Bloc

ing all six member states fully supported Cairo in its intervention in its lawless western neighbour.

"GCC states have stressed their full support to Egypt and its brotherly people in fighting terrorism and protecting its citizens at home and abroad," he said in the later statement. (AFP)