

(1) Continue Bombing...

to the families of the martyred soldiers.

He added that a vast majority of the 1,000 living quarters which are going to be built would be given to the families of the martyrs of police, army and the NDS.

On the issue of the economy, Ghani said foreign aid will not eliminate poverty. He said the nation needs to get involved and investors need to be found.

Land-Grabbing:

Another issue participants of the gathering shared with President Ghani was land-grabbing.

President Ghani instructed Nangarhar Police Chief to prepare a list of the occupiers and bring court orders again them.

He ordered the military to support police in taking the grabbed land back from occupiers.

"In regards to the land-grabbing, mercy will not work," he said, adding that "force" is required to resolve the issue. (KP)

(2) British EU ...

plan to tackle so-called benefit tourism.

"We have a welfare system, unlike many in Europe, that you have immediate access to and it is that that creates many of the difficulties," he explained.

The British premier said he was optimistic of securing a deal at an EU summit in February, and that an in/out referendum -- promised by the end of 2017 -- could take place soon after.

However, he said that the vote could be pushed back if he failed to secure satisfactory concessions from Brussels.

"I have to have this referendum by the end of 2017," he said. "If I can't get the right deal in February I will wait and I will keep going."

Assuming agreements are reached, Cameron will campaign to stay in the union, saying "I don't think that (leaving) is the right answer."

Asked whether officials had plans for a "Brexit", Cameron said "we would need to do everything necessary to make that work", but did not reveal if any contingencies had been made, angering those campaigning to leave. (AFP)

(3) Afghan Forces ...

remain on the books, with senior police or army officials pocketing their salaries without replacing them, Atal said.

He estimates that some 40 percent of registered forces don't exist, and says the lack of manpower has helped the Taliban seize 65 percent of the province -- Afghanistan's largest -- and threaten the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah. Those men who do serve face even greater danger because of the no-shows. In the last three months alone, some 700 police have been killed and 500 wounded, he said.

The province's former deputy police chief, Pacha Gul Bakhtiar, said Helmand has 31,000 police on the ground. Nearly 15 years after the U.S.-led invasion that toppled the Taliban, and despite billions of dollars in military and other aid, corruption remains rife in Afghanistan and local security forces have struggled to hold off insurgent advances across the country. Last year the Taliban seized the northern city of Kunduz for three days, marking their biggest foray into a major urban area since 2001.

Pakistan will host four-nation talks Monday with Afghanistan, China and the United States aimed at reviving peace talks with the Taliban, but even if those efforts succeed the insurgents are expected to stay on the offensive in order to gain land and leverage.

The Defense Ministry declined to comment on ghost security forces. Interior Ministry spokesman Sediq Sediqqi acknowledged the problem and said an investigation has been launched, without providing further details.

Iraq has also struggled with the ghost soldier phenomenon, a factor in the Islamic State group's rapid conquest of much of the country's north and west in the summer of 2014. In December of that year, Iraqi officials said the payment of tens of millions of dollars in salaries to nonexistent forces had been halted.

But Afghan lawmaker Ghulam Husain Nasiri, who has been researching the problem for more than a year, said his government is ignoring it.

"When we say we have 100 soldiers on the battlefield, in reality it is just 30 or 40. And this creates the potential for huge catastrophes when the enemy attacks," he said.

"It is an indication of massive corruption - the reason Afghanistan is one of the most corrupt nations in

the world," he added. Afghanistan consistently ranks among the most corrupt countries in indices released by global watchdog Transparency International.

Nasiri said the government "doesn't seem to want to know about it," and that he received death threats after revealing the names of parliamentarians who are allegedly in on the racket. He said he handed a list of 31 names of corrupt parliamentarians to the Interior Ministry but has so far received no response.

Cash-strapped Afghanistan's security forces are entirely funded by the international community, at a cost of some \$5 billion a year, most of which comes from the United States. The U.S. government's auditor of spending in Afghanistan, John Sopko, told a congressional hearing last year that Afghan government figures on security personnel and pay could not be regarded as accurate.

