

(1) King Abdullah...

King Salman and Crown Prince Muqrin will receive pledges of allegiance from citizens on Friday evening.

The news of Abdullah's death spurred oil prices in main trading markets around the world, which had lost more than half their value since June 2014, when they were sitting at more than 100 U.S. dollars a barrel.

U.S. benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) for March delivery soared as much as 3.1 percent in New York, while Brent crude for March jumped 1.09 dollars, or 2.25 percent, to 49.61 dollars.

The price spikes come after months of sharp falls in the energy markets as soaring supplies clash with slowing demand.

Saudi Arabia, the main producer in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), has rejected calls from some OPEC members to slash output, preferring instead to lower prices.

In response to the death of the Saudi king, U.S. President Barack Obama expressed condolences and offered sympathy Thursday to the people of Saudi Arabia upon the death of King Abdullah, an important ally and a major force in the Muslim world.

The White House also announced that Vice President Joe Biden would lead a U.S. delegation to Saudi Arabia in the coming days to pay respects to the king's family.

In a statement, Obama credited Abdullah for being dedicated to the education of his people and for greater outreach to the international community.

Selected as crown prince in 1982, Abdullah had been responsible for the day-to-day running of the country after late King Fahd suffered a stroke in 1995.

He is seen as the main force behind the unprecedented reforms in the past years, including the first communal elections and giving women new professional career choices. He is also credited with a set of measures to attract foreign investments and create job opportunities.

Salman was appointed as crown prince and deputy premier in 2012 after the death of Saudi Arabia's heir apparent and interior minister prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. And he had served as a defense minister since 2011.

Salman, born in 1935, had increasingly taken on the duties of the king over the past year as his ailing predecessor Abdullah became more incapacitated.

The new king appeared to back Abdullah's reforms, but he has also voiced concerns about moving too fast.

Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz was appointed as the second-in-line to the throne after his half-brothers King Abdullah and Crown Prince Salman in 2014.

Muqrin, born in 1945, the youngest of sons of Abdulaziz, is the second deputy prime minister.

He has served as an adviser and special envoy of King Abdullah since 2012, previously serving as the head of Saudi intelligence.

He is believed to be supportive of Abdullah's economic and social reforms. (Xinhua)

(2) Legislators Divided ...

of Afghanistan. A day earlier, four Wolesi Jirga panels rejected seven dual national cabinet picks, including the ministers-designate of foreign and interior ministries, dealing a blow to President Ghani's efforts at forming his government nearly four months later he was inaugurated.

The Presidential Palace has introduced 24 ministers-designate and nominees for the spy service and the central bank.

MP Abdul Sattar Darzabi from northern Jawzjan province told Pajhwok Afghan News the National Assembly would not play politics with the government over the question of dual nationality.

"At the time when we decided not to approve dual citizens, none of us knew who will be the nominees. Now we are compelled to implement our decision, which does not mean any confrontation with the government."

Darzabi said the government should adhere to truthfulness and show respect to law implementation and should not enter a conflict with the parliament over the issue of dual citizenship. "If possible, a solution should be found to the issue."

His colleague from northern Balkh province, Ahmad Shah Ramazan, said the parliament had not meted out step-motherly treatment to the government in the case of dual nationality holders.

"We have no problem with the gov-

ernment. It is a decision of the parliament that dual nationality holders will not be approved. I have the same view that they should not be voted."

MP Haji Zahir Qadir from eastern Nangarhar province also said the house's decision regarding dual citizens should be implemented.

"A legal way should be adopted to reverse the house decision, not through hue and cry," said Qadir, who reminded President Ghani of his remarks that no government official would interfere in the parliament's affairs.

"But some ministers and governors are trying to break the house decision on the dual nationality holders," he claimed.

When asked who were these ministers and governors, Qadir said: "Tonight there will be a gathering at the Inter-Con, go and see who they are." Qadir, a powerful figure in Nangarhar, said he and his parliamentary bloc would allow no one to break the house decision in return for money or privileges.

