

(1) Economic Projects

the RTDM system, including collection of revenue and monitoring quality of IT services delivery.

He said keeping in view governments' budgetary needs and usual procedures of telecommunications and IT across the globe, the government leadership took decision of imposing a 10 percent tax on telecom services. The minister proposed the HEC to amend the Article 10th and 2nd paragraph of Article 11th of the Telecom Services Tax Law.

The meeting after consideration and comprehensive study approved amendments to the suggested provisions of the telecom services fee law and decided to send the modifications to the Cabinet for endorsement.

Meanwhile, Aryoubi, Yama Yari, Homayoon Rasa, Mohammad Hameed Tahmasi, Khan Jan Alokozay, Munizha Wafiq, Jami Zada, Javid Rasouli, and Wolesi Jirga member Usmani thoroughly talked about legal matters and 'talc' export.

President Ghani, expressing gratitude to the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum for submitting analysis and review about the talc mine, said: "A comprehensive analysis has taken place in this regard and now a clear study is needed in order to find how much of talc exists in other provinces and how to extract it."

He said a legal group should work in this regard so that legal standards and responsibilities were kept in consideration.

President Ghani said: "Security of economic projects in the 1397 solar year is part of our Security Plan and talc is considered our important mines and it should be separated from small mines."

Ghani said: "We are negotiating with China and India to find market for our exports of expensive goods and mines."

He said Shaikh Misri Industrial Park's electricity, roads and security issues should be addressed so that the township turned into an example. (Pajhwok)

(2) Committee to

Sunday and after Tuesday will assess the received documents and applications and shortlist the qualified applicants.

"The selection committee has been formed and they have announced that it will receive applications from 31 December up to 3th of January. Then they will hold an examination for the qualified applicants and introduce three applicants to the president. Then the president will introduce one of them as a commissioner for the election commission. We are optimistic that this process will finish soon," Sayyad said.

Meanwhile, the Election Watch Afghanistan said president's new decree and the resumption of work by the selection committee is against the law. A member of Election Watch Afghanistan Habibullah Shinwari said the president should have introduced a new commissioner within seven days after the dismissal of IEC's former chief Najibullah Ahmadzai.

"It is clearly stated in article 16 of the election law that president should have selected the new member for IEC within seven days from the previous list submitted to the president. That list had the names of 14 people," Shinwari said.

The new decree issued, followed after the election commission had previously warned that if the government did not introduce a new commissioner, they would themselves decide on a new chief and deputy for the election commission. (Tolonews)

(3) Afghanistan,

President Ashraf Ghani's trip to Tashkent this month.

A joint team was created following Ghani's visit to Uzbekistan to work on the implementation of the agreements which include trade and transit between the two nations.

According to the ministry, the improvement in the work of the team is assessed by the presidents of the two countries every 15 days.

"We continue our efforts to start our transit through as soon as possible. Uzbekistan is also very interested to start transit through Afghanistan," Qoqandi said.

Deputy head of Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Khanjan Alokozay, meanwhile recommended the Afghan government take the issue under 'proper management'.

"Uzbekistan is trying to use Afghanistan route because it needs a closer route to South Asia. It exports iron and cotton worth billions of dollars every year," Alokozay said.

Earlier this month, Afghan and Uzbekistan officials signed more than 20 agreements which include economic,

transit, security, electricity, agriculture, health and higher education cooperation between the two countries. The Afghan National Security Adviser and his counterpart also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on maintaining the security of the Hairatan bridge. (Tolonews)

(4) Commission

capital is distressing and have asked the government to act.

Over 130,000 has been diagnosed with respiratory issues over the past one year, according to health officials. Arguments tabled by the government officials did not satisfy the commission. Members of the commission gave the government a one-week deadline to take action and undertake practical measures. (Tolonews)

(5) Issuance of E-ID

individuals who are under foreigners' influence to disrupt the process." Following the establishment of the unity government, President Ashraf Ghani approved the law on population registration, in which nationality and ethnicity was not mentioned.

As protests against not mentioning the two words in the ID cards continued, the president issued a legislative decree adding nationality and ethnicity to the cards. The decree then was rejected by the Wolesi Jirga but was approved by the Senate.