"No one knows the exact numbers of the Afghan National Defense Forces," an Afghan official said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief media on the topic. He said the best internal estimates put the number at around 120,000, less than a third of what's needed to secure the country.

The heaviest cost of the ghost soldier phenomenon is being exacted on the battlefield. Neither the government nor NATO publicizes casualty figures for local security forces, but an internal NATO tally seen by The Associated Press shows casualties are up 28 percent from 2014, when some 5,000 Afghan forces were killed. Last month, an army base in Helmand's Sangin district was besieged by insurgents for almost a week before reinforcements were rushed in backed by U.S. airstrikes and British military advisers.

In the northern Helmand district of Kajaki, soldier Mohammad Islam said many of his comrades deserted their posts because they didn't believe their bodies would be sent back to their families if they died. In the absence of a body, the family would not be eligible for compensation payments.

"Everyone knows that we are facing this fight alongside 'ghost' soldiers, and that's the reason we don't have enough men," he said. "The Taliban know it, too. When they attack us, and we're unable to protect ourselves, the big men then ask why." O'Donnell reported from Kabul. Associated Press writer Humayoon Babur in Kabul, Afghanistan contributed to this report. (AP)

(4) NATO Generals ...

Afghanistan at a time that the Afghan security forces continue their struggle against the insurgents in several fronts in the northern regions of the country. (Tolonews)

(5) ANSF Reclaim...

information by security forces. The Taliban militant group captured the district, which is located some 60 km north of Taluqan, the city capital of northern Takhar province, in October 2015.

"Some 40 suspected Taliban have been captured. The cleanup raids will continue in the district until the area is cleared of the militants," Timor added.

A Taliban local leader named Kamal Haidari was among the killed, he said.

Up to four security force members have been injured during the operation and no civilian casualties were reported throughout the clashes, according to Timor.

Takhar and the neighboring Kunduz province has been the scene of clashes between security forces and Taliban over the past couple of months. The Taliban has yet to make comments. (Xinhua)

(6) Protest goes ...

The demonstrators are protesting against assaults on New Year's Eve in Cologne, when a group of around 1,000 men surrounded, harassed and robbed especially women.

German Federal Police detected 32 crimes on the New Year's Eve at Cologne's Central Station, with 31 suspects having been identified by names, German media Focus Online reported on Friday.

According to the report, two-thirds of those identified suspects were asylum seekers, said a spokesman from the German Interior Ministry on Friday, citing a preliminary report of the German Federal Police. (Xinhua)

(7) NATO Report ...

unhindered, read the Der Spiegel story. Back in September the Taliban seized the provincial capital of Kunduz, where the Bundeswehr maintained a military base in 2006-2013. It took two weeks for the ANA troops and

security forces to return control over a city with a population of 300,000. In the meantime, despite being in open conflict with the Taliban, Daesh is also trying to take hold in the country, posing an additional threat to the region's security.

But defense ministry spokesman Dawlat Waziri said rejected the claims as baseless.

"The statements have no solid ground, though I accept that the war has intensified, but I reject the perception that forces have fled or there is a mismanagement issue."

The NATO report cites that from amongst 101 units of ground forces, only one of the units had been mobilized to fight.

"There can be two reasons behind the issue, the mismanagement of war and not equipping forces properly," military commentator Atiqullah Amarkhail said.

Meanwhile, the commander of foreign forces in Afghanistan Gen. John Campbell has also voiced concerns over a number of deficiencies mostly reported in southern Afghanistan which is said to be a Taliban stronghold.

According to the NATO report, nearly 22 Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers lost their lives on a daily basis in battlefields during last year.

The report added that at least 8,000 ANA troops were killed and wounded last year which reveals a 42 percent increase in the army casualties compared to that of 2014. (Tolonews)

(8) Talks on ...

Pakistan's announcement that longtime Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar had been dead for more than two years. The Taliban called off its participation and a second meeting was canceled.

A subsequent power struggle within the Taliban has raised questions about who would represent the insurgents if the talks with Kabul are revived.

