

(1) Ghani Vows....

the businessmen for their efforts for the development of the country, stressing violations of law and public harassment must come to an end because the government was answerable to the people.

He said the finance ministry had the board membership of Aryana Afghan Airline and efforts would be made to expand the air corridor to other cities of India.

Ghani said two export centres for Afghanistan would be opened soon in Turkmenistan and Azarbijan. Two more centres would be inaugurated in Kazakhstan and Moscow.

He pledged discussing trade-related issues with Uzbek leadership during his upcoming visit to the neighboring country. Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) would be signed with Uzbekistan on further expanding economic ties.

The president reiterated his resolve to transform his landlocked country, heavily reliant on imports, into a major exporting economy. (Pajhwok)

(2) Afghan Forces ...

council members and local commander of the Hezb-e-Islami (HI) led by former Mujahedeen leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

Shamsul Haq, a member of the provincial council, told Anadolu Agency the main highway remained closed for many hours as the militants and the ANSF exchanged fire.

Zabehullah Shuja, spokesman for the provincial police headquarters, said on Wednesday the highway and adjacent areas have been cleared.

"16 armed Taliban militants have been killed and 27 other wounded while four of security personnel martyred and three others got wounded", he said. Meanwhile, the Taliban, on their part, have made claim about "strengthening control over the gate to the north".

In a message posted on their official website, the militants noted that 'a large number' of soldiers, policemen and pro-government militia members have been killed.

It added they overrun two check posts and destroyed two armored vehicles. (AA)

(3) 'Father of Taliban'...

graduated and it is believed that he is also having a key influence on the Afghan insurgents, considering the close relations he had with the Taliban founder Mullah Mohammad Omar.

The Afghan officials are saying that Pakistani could play a key role in the reconciliation process and ending the violence in Afghanistan, insisting that the leadership councils of both the Taliban and the notorious Haqqani terrorist network are based inside the Pakistani soil where they have freedom of action and safe havens. (KP)

(4) Toll of Conflict...

deaths, and 3,581 injuries for the first half of 2017, roughly the same as the record set last year. An appalling number of those casualties continue to be children, with 436 deaths and 1,141 injuries - a 9 percent increase over the previous year.

The Taliban and groups linked to the Islamic State (also known as ISIS) were responsible for 67 percent of all civilian casualties during the period. Many of these were the result of deliberate attacks on civilians, which are war crimes.

The good news is that civilian deaths and injuries by pro-government forces and their allies during ground engagements have declined since 2016. However, aerial operations by government and international forces were another story, as civilian casualties from air attacks jumped 43 percent from a year ago to 95 deaths and 117 injuries. There is a need for the government to better address fundamental weaknesses in training these forces, in tracking and addressing civilian harm, and paying compensation for wrongdoing in order to minimize such losses in the future. (HRW)

(5) Trump Reviews ...

ground. So this is actually a very important luncheon and it's a great honor to have you with us and look forward to the discussion," Trump said. (Pajhwok)

(6) U.S. Government...

from 2015 to 2016. McAlpine "hid these kickbacks from his employer by storing the cash payments in his personal effects and then physically transporting them himself to the U.S." the DOJ said. "McAlpine further admitted that he then deposited

the majority of these funds in amounts less than \$10,000 into his bank accounts at bank branches in the Atlanta metropolitan area."

Since the U.S. military invasion of Afghanistan, illegal kickback schemes involving government contractors have been rather commonplace.

In 2014, Robert L. Bertolini, a former project manager of a U.S. construction company, pleaded guilty to accepting \$60,000 in bribes from an Afghan subcontractor. In return, he approved two contracts worth more than \$1.5 million. In 2013, Donald Gene Garst was sentenced to 30 months in prison for attempting to smuggle \$150,000 in illegal kickbacks back to the U.S.

Between 2005 and 2015, the total dollar amount of convicted crimes committed by U.S. soldiers and U.S. government contractors in Afghanistan for theft, bribery, and contract-rigging has been valued at \$52 million, according to the Center for Public Integrity. (UPI)

(7) Ghani Congratulates ...