To resolve the disagreement, a joint committee comprising members of Wolesi Jirga and the Meshrano Jirga was formed to decide on the issue. The committee two weeks ago approved the inclusion of nationality and ethnicity in the new e-NIC.

On Saturday, however, a number of MPs again said they were against the inclusion of the nationality and ethnicity in the e-NICs.

They said four members of the joint committee had been absent when the decision was made and that it contravened Article 100 of the Constitution. Meshrano Jirga chairman Fazal Hadi Muslimyar, while lending his weight to the decision by the joint commission, called it legitimate, saying no one would be allowed to prevent the distribution of electronic ID cards.

He asked the government to take action against those creating hurdles to the process and allow no one to postpone the national process. (Pajhwok)

(6) MPs to Impeach

"The lawmakers are not doing this because they committed treason against the nation or because of poor performances. The majority of the lawmakers are doing this because of personal motives," said an MP Ramazan Bashardost.

"The ministry of energy and water has done some systematic works, but it has not met the demands of the people," said Senator Nisar Haris. (Tolonews)

(7) Disabled Vendors

and we want to know where they have gone."

Abdul Raqib, another protester, said their stalls and goods were their only income source support their families. "We are disabled and poor people, we cannot do any other job. Taking away a job from a disabled means taking his life" he said.

Abdul Wahid Zyan, a municipality senior official, rejected the allegations of the disabled people that they had not been informed about the removal of their stalls and or causing them financial losses.

He said the National Security Council (NSC) had decided removal of illegal stalls from roadsides to reduce crowd and traffic jams in capital Kabul.

He added the disabled people had been informed in this regard and the action had been taken after informing them. (Pajhwok)

(8) 1900 Civilians

have used civilian homes as shields. Civilian casualties have been on the rise because the warring sides do not respect the rules of war," said a civil society activist in Helmand Nazir Mohammad Rodai.

But, local officials in the province have blamed the Taliban for most of the fatalities among the civilians.

"Our security forces have always tried to ensure the security of the civilian population. The majority of the casualties have been inflicted by the Taliban," said Omar Zuwak, spokesman for the governor of Helmand.

Our forces are trying to always protect the lives of civilians and they have largely been killed due to attacks by the Taliban.

The new casualty count in Helmand province comes at a time that the Afghan security forces are still tackling insurgents in the suburbs of provincial capital Lashkar Gah and some other strategic districts. The Taliban

has constantly attempted to expand their insurgency in key areas of the province. (Tolonews)

(9) Afghan Air Force

from insecure regions remain on the priority.

Shoab said the AAF forces have inflicted major harm on the insurgents with the help of MD-530 Helicopters over the past two years.

"These helicopters are carrying rockets and can hit its target easily. We are using these choppers for the past two years," added Shoab.

"We are launching operations to clear those areas which remain fragile during the past season," said MoI spokesman Najib Danish.

"The government should use winter as an opportunity," said senator Gulalai Akbari. (Tolonews)

(10) Afghan Leaders

their holy places.

It added the enemy of Afghanistan had lost the courage to fight with the brave Afghan security forces and thus targeted innocent people. The suicide blast in Jalalabad was part and enemy strategy in which several innocent people were martyred.

Meanwhile, CEO Abdullah also denounced the suicide attack in Jalalabad in a statement from his office. The CEO said terrorists would never reach their targets.

He said terrorists under the cover of Islamic values attacked mosques and other religious places and killed innocent people.

National Security Advisor (NSA) Hanif Atmar and deputy CEO Eng. Mohammad Khan also denounced the attack.

Atmar denounced the attack and added the Afghan nation stood hard and constant against such acts. (Pajhwok)

(11) Citizens Distressed

100 Afs daily.

"We are working here because the security is a little bit better. If there is insecurity, then everyone is distressed," said Hussain.

"Our demand is that they appoint someone whether he is Atta Mohammad Noor or someone. The important point is to create a peaceful environment for the people," said Jailani, another resident.

Two weeks ago, the presidential palace in a statement announced that the president had accepted the resignation of Noor as Balkh governor. Later the government announced that engineer Mohammad Dawoud had been appointed as successor to Noor.

