

(1) MPs Divided...

not be debated based on a few signatures," he said, alleging mafia groups were behind efforts to include the amendment of Article six in the house agenda. "No one would be allowed to use the Constitution for personal interests," the lawmaker warned.

His colleague from eastern Nangarhar province Aryan Yun said joint commissions of both the houses had approved many laws in the past. She said the amendment to the Article six of the census law had been approved and debating it was a waste of time.

Nader Khan Katawazai, a lawmaker from Paktia province said: "If the presidential decree regarding the Article six was illegal, it should have not been included in the agenda. In the past, some laws were approved by the joint commissions, in which equal member of the members were not present."

Katawazai said the 17 joint sessions of the parliament, most of the time the number of delegations had not been equal.

Abdul Qayyum Sajadi, a lawmaker from Ghazni province, said the meeting of the joint commission was against Article 100 of the Constitution and the issue should be included in the agenda for more debate and exchange of lawmakers' viewpoint.

Under the relevant law, if one House rejects a decision of the other, a joint commission comprised of an equal number of members from each House is formed to solve the difference.

The decision of the joint commission, after endorsement by the President, shall be enforced. If the joint commission does not solve the difference, the decision shall be considered rejected.

In such a situation, the House of People shall pass it with two-thirds majority in its next session. This decision, without submission to the House of Elders, shall be promulgated once endorsement by the President.

Lower house Speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahimy termed the decision of the joint commission as 'legal' and said the issue had been shared in the meeting by the heads of commissions, but insufficient votes led to excluding the subject from the agenda.

He added 75 members of the house had demanded the issue not to be made part of the agenda while 56 lawmakers demanded the subject to be made part of the agenda.

The controversial census law has recently landed in the Parliament with a presidential legislative decree amending Article six of the law, but the Wolesi Jirga again disapproved it, while the Mesharano Jirga has approved the law.

For a unanimous decision, a joint commission of the two houses held discussion and approved the law which was then sent to the President for endorsement. (Pajhwok)

(2) Pakistan Played...

Meanwhile, the State Department said it expected Pakistan to take decisive action against the Haqqani Network and other militants operating from its soil.

"Pakistan is an important partner. We have a lot of issues in that region. Pakistan knows that, we all know that, and we try to work carefully together on some of those issues.

"I don't want to say that Pakistan can do more, but Pakistan knows what it needs to do," State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert told reporters at her daily news conference.

"We expect Pakistan - and we've made clear, and the President has made clear in the past also through

his new strategy that was announced back in August about the new South Asia strategy that the United States expects Pakistan to take decisive action against the Haqqani Network and other militants who are operating from its soil," she said.

Nauert added the decision to withheld US aid to Pakistan was taken in August. "That was an announcement that came out back in August, and for some reason, people got interested in it again. But that is not a new announcement that we would hold back on that money."

The spokesperson said: "They need to earn, essentially, the money that we have provided in the past in foreign military assistance, they need to show that they are sincere in their efforts to crack down on terrorists." Senators Rand Paul, meanwhile, announced bringing legislation in the Congress to stop US aid to Pakistan. "I wholeheartedly agree with Trump on this. The US has given USD34 billion in direct aid and military reimbursements to Pakistan since 2002. That is not putting America first, and I will introduce new legislation in the coming days to stop aid to Pakistan," Paul said.

Congressman Dana Rohrabacher in a separate statement applauded Trump for his realistic assessment on Pakistan. "Pakistan's regime, though our government imagines otherwise, has long acted as a malignancy in South Asia.

"It pretends to benign neutrality, seducing the United States into believing it will cooperate with us in the war on radical Islamic terrorism if we ship its political leadership copious tax dollars," he said. (Pajhwok)

(3) Tajikistan ...

in Sher Khan Port, Haji Fahim, said the border closure faced businessmen with serious problems. "The traders' goods were stuck on the other side of the border for two weeks."

The spokesman for the governor of Takhar province, Niamatullah Temori, also confirmed the crossing point's reopening and said: "We have sent a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to take proactive steps for preventing such issues in future."

Although it is not yet ascertained why the highway between the two neighbors was closed, but some sources say recent mysterious killing of a number of Tajik border guards prompted the move. (Pajhwok)

(4) Freed Canadian ...

Boyle, his wife and their three children met Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in his Parliament Hill office last month. Photos that Boyle released at the time on Twitter showed Trudeau holding the youngest child in his lap.