However, a number of lawmakers at today's session insisted dual nationality holders should be granted the trust vote.

Outspoken female lawmaker from Kabul Shukria Barakzai said the Wolesi Jirga had unlawfully formed the joint commission to vet documents of ministers-designate.

She said the Constitution gave all sections of society the right to elect or be elected and the assembly could not decide against the law or deprive people of that right.

Article 33 of the Constitution says the citizens of Afghanistan have the right to elect and be elected. The clause 2 says law regulates the conditions and means to exercise this right.

MP Gulalai Noor Safi from Balkh said cabinet picks who had shunned their dual nationality should be granted a trust vote after confirming the matter from the embassies concerned.

"Foreign embassies say Afghans who have shunned their countries' citizenship should travel to their countries with Afghan passport and should have visas of their countries. Now as these individuals have become only Afghans, we should endorse them."

Gulalai said the joint commission had misused its authority in assessing documents of ministers-designate and rejecting some of them. However, she did not go into details. Some other MPs held similar views. But First Deputy Speaker Siddique Ahmad Osmani, who presided over the session, said the assembly would strongly defend its decision on dual citizens.

"All people have the right to elect or be elected, then bring an illiterate, we will vote for him. But this is not the case, everything enshrined in the law should be enforced." He said 166 votes were required to reverse a decision of the national assembly and take a new decision under the Constitution. (Pajhwok)

(3) Abdullah in...

submit to Parliament official letters requesting revocation of their foreign citizenship.

Based on the documents received by TOLONews, in a letter to the House of Representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ministry has confirmed the revocation of Mr. Noorul Haq Uloomi's second citizenship with Holland. Nevertheless, a number of other nominees have preemptively withdrawn their names in light of opposition in Parliament. The debate around dual citizenship has divided lawmakers, and it remains unclear how they will vote on the nominees when the slate is finally presented. (Tolonews)

(4) Turkmenistan Ready...

separate export centre for oil was also planned, he said, adding his country had always supported peace and stability in Afghanistan. Berdymukhamedov promised continued support for Afghan-led reconciliation

Berdymukhamedov, who said that Turkmenistan was ready to export 500 megawatts of power to Afghanistan, hinted at plans to construct maternity home in Torghondi district, an orphanage in Jawzjan and two mosques in Aqina and Andkhoy.

The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project also came up for discussion at the meeting. Ghani said Afghanistan remained committed to supporting the long-delayed scheme.

The 1735-kilometre TAPI pipeline project will run from Dawlatabad through Herat and Kandahar provinces before entering Pakistan and ending in the Punjab province of India.

Afghanistan will earn \$400,000 million in transit fee per year from the ambitious project, which is being funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Ghani stressed a railway line between Afghanistan and Central Asian countries including China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Turkmenistan. He believed such a track would pave the ground for spurring regional trade. (Pajhwok)

(5) Karimi Vows ...

good income source for the government during the past few years.

"I want to enable telecom companies to provide high quality services at cheap rates," he said, adding the quality of services the ministry provided needed be improved like that of private companies.

Karimi identified completion of the fiber ring project one of his priorities, saying the project completion would convert Afghanistan into a regional telecom intersection that would help the country receive more taxes from neighbouring countries.

"Access to the Internet is every Afghan's right and extending this service to all part of the country will be my primary goal," he said.

About postal services, he regretted the service had been confined to Kabul and a few provinces alone, but said he would streamline postal addresses in cooperation with the authorities concerned.

Karimi also vowed to protect phone calls from being tapped, fight corruption and establish electronic government, if he was endorsed.

About electronic ID cards, the minister-designate said despite the fact, it was not the telecommunications ministry's responsibility, but he would technically support the process. He also promised to digitalise TV broadcasts. (Pajhwok)

(6) Saba Identifies...

communications and IT and the National Directorate of Security head outlined their future programmes on Thursday.