The government so far has not shown willingness to unveil its final decision about the resignation.

Noor defied his resignation. He has regularly attended his office as Balkh governor over the past two days and insists that he is the incumbent governor of the province.

"I am still the official governor. If someone acts against any documents which are related to the governor, then he will be made accountable," said Noor

Jamiat-e-Islami party, of which Noor serves as its chief executive, said this week that the government had shown willingness for talks with the party in a move to resolve the Noor's saga. (Tolonews)

(12) US to Withhold

network are based in the key cities of Pakistan where from they plan and coordinate attacks in Afghanistan.

The director of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) earlier had warned that the United States will take necessary steps if Pakistan fails to destroy terror safe havens in its soil. (KP)

(13) Former Ireland

by the ICC alongside Ireland back in June, prepare for their inaugural Test against India.

Simmons replaces Lalchand Rajput, whose contract was not extended by the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) in August, after being previously employed as consultant last year.

The 54-year-old was in charge of Ireland for eight years between the 2007 and 2015 World Cup, during which he presided over famous victories against England and West Indies.

During his time in Ireland, Simmons helped the team qualify for every major ICC event and won 11 trophies before accepting an offer to become West Indies head coach.

ACB chief executive officer Shafiq Stanikzai said: "We went with Phil because he understands our team. Simmons will now join the Afghanistan squad in Dubai as they prepare for a limited-overs series against Zimbabwe in Sharjah in February, before the 2019 World Cup qualifiers take centre stage later this year.

Afghanistan will also play their first Test match against India in 2018,

where they play the majority of their home games, although a date has yet to be announced. (Agencies)

(14) 15 Militants

In Nangarhar, five Daesh rebels were killed as a result of an air raid in Achin district. Weapons and ammunition were also destroyed, the governor's office said in a statement. There has been no word yet from IS. (Pajhwok)

Veteran Afghan Singer Yunus Dies At 76

KABUL - Veteran Afghan singer Yunus passed away at the age of 76 years at his home in Australia on Saturday.

Head of the National Institute of Music Ahmad Naser Sarmast said on his Facebook page on Saturday that Yunus was one of the founders of Afghanistan's folk music scene and that he wrote beautiful songs.

Yunus lived in Melbourne and he will be laid to rest there on Sunday.

One of his songs which made him famous during the 1980s in Afghanistan, was titled Bewafawee.

He travelled to Kabul a few years ago and recorded an album at the National Radio and Television of Afghanistan, from where he started his career as an amateur singer.

His songs had mostly focused on romantic themes.

Music lovers say his voice was among the golden voices of Afghanistan.

He migrated to Australia during the civil war in Afghanistan.

According to the Ministry of Information and Culture, Yunus had recorded more than 200 songs for radio and over 30 songs for TV.

He leaves behind a son and a daughter. He studied at Amani High School in Kabul and completed his higher education in geology at a Moscow university. The ministry termed his death a big loss to the Afghan music industry. (Tolonews)

Chinese Ice and Snow Sculptures Attract Many Tourists

BEIJING - The 2018 edition of the Harbin International Ice and Snow Sculpture Festival, the world's largest, has attracted many tourists with its intricate frozen works of art since it opened on December 24 in China.

Braving freezing temperatures, many visitors from far and wide have come to see the sculptures lit up with LED lights. Works included national landmarks, frozen palaces, ice slides and snow cherubs.

"I'm from Yemen. This is my first time here in Harbin, and the Ice City Festival," said an exchange student Ahmed Manswor. There is no place else like Harbin in winter, he said.

Christina Phipps, a tourist from the United States, came to visit along with her husband and children. They were deeply impressed by the "incredible" Buddhist structure and the castles.

"Just the work that's gone into [making the sculptures], the amount of manpower that's gone into it and getting it all together. It's just amazing!" she said.

The festival this year incorporated the concept of the Belt and Road Initiative into its design, showcasing the most iconic architecture from countries involved in the project.

"We hope to present to the visitors the concept of the Belt and Road Initiative with ice and snow," said Wang Zengyu, the deputy general manager of the Harbin Ice and Snow World.