Students from more than 126 countries took part in the competition. The All-Afghan girl robotics team was decorated with 'Rajaa Cherkaoui El Moursli Award.'

A statement from the Presidential Palace received by Pajhwok Afghan News said President Ashraf Ghani encouraged the robotic girls and called their achievement as a gesture of knowledge, courage, determination, hard work and creativity.

Ghani, while calling the robotics team's participation and success at the international competition as 'a reflection of a new Afghanistan', saying this achievement showed the Afghan girls despite challenges could be great examples for their fellow generations in the spheres of science and technology.

Ghani congratulated the robotics team, their families, classmates and the Afghan people on the achievement. The president hoped the Afghan youth with their ingenuity and wisdom would shine in their respective fields and would present a real image of Afghanistan to the world. (Pajhwok)

(8) CEO Urges...

place close to Zanaq Square was detonated at the entrance to the heavily fortified Green Zone. The explosion tore through the Wazir Akbar Khan area and killed over 150 people and wounded hundreds more.

Experts have said it was one of the biggest bombs to hit the city in the past 17 years.

Two days after the bombing, demonstrators gathered at the blast scene to raise their voices over what they described as government's failure to tackle terror attacks in the city. But the demonstration turned violent when members of the Afghan National Police (ANP) opened fire on the protestors killing at least five of them including Mohammad Salem Ezadyar, the son of first deputy of senate Mohammad Alam Ezadyar.

The attack in Zanaq Square was followed by a massive public outcry and critics blasted leaders of the National Unity Government (NUG) including President Ashraf Ghani and his CEO Abdullah Abdullah for "failing to fix the fragile security situation in the country".

Abdullah's close ally Atta Mohammad Noor went a step forward and accused the CEO of making compromises that resulted in the death of civilians.

"The uprising for change still wants the resignation of Mr. Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, the Uprising for Change also wants the case of leaders of national unity government to be sent to the international criminal court so that these officials are prosecuted in connection with the killing of members of Uprising for Change. The Uprising for Change also demands the resignation of the national security advisor and minister of interior, head of the national directorate of security, the commander of Kabul Garrison general Dawoud Tarakhail," said Sakhizada, a member uprising for change. (Tolnews)

(9) Zakhilwal Wants ...

the ambassador as having said that Haq's mediation was acceptable to the Afghan Taliban, government and people. The JUI-S head promised cooperation with any peace initiative.

However, he linked his cooperation with the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. The JUI-S chief called on the Pakistan government to rethink its foreign policy because, according to him, India was taking advantage of the current situation in the region. (Pajhwok)

(10) Indo-Afghan

The officials of the Indo-Afghan Chamber of Commerce evinced their desire to enhance their trade activities in Afghanistan and requested the Afghan Embassy to help them with the same.

While praising 64 years of their trade relations with Afghanistan, Ambassador Abdali welcomed their interest in further their company's business activities in Afghanistan.

He assured them of the embassy's full cooperation in helping them to expand their business in Afghanistan.

Established in 1952, the Indo-Afghan Chamber of Commerce has been involved importing and trading dry fruits, nuts, herbs and spices across the world.

Mr. Mohammad Shoaib Habibi, the Economic Counselor of the Embassy was also present at this meeting. (Pajhwok)

(11) Plane Carrying ...

been Turkey on medical leave, flew to Afghanistan in a private plane but the plane was not allowed to land in Balkh and the jet diverted its course to neighboring Turkmenistan.

The VP office rejected the reports as untrue, saying Junbish-Islami leader was due to return home next week to attend a gathering marking the announcement of the three-party coalition.

Without going into details, a member of the Junbish party, Senator Maulvi Abdullah Qarraq told reporters that some countries and circles were pressuring Dostum to stay in Turkey.

He said preventing Dostum from coming to Afghanistan was aimed at preventing the three-party alliance.