Dawood Saba said his first priority would be developing short, medium and long-term strategies for the next five years. "My first work would be a comprehensive study of the existing mining conditions in the ministry."

Saba added the ministry's previous policies needed revision and new plans would create better facilities for investors, the government and people to avoid a conflict of interest. "Lack of technical capacity and oversight has caused a delay in implementation of major contracts for different mining projects. It has also led to financial losses, environmental damage and insecurity," he said.

He warned corruption was contagious and if it infected the mining sector, another civil war would be inevitable. "Graft in the mining sector could spark another civil war and would hurt our national interests."

Mining sector, he said, was a vital part of the economy but it was necessary to give a sense of ownership to the local people when it came to the extraction of subsoil assets. He also promised a crackdown on illegal and non-professional extraction.

Dr. Dawood Shah Saba is a son of Abdul Samad Khan and was born in Herat province. He is an ethnic Pashtun and has a doctorate in geology. He has also served as Herat governor. (Pajhwok)

(7) Feroz to Crack...

mines and petroleum, communications and IT and the National Directorate of Security head outlined their future programmes on Thursday.

Dr. Ferozuddin Feroz acknowledged 50 percent of the population did not have access to proper health services and Afghans spent \$250 million annually on medical treatments abroad.

Feroz blasted private medical centres for their sky-rocketing fees and said he would evaluate their services in the first three months after taking office.

"I will build a world-class hospital and ask all renowned Afghan doctors to come and work there. This will obviate the need for our people going abroad for medical treatment," he pledged.

Special heed would be given to people who could not afford treatment at private hospitals or abroad. He also promised creating a separate department along ports to prevent inflows of poor-quality medicine and food items.

According to reports, up to 300 companies based in neighbouring Pakistan make medicine specifically for exports to Afghanistan. Such products do not require the standards demanded by their own government for drugs used in Pakistan.

His other priorities would be to at-

tract investment for quality domestic production, giving more opportunities to youth, rooting out graft, overall evaluation of health services and special attention to the disabled population and nomads. (Pajhwok)

(8) Neighbours to...

many achievements. Afghanistan's future is now in its own hands," he remarked.

If its neighbours continued to destabilise Afghanistan, they would also burn in the fires they were stoking, he warned. For certain socio-economic reasons, NDS had been short of funds, he said, stressing its reinforcement.

Nabil was born in 1969 in the Jaghatu district of central Maidan Wardak province. He received a civil engineering degree from the Polytechnic University in Kabul. (Pajhwok)

(9) Islamabad ...

Relevant government departments have been instructed to initiate immediate steps to freeze the assets of the banned outfits, including the Haqqani, which was founded by Jalaluddin Haqqani. (Pajhwok)

(10) NATO Welcomes ...

implementing NATO's Readiness Plan, in light of challenges to the east and south of the Alliance.

"Implementing the plan is our highest priority," Stoltenberg said, noting that it will "make our forces more ready and better able to respond to challenges from any direction". (KUNA)

(11) Thousands Rally...

and soul, to defending our religion and the Prophet of Islam; we won't allow anyone to insult Islam," he pledged.

A day earlier, scores of people rallied in front of the French embassy in Kabul, calling for the trial of the perpetrators. Similar protests have erupted in other parts of the country as well. (Pajhwok)

(12) Neighboring Count...

of dollars of investment to the country. Instead billions of dollars have been invested outside of the country. In recent days President Ashraf Ghani called on investors to make the production of cement and iron one of their investment priorities.

"I want investors to invest in cement production and production of iron," Ghani said. "This will create and make economic growth possible." Investors believe that lack of investment is not because of the production of cement and iron, but rather political issues.

"We have lots of problems with our neighbors," iron investor Asmatullah said. "There should be efforts to stop them in their unhealthy competition."

Afghanistan's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) officials said that lack of government support is the main reason that Afghanistan has not become self reliant when, in fact, the country has the capacity two become an exporter.

