

(1) Documents of...

days, he wrote on his Facebook account.

The confidence vote process is scheduled to be held on Sunday.

Wolesi Jirga member Humaira Ayubi told Pajhwok Afghan News the documents of ministers-designate of interior, defence, hajj, education, rural rehabilitation and NDS head were found valid.

"Fifteen nominees have received degrees and certificates from foreign institutions and they could not be authenticated by the Ministry of Higher Education," the legislator added.

Another Wolesi Jirga member, who wished not to be named, claimed that some public representatives from eastern provinces were trying to give the nominees a raw deal.

The source believed the confidence-vote proceedings would take a long time to complete if legislators did not vote nominees with dual nationality. The house is due to rise for its winter recess on Jan. 21. (Pajhwok)

(2) Parliament...

Zaman Maiwandi for the Ministry of Urban Development; Faizullah Kakar for the Ministry of Counter Narcotics and Ahmad Siar Mahjur for the Ministry of Justice. (Tolonews)

(3) Turkmenistan, ...

ghanistan.

The sides also emphasized the significance of transport projects in the development of bilateral economic cooperation. They discussed the issues related to the construction of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan railway and Afghanistan-Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan-Georgia transport and transit corridor.

Afghan president said he supports all the energy, transit and transport projects between the two countries. He added that Afghanistan is ready to ensure the transit of Turkmen natural gas and electricity to China and other countries through its territory.

Ghani is accompanied by his Vice-Presidents Gen. Abdur Rashid Dostam and Mohammad Mohaqiq, National Security Advisor Hanif Atmar and acting finance minister Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal.

The presidents signed a joint statement following the negotiations.

Meanwhile, the sides signed a memorandum of understanding on the further cooperation in electricity sphere, as well as a cooperation program between the foreign ministries of the two countries for 2016-2017. (Trend News Agency)

(4) Hekmat Karzai ...

Afghanistan's Center for Conflict and Peace Studies (CAPS), which has branches in southern Kandahar and Helmand as well. (Tolonews)

(5) Obama Insists....

taken the lead," Obama said, saluting the troops' sacrifices by supporting the country's first democratic transition.

Referring to the costly lessons learned by the U.S., Obama stressed the need for cooperation with the world nations in fighting terrorism instead of sending ground forces overseas.

He also touched on the growing issue of the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) militants who have apparently been sighted in some unrest areas of Afghanistan. "In Iraq and Syria, American leadership, including our military power, is stopping ISIL's advance."

The rumors of IS fighters presence in Afghanistan grew sharply after local authorities confirmed sightings of the newly-emerged militants in Nimruz and Helmand provinces.

But the Ministry of Interior (MoI) rejected the existence of IS militants, insisting they were the same Taliban and Haqqani militants operating under different names in hopes of garnering greater support. (Tolonews)

(6) Afghanistan...

plans to export 80 billion cubic meters (bcm) of its natural gas annually to the Asian and European countries by 2025. The country exported over 10 bcm of gas in 2014.

Earlier this month, Iranian and Afghan officials called for enhancement of all-out ties, especially in the energy sector.

According to Fars News Agency, in a meeting between Iranian Deputy Oil Minister Amirhossein Zamaninia and Afghan National Security Adviser Mohammad Hanif Atmar in Tehran last year, the two sides stressed that expansion of bilateral economic cooperation will pave the ground for restoration of security in the region. (Agencies)

(7) Pakistan Using...

foreign meddling. "Pakistan has since been conspiring against us...trying to occupy our country."

Karzai acknowledged the US and Pakistan had helped him come to power, but that did not mean all his actions were dictated by Kabul and Washington. (Pajhwok)

(8) India Responds...

ttari in India, which has resulted in the outrage of Afghan traders and private sector officials.

According to a press release from the Indian Embassy in Kabul, such a restriction would severely curtail Afghanistan's access to the Indian market. It may be mentioned that India provides duty free access to the Indian market for all Afghanistan's export products under the Agreement of South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA).

In a bid to give a fillip to Afghanistan's exports to India and to reduce the transaction costs for Afghan exporters, India allows Afghan trucks to directly unload in Attari.