The development signals deepening political tension in Afghanistan amid increasing insecurity. The plane carrying Dostum was reportedly told to divert its course to Kabul. (Pajhwok)

(12) Dostum Expected ...

Office confirmed the case against Dostum had been handed over to court. Dostum has been accused of kidnapping and ordering the sexual assault of his rival Ahmad Eshchi last year.

Dostum left Afghanistan two months ago for Turkey, citing ill health as the reason. (Tolnews)

(13) Unprofessional ...

Ezatullah charged most of the people running pharmacies could not read prescriptions and gave patients medicine of their choice.

Mohammad Kazim Rassouli, a civil society activist, said besides Ghazni City, the problem was common in districts as well. "Those running district drug stores are completely illiterate and give visitors improper medicine."

He asked relevant officials to pay serious attention to the problem that threatened people's lives.

Khalilullah, hailing from Giro district, said the problem existed in his area too. "There are no drugs stores in the district. Medicines are sold like other goods in shops. The shopkeeper would give patients medicines without knowing about their condition," he alleged. Mohammad Asif, a pharmacist in Ghazni City, confirmed many pharmacists were without licences. "Some people are professional but they don't have money to open drug stores."

"Others without having experience in pharmacy own wealth and have opened drug stores," he admitted, asking the public health department to oversee pharmacies in the province.

Public Health Director Dr. Zahir Shah Nekmal confirmed some of drug stores in Ghazni City and districts were run by unprofessional individuals. He said serious efforts were underway to address the issue.

A commission has been appointed to deal with the situation. Six drug stores run by unprofessional men were recently closed in Maqur district, he said. Just like Ghazni province, most of drug stores in the capital Kabul are also sub-standard and operated by unprofessional people. (Pajhwok)

(14) Afghanistan Appoints ...

President Ashraf Ghani vowed to increase the role of the women in the government institutions with the formation of the government of national unity.

Numerous women have been appointed in different sectors, including ministries and other high level government institutions, although some of them have been dismissed during the parliamentary confidence voting. (KP)

(15) 24 Militants ...

personnel were able to capture more areas from insurgents.

He warned the areas would fall to the Taliban again if the security forces did

not establish check-posts.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said six security personnel and one of their fighters were killed, four fighters and four police were injured in clashes in Gero. He said one tank belonging to security forces was destroyed. (Pajhwok)

(16) 6 Soldiers Killed ..

The source added that five policemen and an Afghan National Army (ANA) soldier were killed and two policemen and three other ANA soldiers wounded in the battle.

The militants also suffered casualties but their exact figures is still unknown, the source said.

Taliban claimed capturing two security posts and killing 16 soldiers. (Pajhwok)

(17) Taliban Militant..

group founder Mullah Mohammad Omar.

However, a Taliban commander opening fire on his comrades within the same rank has rarely been reported.

Dozens of militants were killed and scores more were wounded after the suicide bombers belonging to Mullah Hebatullah and his rival Mullah Rasool carried out attacks against each other in Helmand province earlier this month.

In the meantime, numerous deadly clashes have also taken place between the Taliban insurgents and ISIS militants in Nangarhar province and other provinces of the country, including some northern and eastern provinces during the recent months. (KP)

(18) 7 Daesh Rebels ..

on Tuesday.

The militants had placed explosives in the house of a civilian named Multan Khan, he said. One of the landmines being made by the militants went off, killing seven fighters.

According to another report, security forces destroyed a huge quantity of explosives in Pachiragam. The spokesman confirmed the incident but he did not give details. (Pajhwok)

(19) Gang Leader...

having role in several armed robberies including an attack on a woman who was wounded.

This comes as criminal incidents involving murder, kidnappings, and robberies are on the rise in the major cities of the country during the recent years. It is believed that the majority of such incidents have links with the growing poverty and lack of job.

The Kabul police announced late in December that 597 people were arrested on various criminal charges in the capital.