Trudeau had said in September he could not imagine what the family were going through. The Taliban denied the accusations of rape and murder.

Boyle and Coleman were kidnapped in 2012 while backpacking in Afghanistan and their children were born in captivity. U.S. officials say the family spent almost all their confinement in neighboring Pakistan, which is where they were freed by Pakistani troops. (Reuters)

(5) Noor Orders Arrest ...

said the allegations are a plot against him.

"I am not a rebel. If someone has a complaint or claim, I am ready to appear at any organization which is required," he said.

"Individuals cannot judge, judicial organizations should take decisions in this respect," said Munira Yusufzada, spokesperson for Independent Directorate of Local Governance.

The attorney office of Balkh appel-

late court said it considers Dawood to be a suspect. According to the office, they will announce their decision on the matter after their investigation had been completed. (Tolonews)

(6) Marble Mine...

warned them not to come to the area again.

He said it was not for the first time their vehicles were torched as a similar incident happened last month when one vehicle was torched.

Malakzai criticized what he said irresponsible attitude of security officials. "After 6:00am in the morning, security officials come out of their check-points and charge every vehicle up to 1,000 afghanis and return to their posts in the evening."

He said when rebels were torching their four vehicles, the drivers rushed to the check-posts and sought help but the security forces responded negatively and said the government did not allow them to react.

Abdul Sami Tokhi, deputy head of Mine Owners Union, expressed concern over growing insecurity on the Chest-i-Sharif road and said most of investors had withdrawn their capitals due to insecurity.

He warned some 10,000 people, working in marble sector, would lose their jobs if insecurity continued.

Governor's spokesman Jilani Farhad said investigation into insecurity and the arson attack had been launched and strict measures would be put in place to prevent such incidents in future.

Chesti Sharif police chief Sher Agha Alokozai said the Chest-i-Sharif Road became insecure during night and there was no problem at daytime on the road.

He added at night time when telecommunication services were suspended security personnel could not be informed in time.

He claimed some mine owners had connection with militants and provided them money. "When the money is not transferred to the rebels in time, then they torch their vehicles in response."

Mine owners, however, rejected giving money to the Taliban. (Pajhwok)

(7) Talks Underway...

Rahimi, head of the administrative office of the president.

The two sides in these talks are exchanging views on the implementation of the political agreement on the formation of the National Unity Government and the fate of the post of Balkh governor.

"We want to know that where the reform process is now, which progress has been made in this respect?" asked University Lecturer Rahmatullah Bezhampur.

Meanwhile, Ahmad Wali Massoud, head of Ahmad Shah Massoud Foundation, said the country's problems will not be addressed even if government accepts all demand of Jamiat.

"Government is trying to terminate the opportunity for diplomacy and talks by making threats," Massoud told TOLONews. In the meantime, Mohammad Dawood, the newly-appointed governor of Balkh, said the issues facing his appointment as governor of the province will come to an end in the near future.

"The president (Ashraf Ghani) has said over different occasions that he is firm on his decision. The president has told me to be patient and they will resolve the issue through peaceful means," Dawood said.

This comes after President Ashraf Ghani in announced two weeks ago that he has accepted the resignation of Atta Mohammad Noor as Balkh governor and has appointed Mohammad Dawood as new governor of the province. (Tolonews)

(8) Major Regional...

said plans have been drafted to en-

sure the safety of these projects in liaison with relevant organizations. "There are projects on which joint teams are working. The Ministry of Serious decisions have been made to boost the security of the projects," said Nusrat Rahimi, spokesman for Interior Ministry.

Work on the TAPI project will kick off in Herat province within the next month.

The spokesman for Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, Abdul Qadeer Mutfi, said the ministry continues its efforts to raise public awareness on the implementation of the TAPI pipeline project.

"The goal of the public awareness program is to ensure that people understand the importance of major economic projects. We have held talks with tribal elders, religious scholars and the youth in Nimroz, Herat, Kandahar, Helmand, Farah and all other parts where the pipeline passes through," he told TOLONews. (Tolonews)

(9) Ghor Policewomen...

officer another is an NDS personnel and I joined the police to serve to my country," she added.

She complained women in Ghor had to face problems in the absence of policewomen and their problem would be resolved.

