

(1) IEC 'Fully'...

President Ashraf Ghani's decree on the amendment of electoral laws is passed by parliament and also after bringing reforms in electoral bodies.

"In a meeting that we had with the president, it was agreed that the president will issue another decree during winter break of parliament. Once the electoral reforms are brought, parliamentary and district council elections should be held," said the Wolesi Jirga's second deputy speaker, Mohammad Nazir Ahmadzai.

"People, civil society, international community and government don't want these people to hold elections, because people have lost trust in them and the international community is not ready to financially support the elections, before bringing about reforms," said Mohammad Abdul, the chairman of the Legislative Committee of the Wolesi Jirga.

The Presidential Palace said that the government is committed to bringing about reforms in the electoral process and the reforms will be brought immediately.

Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah and Second Vice President Sarwar Danish recently said the parliamentary and district council elections will be held by new commissioners - which will be introduced by the Election Commissions Selection Committee. But it is not clear yet what the fate of the electoral bodies and the parliamentary polls will be. (Tolonews)

(2) EU Seeks ...

towards Western Balkan corridor. This is why, as European Union, as European institutions, we deal with the root causes," he said.

"We must address the root causes of the refugee crisis. We must fight [for a] political solution inside Syria, inside Afghanistan, inside Iraq," the EU commissioner added.

He also said that European institutions have made a lot of initiatives in Syria in order to persuade people to stay in their country.

Meanwhile, the Serbian Prime Minister said that his country will fulfill all its obligations regarding migrants and refugees in order to protect them.

"We will fulfill all the obligations we receive from the European Union as a serious, responsible country, by protecting the rights of these people, respecting their human rights, and at the same time, do what was agreed and what is an overall EU policy," the Serbian Prime Minister added.

This comes after an increasing number of Afghans leave the country to European countries on a daily basis to seek better lives and economy.

The Afghan government recently vowed to address the challenges in the country and provide job opportunity for the young folks. Meanwhile the ministry of refugees and repatriation said migrants will return to the country if the European Union helps Afghanistan overcome its current challenges.

"Afghan government hopes that developed countries, like European Union members, prepare the way for Afghans and help them overcome challenges through political ways," said Islamuddin Jurat, the ministry's spokesman.

MP Abdul Qayum Sajadi said the EU should help Afghans in the country so they do not leave. "If the European Union wants to decrease the flow of migrants it should make plans to improve the political situation in countries like Afghanistan. If this happens, Afghans will not want to leave their country," Sajadi said. (Tolonews)

(3) Religious Scholars...

and the country, it is war which is aimed to tarnish the image of our religion, this is not the war for Islam and Islamic values," researcher Mohammad Mohiq said.

The scholars strongly condemned the Taliban insurgency and activities of Daesh militants, announcing it against the human values and Islamic laws.

"The only way to combat this violence and extremism is to seek help from the scholars which can change public mindset," said the head of Herat's Hajj and reli-

gious affairs department Sayed Abdul Wahid.

"Today there is a situation in which even the women and the children aren't safe including the scholars and the elderly people," religious scholar Shahzada Shahid said.

"The violence which is emerging from extremism has destroyed the entire nation, if this extremism is not tackled, this will push Afghanistan toward more crisis," head of Badghis religious affairs department Sayed Abdul Halim said. (Tolonews)

(4) Villages in ...

insurgents have been killed and 15 others injured.

"Our forces at a checkpoint in Adam Khan village fought for five days, after that their equipment was finished, they tactically retreated 1.5 kilometers back and now we are on the defensive," he said, adding the Taliban have sustained heavy casualties in the fighting.

The fighting between Afghan security forces and the Taliban militants started around six days ago, when a large group of Taliban insurgents attacked several areas of the province and captured several villages. (Tolonews)

(5) 160 Afghan ...

group headed by Imtiaz Afridi, former hockey Olympian, boycotted the elections and alleged that 18 out of the total 32 sports organisations which polled their votes were bogus and not registered with Pakistan Olympics Association. (Agencies)

(6) First Consultative...

Georgia. The Corridor then connects cities of Kors and Istanbul of Turkey and finally ends in Europe.

The Asian Development Bank has allocated USD 130mn for the implementation of the Corridor which further integrates Afghanistan into the region via road and rail. According to a recent study by the Afghan Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI), transit through Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey via road and rail is a viable transit route for trade with the EU, Balkans and Eastern Europe. An initiative of the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the proposal for the Corridor received approval from the regional countries in March 2014.