"We hope that this offer will overcome the limitation currently being faced by Afghanistan and also contribute to greater regional integration which is an objective pursued by all members of SAARC," states the press release.

Attari is a village of Amritsar District in the Punjab state of India, 3 km. from the Indo-Pakistani border at Wagah. (Agencies)

(9) Revised Budget...

on December 22. The draft was approved by the Council of Ministers and then Meshrano Jirga sent it to Wolesi Jirga with some recommendations on Dec 9.

MPs cited imbalance in allocations to provinces and no funding to some incomplete projects from the previous fiscal year, insufficient fund allocation for Afghan students studying abroad and no clarification of necessary codes among other reasons for rejecting the draft budget.

Wolesi Jirga's Finance Commission head Amir Yar Khan said funds had been unconstitutionally allocated to the offices of the chief executives and the president's special representative on reforms and good governance.

"It is illegal because the creation of a new department needs parliament's approval under the Constitution. The two offices are yet to be introduced to the national assembly."

Under Article 90 of the Constitution, the parliament has the authority to create and modify administrative units.

However, Yar told Pajhwok Afghan News the Finance Ministry had brought sufficient changes to the draft budget before sending it to the parliament.

He said the revised budget had been discussed by the house panels in joint sittings and most of the panels had a positive view about it.

"We have in principal included funds for the chief executive and the president's envoy on reforms and good governance to the necessary codes. If the two offices are introduced and approved by the assembly, they will be allocated funds,

otherwise no funding to them," Yar said.

The revised version of the budget would be tabled in the lower house on Monday, said Yar, hoping it would be approved then.

The Ministry of Finance says the general budget is worth \$275 billion and development spending \$183 billion -- 70 per cent coming from foreign aid. Under Article 98 of the Constitution, the general and development budgets are prepared in light of Meshrano Jirga recommendations before it is sent to Wolesi Jirga for a final decision.

The Finance Ministry had urged the assembly to approve the budget at the earliest in order to enable the government to avoid delays in completing development projects.

But the assembly responded the draft had been presented to it quite late and the government would be responsible for any delay in its approval.

The lower house was scheduled to rise for a 45-day winter recess today (Wednesday), but it put on hold the break until the budget is approved. (Pajhwok)

(10) MPs Stick to...

others had denied. He urged colleagues to act in line with their own evolution of documents of the nominees.

He said the assembly had received written testimonies from the cabinet picks making it clear on them that they would be treated in accordance with the law.

MP Abdul Sattar Khawasi said Article 72 of the Constitution barred dual nationality holder from becoming a minister.

Siddique Ahmad Osmani, who chaired today's session, said the assembly was bound to act in accordance with the Constitutional provisions. He said the government had the authority to interpret laws from a source it could.

Lawmaker Gul Pacha Majidi said the newly-formed committee comprising members of three commissions tended to confuse the issue of dual nationality. He called for a clear stance on the issue. (Pajhwok)

(11) Durrani Pledges ... (NDS) and Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB) to the Parliament for a vote of confidence.

Some of the nominees on Wednesday unveiled their future plans and others would follow suit tomorrow and on Saturday.

Eng. Nasir Ahmad Durrani, the pick to head the MRRD, briefed lawmakers about his future programmes. He said developing rural economy, reducing the distinction between villages and cities, the risks from national disasters and standardising rural development projects would remain his priorities.

He said, if endorsed, he planned to bring tangible improvement to the living standard of residents of rural areas by converting their consumer culture into an independent producer.

A team of experts would be formed to study various projects and their impact on rural life such as employment, increase in income and other social and economic impacts, he continued. Investment in villages, creating markets for local products, construction of roads, bridges and small hydropower dams would be part of his job, he added.

On countering corruption, the nominee said he would introduce a culture of professionalism and a strong oversight of contracts, which would be awarded only to those companies having good background, technical and financial ability. He assured lawmakers of his accountability, if endorsed. (Pajhwok)

(12) If Endorsed,...

corruption. He would also forge coordination with Pakistan at the tactical level.

Stressing public support for the army, he promised taking steps to address the current problems facing the institution.