Another policewoman Fatima (not her real name) said she joined police after the death of her husband. "After my husband was killed, no one helped me, thus I joined police."

She complained their salaries were not paid in-time, but they would not relinquish protecting the country.

Zahra, a resident, expressed happiness over the increasing number of policewomen in Ghor. "It is a good initiative for women to address their own problems and help others."

In Afghanistan, about 5,000 women are severing in police ranks nationwide. (Pajhwok)

(10) US Military ...

have returned to duty, according to a military statement.

"We are deeply saddened by the loss of one of our own," said General John Nicholson, commander, U.S. Forces in Afghanistan. "At this very difficult time our heartfelt sympathies go out to the families and friends of our fallen and wounded brothers."

No other details about the incident have been released.

The U.S. military lost 17 soldiers in combat-related incidents in 2017 in Afghanistan. (VoA)

(11) NATO Probing ...

security forces against Daesh insurgents. Meanwhile, a statement from the NATO-led Resolute Support (RS) mission said it was aware of the civilian casualties in the district.

"We are aware of reports regarding civilian casualties as a result of a combined operation in Nangarhar province on January 1," the NATO mission said in a statement.

It quoted Tom Gresback, US Navy captain, as saying: "RS takes all allegations of civilian casualties seriously and is working with Afghan partners to determine the facts surrounding this incident.

"Every civilian casualty is regrettable, and we do everything we can to prevent harm to innocents on the battlefield. A formal review of the incident has been initiated."

He said more information would be released to media as available. (Pajhwok)

(12) Ghoryan Salt ...

ministry did not have the permission to sign any contract for any mines. Because the priority was given to managing contracts and enhancing the ministry's capacity to bring transparency in the contract process," said Nehan.

Nehan said before, due to a lack of transparency in contracts, capaci-

ty and existence of problems in the projects, they did not have the permission to sign contracts. However, now a number of these problems have been resolved.

The Ghoryan salt mine is 74 acres long and 10 years ago was contracted with another company.

Implementation of some of public services projects valued at \$70,000 USD in the mine's area, the establishment of a hospital and also paying \$30,000 USD for environmental protection are part of the commitments of the contractor company.

"We are committed that we will start our work transparently in terms of the law and in line with the requirements of the mines ministry," Basir Ahmad, representative of the contractor company said.

Nehan said due to problems in contracts of 14 mines, including big mines, the extraction processes have been stopped. They are now trying to resolve the problems as soon as possible. (Tolonews)

(13) Teachers on ...

He said it was not a matter of budget deficit, but administrative corruption. "Teachers are struggling with economic problems, they have patients in families, they have to give house rents," he said.

Abdul Karim, another school teacher, said he had been on the teacher post for 15 years but had never received his salary in-time.

He said more than 500 teachers served in Greshk district and the Education Department illegally deducted 60 afghanis from their salaries each month.

An official of the District Education Department confirmed 60 afghanis were cut from teacher's salaries each month.

The source said the money cut from teachers' salaries was used for the education department's extra activities.

The striking teachers insisted they would continue their strike until their rights were served.

The teachers strike comes only days ahead of the mid-term exams in warm climate areas.

Greshk education director, Mohammad Nasar Meer, said teachers salaries could not be delivered due to budget shortage. "It is not our fault, we share our reports with the provincial education department on monthly basis and the revenue department, it is their problem," he said. He said 25,000 students, including 6,000 girls, were studying in 26 schools in Greshk district. Meer asked teachers to end their strike and keep the schools open.

Helmand education director, Qudratullah Yaqobi, said the district education office did not send them necessary documents on time and that was the reason the salaries delayed. He said talks with teachers to end their strike were underway. The unpaid salaries would be paid in the new fiscal year, he added.

Of 304 schools in Helmand, 100 have been shut due to security problems. (Pajhwok)

(14) 4 Rebels...

slain rebels as Abdul Rahman Muslim and Tor Gul, adding three more militants also suffered wounds.

Zwak confirmed the killing of an ANA soldier and injuring of another three, who were under treatment in a nearby hospital. The health condition of the wounded military personnel was said to be stable.

Taliban have not yet commented about the incident. (Pajhwok)

(15) 2 Civilians Killed...

district, he said. Nasrullah, the resident of locality, said local people had evacuated the dead and injured but there exact number of dead people could not be ascertained. No group has been taken the responsibility of the blast. (Pajhwok)