The significance of the Lapis Lazuli Corridor was highlighted by the representatives of the concerned countries in the first technical working group meeting of Lapis Lazuli Corridor held in Turkmenistan on 15 November 2014. The Corridor was termed as a "shortest, less expensive, and secure passage" connecting Caucasus and Central Asia. It seeks to improve and streamline transport infrastructure and customs procedures, increase trade, create employment opportunities and bolster economic ties between the concerned nations benefitting from this trade route.

The officials regarded the operationalization of the Corridor as a key factor in reviving the New Silk Road. President Ashraf Ghani also reflected on the importance of the Corridor in connecting Afghanistan with the regional countries in his speech to the American congress in March 2015 and said that Afghanistan has "already made significant headway in making the vision of the of the Lapis Lazuli corridor that will link us to Turkmenistan, Georgia, Turkey and Europe into a reality."

Furthermore, the Lapis Lazuli Corridor will provide Afghanistan with an alternative trade route. Afghanistan currently relies on its neighboring countries, mainly Pakistan, for the transit of its goods.

Afghanistan's right of transit through Pakistan was recognized in the Afghanistan-Transit Trade Agreement (ATA) that dates back to 1965. The agreement was superseded by the Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) which came into force in June of 2011. As per the agreement, Pakistan will allow Afghan trucks to carry Afghan products to the markets of China, India and other countries through the seaports of Karachi, Qasim and Gwadar Ports.

However, Afghan merchants have time and again complained about the hurdles caused by

Pakistani customs in exports of Afghan goods to international markets by blocking the trade routes or hiking shipping freight rate. In January 2015, as many as 2,000 Afghan containers loaded with food and non-food items were stuck at Karachi port for over two weeks due to unjustified raise in freight rates by Pakistani customs. While Pakistan has always promised to be fully committed in helping to successfully implement the APTTA, Afghanistan finds their promises dubious as transit problems on Pakistan's soil continue to be a major impediment in boosting Afghan exports. Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) sees the Lapis Lazuli Corridor as the best alternative trade route for Afghanistan's goods to reach the international markets and reduce its reliance on neighboring countries. (Wadsam)

(7) Kabul Ready...

are expected in the second round of the meeting," Mustaghni said. Meanwhile, a number of Afghan lawmakers in the Wolesi Jirga (lower house of parliament) have asked the government to present the stance of the people of Afghanistan firmly and resolutely.

"Focus must be put on the problems clearly which could help us to settle our disputes with the Taliban and Pakistan to reach peace which is a fundamental aspiration of the people of Afghanistan," MP Farhad Majidi said. In the first meeting representatives from all four countries agreed to safeguard the sovereignty of the government of Afghanistan. (Tolonews)

(8) US Should ...

expected to increase the Afghan forces capabilities to suppress the Taliban-led insurgency by large extent. (KP)

(9) Mining Sector ...

still being exploited in callous ways, he regretted.

Lack of coordination and planning were the main reasons behind irregularities and embezzlement, Afzali noted. The international community injected money into the sector without a proper strategy to get revenue, he said, stressing the need for long-term strategic planning for excavating the natural wealth.

He warned the mining sector, whose revenue was going into the pockets of top government officials, powerful individuals, lawmakers and others, was faced with a serious crisis. The lack of professional workers to excavate mines is also damaging the sector.

"Militants are out to fuel insecurity in areas where natural resources are excavated. They take control of these areas and the revenue line their pockets," Afzali said, accusing the government of failing to keep its promises to eradicate corruption and amend the mining law. (Pajhwok)

(10) ANSF Repel ...

Kala localities of Nahri Sarraj district Friday morning. The NATO-led coalition's air power supported the Afghan forces to push back the day-long attacks. As a result 37 militants were killed and 14 others wounded," Lieutenant Colonel Mohammad Rassoul Zazai, spokesman of army Corp 215 Maiwand, told Xinhua.

No member of security force was killed during the clashes while three insurgents' vehicles were destroyed by the security forces, Zazai added. Helmand province, notorious for poppy growing, is also a known Taliban stronghold.

The Taliban has intensified attacks across the country since the start of this year, which coincides with the potential resumption of government-Taliban peace talks and the launch of second round of four-nation meeting of Afghanistan, China, U.S. and Pakistan on Afghan peace process to be held in Kabul early next week. The Taliban has yet to make comments. (Xinhua)

(11) Merkel Allies...