A son of Mohammad Karim,

Karimi was born in 1945 in southeastern Khost province. He graduated from the Military Academy in Kabul before completing military course in the UK, US, India and Egypt. (Pajhwok)

(13) Edu Minister...

outline my priorities and plans to deal with the challenges involved," he said.

Younusi acknowledged he would have to shoulder the heavy responsibility of Afghan children's education along modern lines.

The Ministry of Education would not progress if fanaticism, corruption and illegal interferences continued, he believed, pledging to address teachers' problems.

Younusi would try to resolve all problems exist in the ministry and extend literacy courses to remote areas, besides starting computer classes in schools. Reconstructing of school buildings and improving teacher training standards are also among his goals. Nomadic children and people with disabilities would be given special attention.

Calling the evaluation of private schools important, he suggested they should be under the supervision of the ministry and have coordination with government institutes. (Pajhwok)

(14) Lashkargah Mayor...

their area had been sold out to private individuals by the mayor and the governor, leaving no land for roads. "That's why they want to destroy some homes to create space for roads."

He said residents had rejected the municipality's demand of money and in reaction, the department unleashed rainwater on their houses to force them into payment.

"Last night, rainwater entered all homes in the area, caving in several walls. Children and women stayed in the open as we struggled with water exit." It has been raining in Helmand since yesterday.

Another resident, Abdul Baqi, said the governor was not allowing him to enter his office and share the problem with him. He said the governor's house referred him to the mayor, who sent him back to the governor's house.

"Free Zone residents are poor, they have no money to give it to the officials. All public land in our area is sold out, now they look to our homes."

He urged the central government to send a delegation to the province to investigate and resolve the issue. He warned residents would resort to protests against the government if their problem was not resolved. Allah Noor, another resident, alleged the mayor had told them to offer bribes to public representatives or be ready to face more problems.

Lashkargah Mayor Mohammad Fazil Safi rejected the allegations. He said neither he had sought money from anyone nor he had unleashed rainwater on someone's house.

He said the Free Zone residents had built house on government land and were preventing the municipality to implement its plan. He said they were trying to resolve the issue.

Pajhwok contacted the acting governor, but he refused to talk and said media people would be briefed on the issue next time.

Helmand police chief Brig. Gen. Juma Gul Himmat had previously told Pajhwok Afghan News that the municipality and the governor's house had illegally distributed some land plots. He said police landed in trouble after they tried to prevent construction works on the plots. (Pajhwok)

(15) Ultimate US ...

some involved in counterterrorism measures.

Campbell acknowledged that the Islamic State, which has thus far focused its efforts in Syria and Iraq, has been active in recruiting new members in Afghanistan although most

Taliban members still pledge allegiance to their leader, Mullah Omar, who has hid in Pakistan since late 2001. (ABC NEWS)

(16) Exports to ...

Mil 78 \$18.360 and Dokouhaneh \$2.900 million in the first nine months of the current year.

Meanwhile, he noted, the amount of imports from the said four border marketplace has dropped by 51% in the current year.

He noted that decrease in imports is not a negative issue although it will be effective in the revenue sector. (FNA)

(17) Court Moved ...

said of the charges.

The remaining four accused include two education department officials, one rural development department employee and a contractor.

To a question, Safi said: "We have investigated their dossiers and produced them before the court, which is to decide their fate."

The governor's house confirmed corruption charges against some officials were being investigated by the provincial attorney's office.

Education Director Ihsanullah Nasher once again rejected the allegations. He said his case was referred to the court as a result of his refusal to pay bribes.

"I have committed no corruption. The school project in which corruption is claimed was completed six years ago. Some attorneys sought kickbacks, but I refused," he alleged.

Pajhwok tried to seek comments from the other accused, but did not succeed. There has been no reaction to the charges from the remaining accused. (Pajhwok)

(18) Turkmens...

intelligent individuals like other tribes then why we are denied our full rights," he asked.

Ending the gathering, the participants issued a 17-article declaration, in which they demanded government positions from ministerial slots to district administrations according to the tribe's population share.

The cabinet nominees, which the unity government introduced to the Parliament on Tuesday for a vote of confidence, include Faiz Mohammad Osmani, a Turkmen, to head the Ministry of Haj and Auqaf. (Pajhwok)

(19) Fuel Prices ...

recently graduated from school, is the only breadwinner for his family. He alleged traffic officers in Afghanistan looked for ways of fleeing drivers.