FILE - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, center right, greets Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, center left, upon his arrival at Nur Khan airbase in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, Dec. 9, 2015.

FILE - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, center right, greets Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, center left, upon his arrival at Nur Khan airbase in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, Dec. 9, 2015.

Analysts have cautioned that, despite the rapprochement between Kabul and Islamabad, any substantive peace talks are still months off. Taliban demands have consistently focused on an end to the international military presence in the country. The U.S. and NATO have 13,000 troops stationed in Afghanistan, mostly in a training capacity. They include 9,800 Americans. (VoA)

(9) Survey Finds...

youth will likely have a significant impact on the future of Afghanistan's democracy and economy. Youth participation in elections and engagement in the democratic process as a whole are critical for the long-term consolidation of democracy in Afghanistan.

The statement went on to say: "Afghan youth also make up a substantial portion of the workforce. It is therefore vital that Afghan policymakers and international stakeholders understand the issues facing Afghan youth today."

In their survey, they found that in the household youth survey, just over four of 10 respondents are somewhat or very interested in national and local politics compared to about seven of 10 surveyed students.

"Students are more likely than the general youth population to participate in civic activities. Students are nearly twice as likely to run for an elected office as the general youth population and are more likely to vote than the general youth population," read their findings.

Only 22 percent of the students surveyed and seven percent of the general youth population participated in a demonstration in the last five years, the study found.

However, the survey found that young women face more barriers to political participation than young men.

In both groups of youth, women reported being invited to participate in political activities much less frequently than men and are less likely than men to attend political or civil society events.

Female respondents to the household youth survey are most likely to report cultural barriers as the primary obstacle to increased involvement in politics and security second. A plurality of female household youth respondents (32 percent) who did not vote in the 2014 presidential

and provincial council elections cites male family members preventing them from voting as the main reason. However, it was found that there is a crisis of confidence in the government among Afghan youth.

"Significant numbers of general respondents reported having no confidence in the parliament (38 percent), the National Unity Government (39 percent), the President (43 percent),

"The vast majority of young people believe to some degree that politicians mostly work for the interest of their own ethnicity (90 percent), are only interested in people's votes (90 percent), and lose touch with young people quickly once elected (89 percent)," read the findings.

Meanwhile, on a more positive note the study found that youth are committed to the rule of law, but frustrated with corruption.

"Nearly all youth surveyed (98 percent) believe a model youth citizen must be law abiding, but 57 percent of youth believe it is impossible to live in Afghanistan without committing corruption or paying a bribe." The study found that youth overwhelmingly believe there should be strict punishment for corruption, although a strong majority (65 percent) believes there is nothing the government can do when leaders break the law.

"Young Afghans believe parliament can play an important role in combatting corruption, with 72 percent believing it can hold government accountable."

DI has worked to support the strengthening of Afghanistan's electoral processes, both through international election observation missions as well as by supporting domestic advocacy for electoral reform. Currently, DI implements USAID's Afghanistan Electoral Reform and Civic Advocacy program (AERCA) -- which aims to support Afghan-led advocacy efforts for electoral and democratic reform and to conduct research that can inform and encourage the debate on reform. In line with this, DI interviewed thousands of young Afghans to take the pulse of this crucial segment of Afghanistan's population on critical issues like politics, the economy, and security. Their report details the survey findings and highlights trends in the opinions of Afghan youth -- both university students and the general youth population.

The 66-question survey instrument was administered to 4,020 randomly selected Afghans between the ages of 18 and 35 in all 34 provinces and, in order to allow comparison of the opinions of the more educated and the less educated Afghan youths, 1,000 students from 15 public and 16 private universities in 12 provinces were consulted. (Tolonews)

(10) Over 50 IS ...

Nangarhar against IS, in which dozens of members of both groups were killed.

Taliban leader Zabihullah Mujahid justified the offensive against IS by saying that those who call themselves Daesh fighters are involved in armed robbery, murder, torture and kidnapping of civilians.