A record of 180,000 cubic meters of ice has been used this year to recreate some of the most famous landmarks around the world, such as Beijing's Temple of Heaven, Moscow's Red Square, and Thailand's Wat Phra Kaew.

More than 10,000 staff have been involved in constructing the exhibits, including Du Yanjiang, who has been carving ice for two decades.

"The Songhua River produces a large area of ice due to the freezing temperatures every year. The ice we use is all from the nearby Songhua River. Other rivers are not able to produce as much ice and the water is not as clear [as that of the Songhua River]. An exhibition of such scale has experienced a lot of modernization. Large machinery has replaced a lot of the manual labor," said Du.

This year's festival is expected to run until Feb 25, 2018. (Tolonews)

Hundreds of Indonesian couples ring in the new year at mass wedding

JAKARTA - Hundreds of Indonesian couples celebrated New Year's Eve on Sunday night by tying the knot in a mass wedding in the capital Jakarta. Nearly 450 couples gathered in a large tent in the city centre just hours before midnight to pray with their families before signing marriage certificates. Government officials oversaw each brief ceremony.

"We wanted an unforgettable experience and we're so happy that we decided to participate today," said Hartiningish, a 38-year-old East Javanese bride, while a live band played a set of traditional and pop music in the background.

Her husband, Ricky Rangga, 30, said the couple was grateful to the city administration for making the wedding possible.

Many couples wore matching colours and colourful traditional Indonesian outfits, with some brides donning elaborate headdresses and grooms carrying traditional daggers called keris.

Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan congratulated those taking the plunge and said the city would now host the event every New Year's Eve. The city government raised donation funds to pay for token gold dowries for the couples to exchange. Grooms in Indonesia traditionally present gold jewellery or money to brides on the wedding day.

Security was tight around the event's venue in the heart of the city, which took place just a few meters from the site of a militant attack in January 2016, when Islamic State-linked radicals killed four people using guns and bombs.

Tens of thousands of police and military personnel have been deployed in Jakarta and across the country to safeguard holiday celebrations as the country remains on high alert.

One young pair from west Jakarta said they were looking forward to their honeymoon in the holiday island of Bali, where an active volcano, Mount Agung, remains on alert for an imminent eruption.

"If we're together, there's no need to be afraid of (the volcano), we will just enjoy," Ruri Nurhayati, 22, said, just minutes after marrying her partner Andrianus, who goes by one name.

The couple were accompanied by a wedding party of 20 friends and family members, and joined New Year's Eve revellers setting off fireworks in the city centre, while others left the venue in cars bedecked with flowers. "We're planning to do this every year," Baswedan said, after posing for photographs with some couples. (Reuters)

Turkey detains 20 suspected Daesh members, including 15 foreigners

ASTANA - Turkish police have detained 20 people, including 15 foreign nationals, on suspicion of links to Daesh during raids in Istanbul, tightening security ahead of the anniversary of a nightclub attack in which dozens were killed.

The raids by the anti-terrorist branch of the Istanbul police took place on Saturday and targeted four locations across the city, the police said in a statement on Sunday. They did not give the nationalities of the foreign suspects.

The state-run Anadolu news agency said the suspects were believed to have been planning an attack during New Year's Eve celebrations in the city.

Turkish police have been ramping up operations against suspected Daesh militants in recent days, detaining around 195 on Thursday and Friday.

During New Year's celebrations a year ago, a man with an assault rifle shot dead 39 people including Turks and visitors from several Arab nations, India and Canada at an exclusive nightclub in Istanbul, the country's biggest city.

Daesh claimed responsibility for that shooting, one of a series of attacks believed to have been carried out by the extremist and Kurdish militants in Turkey in the last couple of years. A trial of those allegedly involved in the nightclub attack began this month.

On New Year's Eve, the number of police officers on duty in Istanbul will be doubled to 37,000 and public celebrations will be cancelled or banned in some districts for security reasons, officials have said. Many roads in central Istanbul districts will be closed, while heavy vehicles will not be allowed to enter some areas, police have also said. (Agencies)