On the other hand, Traffic Director Gen. Asad denied the bribery allegation and asked drivers to share evidence with him in support of their claim. (Pajhwok)

(20) 23 Rebels...

Meanwhile, residents voiced their concern at the situation, asking for tightening security in the district. One dweller Jalaluddin said: "The government couldn't purge the area of militants so far." (Pajhwok)

(21) Heavy

the first snowfall of the ongoing winter season in Herat. (Pajhwok)

Japanese Reporter's Bid to Save Friend Led to Islamic State Abduction

TOKYO - It is an unlikely friendship that ties the fates of war correspondent Kenji Goto and troubled loner Haruna Yukawa, the two Japanese hostages for which Islamic State militants demanded a \$200 million ransom this week.

Yukawa was captured in August outside Aleppo. Goto, who had returned to Syria in late October to try to help his friend, had been missing since then.

For Yukawa, who dreamed of becoming a military contractor, traveling to Syria had been part of an effort to turn his life around after going bankrupt, losing his wife to cancer and attempting suicide, according to associates and his own accounts.

A unit at Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been seeking information on him since August, people involved in that effort said. Goto's disappearance had not been reported until Tuesday's video apparently showing him and Yukawa kneeling in orange t-shirts next to a masked Islamic State militant wielding a knife.

Yukawa first met Goto in Syria in April and asked him to take him to Iraq. He wanted to know how to operate in a conflict zone. They went together in June.

"He was hapless and didn't know what he was doing. He needed someone with experience to help him," Goto told Reuters in August.

Yukawa then returned to Syria in July on his own. Goto, 47, returned to Japan. Yukawa's subsequent abduction haunted Goto, who felt he had to do something to help the man, a few years his junior.

"I need to go there at least once and see my fixers and ask them what the current situation is. I need to talk to them face to face. I think that's necessary," Goto said, referring to locals who work freelance for foreign correspondents, setting up meetings and helping with the language.

Goto began working as a full-time war correspondent in 1996 and had established a reputation as a careful and reliable operator for Japanese broadcasters, including NHK.

"He understood what he had to do and he was cautious," said Naomi Toyoda, who reported with him from Jordan in the 1990s.

Goto, who converted to Christianity in 1997, also spoke of his faith in the context of his job.

"I have seen horrible places and have risked my life, but I know that somehow God will always save me," he said in a May article for the Japanese publication Christian Today. But he told the same publication that he never risked anything dangerous, citing a passage in the Bible, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

In October, Goto's wife had a baby, the couple's second child. He has an older daughter from a previous marriage, people who know the family said.

Around the same time, he made plans to leave for Syria and uploaded several short video clips to his Twitter feed, one showing him with media credentials issued by anti-government rebels in Aleppo.

On Oct. 22, he emailed an acquaintance, a high school teacher, to say he planned to be back in Japan at the end of the month. Friends say he traveled from Tokyo to Istanbul and traveled from there to Syria, sending a message on Oct. 25 that he had crossed the border and was safe.

"Whatever happens, this is my responsibility," Goto said on a video recorded shortly before he set out for Raqqa, the capital of the Islamic State. (Reuters)

Russia has 9,000 Troops on Ukrainian Soil, Poroshenko tells Davos Forum

DAVOS, Switzerland - Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said on Wednesday Russia had 9,000 troops on Ukrainian soil supporting separatist forces there and he called on Moscow to withdraw them.

In a speech to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Poroshenko said the Russian troops were backed by a range of heavy weapons, including tanks, heavy artillery and armored vehicles.

«If this is not aggression, what is aggression?» he asked.

Poroshenko said Moscow must comply with a peace plan agreed in Minsk, Belarus, last September between Ukraine, Russia and separatist leaders to end a conflict in which more than 4,800 people have died since it flared up last April.

«Our approach is very simple we have nothing to negotiate ... We have the Minsk format and we need immediately just a ceasefire and the withdrawal of heavy artillery and weapons and tanks from the touchline,» Poroshenko said. (Reuters)