"The president must turn his promises into reality," ACCI Deputy Mohammad Yunus Momand said. "Not only will exporting help increase the economy, but will also create job opportunities."

Afghanistan is the largest producer of cement and iron for Pakistan, Iran, and central Asia, but Pakistan is currently exporting their production of cement and iron worth billions to central Asia via Afghanistan.

According to investors, neighboring countries have attempted and continue to find ways to prevent Afghanistan from becoming self reliant in the cement and iron production in fear of losing hundreds of billions of dollars. (Tolonews)

(13) Languages as...

industrious professor expressed hope that the numbers of those studying both languages would increase in the years ahead.

"A total of 13 Chinese students are studying Pashto language in the Communication University of China and I am hopeful that the number of Pashto learners will go up in future," the professor, also a respected foreign scholar in Afghanistan, told Xinhua.

Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani awarded the professor with the honor medal of Sayed Jamaluddin Afghan in recognition of his services in Pashto field, in a ceremony to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Afghanistan, at the Presidential Palace on Tuesday.

In his remarks, President Ghani praised professor Che for compiling the Pashto-Chinese dictionary, saying the dictionary can help people of both countries to further understand each other.

For Che's part, the scholar said that, "Both the people of China and Afghanistan need this dictionary and compiling the Pashto-Chinese dictionary, I think I have helped the two countries in the cultural exchanges sector and helped enhance cultural relations."

With China's support, the Chinese Language Department or Confucius Institute has been opened at Kabul University, and dozens of Afghan students are currently learning Chinese language there.

"I am hopeful that more youths and students from both countries learn each others' languages and I believe that such cross cultural exchanges and visits will further help the two countries to get closer," the professor said. (Xinhua)

(14) Another Senior ...

the leaders deliberated over the recommendation about improving the border security.

This comes as the Corps Commander Peshawar Lt General Hidayat ur Rahman visited Afghanistan on 18 January to meet with the Afghan officials, while Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) Chief Gen. Rizwan Akhtar visited Kabul on 11th January to meet with Afghan officials including President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani.

According to the ISPR the recent visits by top Pakistani military leaders are aimed to improve the coordination between militaries of both Pakistan and Afghanistan. (KP)

(15) KMTIC Provides ...

the nation. So far more than 25,000 recruits have pursued their education and military training at the center, which was established 13 years ago.

Once graduating from the center, the new graduates are immediately deployed throughout the region. (Tolonews)

(16) Ghani Looks ...

to take advantage of it." Many, including officials from the Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI), have emphasized the importance of becoming less dependent on Pakistan. "If our problems are resolved in different areas and if these projects are implemented, Afghanistan will be relieved of transit dependency to other neighboring countries, especially Pakistan," said Atiqullah Nasran, Chairman of the ACCI Executive Board.

The projects specific to Afghanistan and Turkmenistan that Ghani hammered out with leaders in Ashgabat this week join mega projects like the TAPI pipeline and electricity transit development as part of a larger effort to promote cooperation and integrated networks of trade in the South Asia and Central Asia region. (Tolonews)

(17) No Place for ...

Comparing the rumours with the rise of Taliban militants in Afghanistan Karzai said the regional security institutions specifically the Pakistani forces should be on high alert and cautious in this regard.

The remarks by Karzai comes as the Ministry of Interior (MoI) confirmed last week that a number of the Taliban militants have launched operations under the name of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in parts of Afghanistan.

MoI spokesman Sediq Sediqi told Radio Free Europe (RFE) on Saturday that the exact number of Taliban militants who have pledged allegiance to ISIS terrorist group is not clear so far.

The commander of the NATO-led Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan Gen. John Campbell earlier also said that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is recruiting militants in Afghanistan.