Bavarian state premier Horst Seehofer said he would send the federal government a written request within the next two weeks to restore "orderly conditions" at the nation's borders, through which one million migrants and

refugees passed last year alone. "If it doesn't follow, the state government will have no other choice but to file a suit at the federal constitutional court," Seehofer told Der Spiegel magazine. Seehofer has issued a series of ultimatums to Merkel in recent months to press her into taking immediate action to limit the influx of migrants, only to back down at the last minute.

His comments reflect increasing doubt among Germans about Merkel's "we can do this" mantra in the face of Europe's biggest migrant crisis since World War Two, especially since sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve were blamed on migrants. (Reuters)

(12) Senate Republican...

the Senate Armed Services Committee prepares to hold its first hearing on the issue next week. Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, sent a letter on Friday to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction to request a formal audit of the Defense Department's Task Force for Business and Stability Operations.

"I believe that the Defense Department must provide an accurate accounting of how all the money provided to the TFBSO was actually spent," Grassley wrote in a letter to the special inspector general. "I need assurance that all this money was spent in accordance with the law." (Monitoring Desk)

(13) Gunmen Attack ...

were armed with rocket launchers and small arms when they launched attack on the bank building.

Mamozaifuther added that the branch belonged to First Micro-Finance Bank Afghanistan which is part of the Aga Khan Development Network (ADKN).

He said the attack did not cause any casualties but the property of the bank sustained damages due to rocket and bullets impact. No group including the Taliban militants has so far claimed responsibility behind the attack. Parwan is among the relatively volatile provinces in northern Afghanistan where anti-government armed militant groups are actively operating in its remote districts and often carry out insurgency activities. (KP)

(14) Rocket Attack...

the rockets were planted in Qala-e-Abdul Rauf area of Musahi district and were ready to launch on Kabul city.

The anti-government armed militant groups have not commented regarding the attack plot so far which comes amid deteriorating security situation with the rampant Taliban-led insurgency. The attack has been thwarted as Kabul witnessed a spate of deadly suicide attacks during the recent weeks.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for three separate suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIED) attacks in the Afghan capital between 1 and 4 January, killing five civilians and injuring at least 56. "The use of highly explosive devices in civilian populated areas continues to cause extreme harm to Afghan women, children and men," said Mark Bowden, the Deputy Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and acting head of UNAMA.

Bowden further added "Loss of life, maiming, destruction of homes, businesses and personal property and widespread fear - these are the real consequences of suicide attacks in urban areas." (KP)

(15) US Military...

Iraq and Afghanistan, will likely need "about two to three weeks" to redact the Kunduz report for potential public release, said one defense official who is not authorized to speak for attribution. The official said that no decisions have been made about when and if it might be made public.

One congressional staffer told Foreign Policy that the U.S. Army Green Beret team on the ground on the night of the attack has come under particular scrutiny from investigators for their role in calling in the strike by an AC-130 gunship, which lasted about 30 minutes.

In addition to the 42 killed, including 14 of the aid group's staffers, several dozen others

were wounded. MSF has called the attack a "war crime."

Also likely in the crosshairs of investigators is Army Lt. Col. Jason Johnston, the commander of the military's special operations task force in Afghanistan. Given the strict rules of engagement in Afghanistan, it's likely that his superior, Army Maj. Gen. Sean Swindell, who oversees all U.S. and NATO special operations forces in the country, and Air Force Maj. Gen. Scott West, the overall commander of the air war in Afghanistan, are also likely to have drawn the attention of the investigators.

If the only military personnel reprimanded are enlisted soldiers or junior officers, it will further infuriate MSF, which has already made clear that it didn't believe the Pentagon could be trusted adequately investigate itself. The aid group has called for an independent investigation.

A spokesman for the U.S. military command in Afghanistan, Col. Michael Lawhorn, did not comment on the specifics of the report or those involved, but said that any legal process would potentially "have different decisions for different individuals." (Tolonews)

(16) Pakistan Executed...

those accused of carrying out attacks. Hangings were initially reinstated only for those convicted of terrorism, but in March they were extended to all capital offences. In a written reply submitted to the parliament on Friday, the Ministry of Interior and Narcotics Control said 332 people had been executed in the country. (AFP)

(17) Turkey Asks...

pretend we aren't doing anything."

Turkey has often been criticised by its Western allies for not doing enough to combat IS jihadists who have seized swathes of territory in Syria and Iraq.

"Daesh represents for us the greatest danger," the deputy prime minister said, using another name to refer to IS.

On the migrant crisis too, Simsek said "we are already doing a lot."