The presence of IS here changed the war scenario of the last 15 years and prompted the Government to create special units to fight it. (Agencies)

(11) Kabul Warns...

groundbreaking talks with the hard-line movement.

Concerns grew over the recent weeks that the talks would be more complicated in the wake of the split that emerged amongst the Taliban group following the death of their former leader Mullah Omar. Meanwhile, the High Peace Council (HPC) said that the issue of the Taliban factions will also be taken into consideration during the talks.

"The quadrilateral meeting will also discuss the topic that which groups and who will participate in the coming two or three meetings," HPC member Maulavi Nuristani said.

A number of military experts meanwhile said the Afghan government should mount pressure on Islamabad to take action against those Taliban that still continue to denounce the peace process, calling on Islamabad to target their hideouts which they believe operate inside Pakistan's soil. (Tolonews)

(12) Leaked Report ...

of the Interior Ministry and the Chief Executive Office," the report reveals. Only 320 out of 1,046 employees in the e-NIC department have been appointed through free competition, but the remaining officials have been appointed based on direct orders by a number of MPs and former leaders of the Interior Ministry, the report says. The leaked documents also reveal

that 519 employees of the e-NIC department were first appointed directly by the MoI and then they were provided the grounds for a competition process and finally they were hired as permanent staffers in the organization. However, e-NIC officials have said they have done this because of the pressure on them.

Meanwhile, the report speaks of assessment of three contracts in the organization -- including a 101 million Afs contract with the GRT company, a contract worth \$500,000 USD on public awareness signed with Orange Group and a contract with IOM on procurement. (Tolonews)

(13) QRCS Helps ...

areas.

QRCS distributed food and nonfood aid to the families (9,323 people) from 24 towns in Jurm and Yamgan districts in Badakhshan. Each family received a 72kg package containing rice, vegetable oil, sugar, beans and tea as well as four blankets, kitchenware and a bag of winter clothes.

The purchase of items from the local market, quality check and surveys of beneficiaries were done in coordination with the Afghan Red Crescent Society.

Badakhshan Governor met the QRCS team and awarded them a certificate of appreciation in recognition of QRCS's relief efforts in the province. The meeting was attended by a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Distribution is expected to begin in Faryab and Wardak within two weeks. Relief items are being purchased from Kabul and will be sent to the target areas.

QRCS was the first international humanitarian organization to reach out to Badakhshan and northern provinces to provide relief following the earthquake.

Thousands of homeless families are suffering severe conditions amid below-zero temperatures in northern regions, heavy snowing in cities and blocked roads in mountains. (Agencies)

(14) 47 Militants ...

peace and stability of Afghanistan," Mol said.

According to MoI, the operations were conducted in Nangarhar, Takhar, Faryab, Kandahar, Zabul, Maidan Wardak, Ghazni, Paktika, Paktia, Herat and Helmand provinces, as a result 47 armed insurgents were killed, seven wounded and eight others were arrested by Afghan National Security Forces.

Also, during these operations, Afghan National Security Forces discovered and confiscated light and heavy rounds ammunition, Mol added. (KP)

(15) Toll in Russia ...

Syria's conflict first erupted with anti-government demonstrations in March 2011 but expanded into a war that has left more than 260,000 people dead. (AFP)

(16) Afghan Taliban ...

Taliban also once got hold of five Afghans in Balochistan and got confession from them that they were sent by the NDS to assassinate Taliban leaders. The five Afghans were later executed by the Afghan Taliban. (Agencies)

(17) MRRD/NSP ...

installation of Hand pumps, Construction of 9 irrigation water divider, a Protection wall 273 meters in length and construction of 3 culverts. Approximately, 1,822 families in 7 communities had an opportunity to gain access to basic human needs upon completion of these projects.

Since its inception in Jawzjan province, the NSP has been able to execute 1,549 infrastructure projects in different sectors such as transport, water and sanitation, irrigation, power, livelihoods, education, while the work of another 150 is currently in progress in various communities. (PR)

(18) Afghan Youth ...