In an interview with the Army Times, Gen. Campbell said "We are seeing reports of some recruiting. There have been some night letter drops, there have been reports of people trying to recruit both in Afghanistan and Pakistan, quite frankly." Officials in Helmand province had earlier confirmed that a former Taliban leader is currently recruiting fighters for ISIS in Sangin district, while officials in Farah said the terror group has set up training bases in Khak-e-Safid district.

Concerns regarding growing ISIS influence in Afghanistan and Pakistan comes as a video was released by ISIS over a week ago which purports to show militant leaders who identify themselves as from Afghanistan and Pakistan pledging their support to the Islamic State group. (KP)

(18) Protestors in ...

fails to forward the existing problems and their demands were not addressed, they will expand their protests.

He added that at present, in most districts of the country, Afghan security forces are not present and should rule, these forces spread all over the country.

Nawroz Sultani, another participant, said: "The security situation has lately deteriorated in several provinces, particularly in Ghazni. We, therefore, want the government to act decisively to enforce security."

Bahara Sharifi, who also took part in rally, asked the national unity government to come up with a clear stance on intensifying insurgent attacks across the country. Afghan security forces had no presence in several districts, she claimed. (Pajhwok)

(19) NDS Claims...

detainees belonged to a terrorist group led by Mullah Asmat (Asim) and eight others were loyal to Taliban commander Lutfullah. A Kalashnikov rifle and three pistols were recovered. (Pajhwok)

(20) 33 New ...

the officials promised to work with a sense of commitment and serve the masses to the best of their ability. (Pajhwok)

(21) Rates of ...

the continued volatility of the situation in Afghanistan as the NATO coalition concluded its combat mission.

"Despite the challenges and problems we face, we have formulated an effective program to suppress the opponents and foil their attacks," Nabil told the legislators. He did not go into great detail about the program because the meeting was not a closed-door, classified one.

Yet even among everyday residents of the capital, a sense of optimism for the security situation still appears to live. "If the government works effectively, all opponents, including the IS fighters, would be eliminated," a resident of Kabul named Shahabuddin told TOLONews.

Still, the presence of Islamic State-aligned fighters in Afghanistan has sparked new fears that a different threat could be emerging in the region. Earlier this week, The New York Times published a report discussing divisions between the Taliban that supposedly led to some commanders pledging allegiance to the Islamic State.

Nevertheless, most experts agree that the declarations of support for IS are symbolic and not backed up by any substantial presence of actual IS leaders and strategy in the region. "These all are part of the activities of the Pakistani intelligence, which changes the uniforms of the opponents, otherwise, no IS fighters exist in Afghanistan," military expert Atiqullah Amarkhial told TOLONews. Either way, whether it be the Taliban or the Islamic State, reckless endangerment and targeting of Afghan civilians remains the primary grievance among the public when it comes to the militant extremists. "Our poor people have been victimized by suicide attacks, like the woodpile in a fire," one Kabul resident named Abdul Basir said.

(22) Afghan ...

family's death and strongly criticized Afghanistan's Embassy of Sweden for not returning the bodies. "My interpreter informed me about the death of my family," broke down in tears, Shekeb told TOLONews in a phone call. "I went to the embassy, I knocked many doors, everyone ignored me, and even the Swedish Ambassador in Greece mocked me."

In a telephonic call to TOLONews, a female relative of the family living in Sweden strongly criticized the officials in Swedish Embassy of Afghanistan for not doing enough to hand over the bodies. She added the family migrated to Europe after their five-year-old son was killed by the abductors in Afghanistan. (Tolonews)

(23) Afghan National ...

package of narcotic drug that tested positive to hashish weighing nearly 10 kilograms was confiscated from him. "The preliminary investigation has established that he delivered hashish to Kulob for sale and his complicity in crime - the 30 year-old resident of the city of Kulob - was detained on the same day," the source said.

Criminal proceedings have been instituted against the detained drug peddlers under the provisions of Article 200 (4) of Tajikistan's Penal Code - large-scale drug trafficking; an investigation is under way. (Asia-Plus)