Turkey, which shares a border with war-torn Syria, is a key player in the current record migrant influx to Europe, with EU countries seeking Ankara's help to stem the flow. (AFP)

(18) Taliban Says ...

Afghanistan, the Taliban group said they "are not a threat to anyone including America and have no intention of enmity and fighting with anyone rather our goal is to defend our soil."

The statement by the Taliban group further added "No other system is acceptable to the Afghans except for an Islamic system. In short the end of occupation and establishment of Islamic system is peace as well as the solution in itself. Similarly it embodies security, stability and aspirations of the Afghan nation."

Taliban-led insurgency being rampant amid efforts to revive peace talks has not been unprecedented with the Afghan officials saying the move by the Taliban group ahead of potential talks is to gain privilege for the negotiations.

The officials also believe that the group has stepped up efforts to take control of key areas of Helmand province in a bid to shift the group's council from Quetta city of Pakistan.

Meanwhile, the Taliban militants suffered heavy casualties in the latest wave of counter attacks launched by the Afghan security forces in Helmand province.

The Ministry of Defense (MoD) said at least 35 militants were killed after the Afghan forces repulsed an offensive in Greshk district on Friday night with the support of the coalition forces who were providing air support from the air. (KP)

(19) Taliban-IS ...

Taliban members, while two other men of that rebel group were wounded seriously during the shootings. The aforementioned casualties add to the 10 others suffered by the IS on Thursday, as a consequence of two attacks led by the Afghan Air Force in the district Achin. According to the local news agency Khaama Press, drones destroyed the two vehicles in which the terrorist

were traveling. (Prensa Latina)

(20) N. Korea...

meeting his counterpart from Japan and South Korea.

North Korea said on Jan. 6 it had tested a hydrogen bomb, provoking condemnation from its neighbors and the United States. The isolated state has long sought a peace treaty with the United States, as well as an end to the exercises by South Korea and the United States, which has about 28,500 troops based in South Korea.

"Still valid are all proposals for preserving peace and stability on the peninsula and in Northeast Asia including the ones for ceasing our nuclear test and the conclusion of a peace treaty in return for U.S. halt to joint military exercises," North Korea's official KCNA news agency cited a spokesman for the country's foreign ministry as saying early on Saturday. (Reuters)

(21) U.S. Drone...

known to operate throughout the tribal areas of Shabwa, Abyan and al-Baydha provinces. Yemen, an impoverished Arab country, has been gripped by one of the most active regional al-Qaida insurgencies in the Middle East.

Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which emerged in January 2009 and also known locally as Ansar al-Sharia, had claimed responsibility for a number of attacks on Yemen's army and government institutions. (Xinhua)

(22) Malaysia Arrests...

to sneak into Syria. They were recruited by a Malaysian militant who had joined IS in Syria through social networking site.

Police said they had seen on highest alert following the bombing attacks in Indonesian capital city of Jakarta on Thursday. Authorities said more than 40 Malaysian were believed to be fighting for IS in Syria and Iraq at present. (Xinhua)

(23) Int'l Renewable...

Amin also said that Paris showed that despite huge challenges in global security, the world can stand together. The ambitious objective agreed at COP21 to keep global temperature increase below two degrees Celsius and to step up actions to limit it to 1.5 degrees Celsius also proved that the global community was ready to take serious steps to reduce global warming.

"Sustainable development depends on the richness of renewable energy resources," said Mohamed Hamed Shaker El-Markaby, Egypt's Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy.

"I am confident in IRENA's ability to perform its mission in mobilizing the entire world's efforts to build more sustainable economies, which rely mainly on renewable sources," Markaby, also president of the assembly, added. (Xinhua)

(24) Nepal Formally ...

garden with a pond next to it in Kathmandu.

It is still not clear when work on other more devastated areas will begin, and people in northern mountain villages who are living in tents in freezing weather likely will have to wait for months.

Nepal has been criticized for delaying the much-needed reconstruction work because of disagreements among political parties, drafting the country's new constitution, ethnic protests and severe fuel shortages.

Foreign donors have pledged \$4.1 billion for earthquake reconstruction, but little has reached Nepal because setting up the new National Reconstruction Authority to handle the task took months.

"We will move the reconstruction campaign at full speed. Next year there won't be damaged houses here. It will be a clean and beautiful town," Oli told the cheering people in this farming town, where seven people died and 1,166 houses were damaged. (AP)

(25) Italy Deploys...

close air support, reconnaissance and armed patrol. Military sources quoted by ANSA news agency said the objective of the deployed aircraft was to monitor the area. (Xinhua)