Niazi. Siam Hamid, one of the students, expressed his desire to become an Indian classical vocalist.

"I always wanted to learn classical music because it is my dream to become Indian classical vocalist," said the Afghan student.

Artistic expression was banned in the Afghan country during the Taliban regime and art and culture has never gained popularity there. But the Afghan youth living in Delhi aspire to revive the lost glory of music there, be it classical, folk or western. (ANI)

(19) Egypt's First ...

tween lawmakers broke out when an outspoken member, Murtada Mansour, strayed from the text of the

oath to avoid endorsing the Jan. 25, 2011 uprising against autocrat Hosni Mubarak.

Mansour, an el-Sissi supporter and president of one of Egypt's top soccer clubs, changed the part of the oath where lawmakers pledge respect for the constitution, saying instead he will respect the "clauses of the constitution," thus avoiding implicit support for the charter's prologue. (AP)

(20) France Pay...

the country's streets on Sunday following the attacks at a satirical magazine and Jewish shop to denounce terrorism. After that, French army choir sang "The names of Paris" of Jacques Brel before reading a Victor Hugo's address marking his return from exile on Sept. 5, 1870. (Xinhua)

(21) Finnish, Swedish...

President Sauli Niinisto in his New Year speech said it would be logical to develop cooperation between Finland and Sweden in foreign and security policy. Lofven and Sipila listed recent enhancements in Finnish-Swedish military cooperation. They included joint maneuvers, increased exchange of information and mutual use of airfields and ports in both countries. (Xinhua)

(22) Japan PM...

mentioned "Osaka Ishin No Kai", or the Osaka Innovation Party, as one possible partner backing the revision. Admirers view the constitution as the source of Japan's peace, prosperity and democracy. Many of Abe's conservative backers, who have long wanted to rewrite the constitution but lacked the political means, view it as a shoddy document written, in the words of one commentary, "with malice and vengeance" to keep Japan forever subdued. (Reuters)

(23) Greece's Main...

130,000 votes went to Central Macedonia Governor Apostolos Tzitzikostas and former Health Minister Adonis Georgiadis. Georgiadis has voiced his support for Mitsotakis, and Tzitzikostas has expressed a similar inclination. (Xinhua)

(24) Gunmen Kill ...

of the city's main seaport and the international airport. The step, according to officials of the Supreme Security Committee of Aden, was taken as a precaution to maintain law and order and confront armed groups that seek to undermine stability in the city. (Xinhua)

(25) U.S. Conducting...

uters on Thursday foreign special forces have been conducting raids behind Islamic State lines in Hawija ahead of an offensive planned later this year to retake Mosul, the largest city under Islamic State control. He said the raids were carried out "from time to time" and "supported by Iraqi forces" but did not specify whether the United States had played a role or how many had occurred. (Reuters)

(26) Qaeda Abducts...

fighters, who disapprove of what they term the station's "secular tendency and support of apostates", Taleb said. According to a statement published by Fresh FM, Al-Nusra fighters stormed the radio station and confiscated its broadcasting and technical equipment as well as its electricity generators. "The Al-Nusra members then gathered all of the revolution flags and burned them in front of everyone," the statement said. (AFP)

(27) Cologne Attacks ...

suspicion is that a specific date and the expected crowds were picked. This would again add another dimension (to the crimes)," Maas told Bild am Sonntag, called for a thorough investigation into connections between attacks that happened in different German cities. (Xinhua)

(28) Dutch PM ...

parties have said they would feel bound to take a "no" into account. It had not been previously clear whether the government would weigh in on the campaign or instead hope that the vote would be undermined by low turnout. "I will vote 'yes' in the referendum," Rutte said on public television's Buitenhof show. "And I and my colleagues will explain why we are doing so.

It's about free trade ... not an accession treaty as its opponents say." Anti-European website GeenStijl collected 430,000 signatures to trigger the plebiscite, claiming an association agreement with Ukraine would lead eventually to full membership for the war-torn country of 45 million. (Reuters)