An armed robber was killed during the clashes with the security forces after breaking into the house of a civilian in Kabul city last month. (KP)

attack. He claimed two Taliban fighters were killed and three others wounded retaliatory fire from the security personnel.

Taliban commander Mullah Mohammad Amin claimed three security officials in the vehicle were burnt to death. Passengers traveling on the highway said the road was blocked for traffic for nearly two hours due to the clash. (Pajhwok)

War Displaces at Least 1,000 Families in Baghlan-e-Markazi

KABUL - Security officials say government forces have advanced in the conflict against the Taliban which erupted in parts of the district early Tuesday morning.

Residents of Baghlan-e-Markazi district in the northern Baghlan province claimed that at least 1,000 families have fled their homes to escape the war which has reportedly almost closed in on the district's center - in the west of Pul-e-Khumri city.

"At least 800 or 900 families have been displaced as a result of war in Tarakhail, Ghulam Bai and Tajika villages (in Baghlan-e-Markazi)," said Gawhar Khan Baburi, the district governor of Baghlan-e-Markazi.

"The situation is critical in Baghlan-e-Markazi. People's lives has been heavily affected," said Sher Mohammad, a resident of Baghlan-e-Markazi. "A rocket has landed in the street close to our house. No one asks about it," said Noman, another resident of the district.

Military officials said reinforcements have arrived and that government forces will continue their efforts to push back the Taliban.

"We will clear the areas under the control of the enemy," said Colonel Zia-

uddin, commander of the first regiment of the second battalion of 209 Shaheen Corps Headquarters.

"The anti-government armed militants are in Ghulam Bai, Qazi and Ghorbandi Ha villages," said Mohibullah Kohdamani, the police chief of Baghlan-e-Markazi district.

Meanwhile, Baghlan police said at least 20 Taliban militants have been killed in the battle so far. (Tolnews)

Wrapped in Shrouds, Heratis set Month-long Deadline for Govt

HERAT CITY - Wearing grave shrouds, hundreds of residents of western Herat province on Wednesday staged a demonstration, giving the government a month-long deadline to meet their demands.

They included civil society activists, public representatives and common people who asked the government to improve security, eliminate corruption, create jobs, ensure civil rights of people and end discrimination against the people of Herat.

Nazir Ahmad Salehi, head of the Herat youth council, said people's voices could not be heard because the central government was corrupt. He said their protest rally was aimed at seeking justice for the unemployed youth, families of the martyrs and widows.

Abdullah, another civil society activist, said: "We wear shroud to show the we can go to any extent for our rights. We want the president to through away corrupt individual in the system."

The protesters said they regretted electing the incumbent government and demanded the unity government leaders to immediately resign.

They also accused the central government of subjecting Herat to a step-motherly treatment when it came to development projects. (Pajhwok)

Mafia Money Pollutes the EU Economy

BERLIN - Major profits from large-scale illegal activities have to be laundered to enter the so-called clean economy.

The money laundering itself is increasingly done by external specialised groups, which take a 5-8 percent cut for the service, Europol, the EU's police agency, says.

When only considering the Italian mafias, a 2016 report by the EU's judicial cooperation agency, Eurojust, notes their infiltration into the legitimate economy in "Spain (particularly favoured by the Italian Camorra), the Netherlands, Romania, France, Germany, and the UK."

But how are they doing this?

Primarily through "real estate investments and participation in public or private contracts, particularly in the field of construction, public utilities and waste disposal," the report says.

The Transcrime Organized Crime Portfolio (OCP), edited by Paolo Savona and Michele Riccardi, also notes "cases of organised crime investments were found in almost all EU member states (24 out of 28)", predominantly in Italy, France, Spain, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, and Romania.

Dirty money, the OCP study says, is mostly "in areas with a historically strong presence of organised crime groups (e.g. southern Italy), in border regions, or in areas which may play a crucial role in illicit trafficking (e.g. Andalusia, or Rotterdam and Marseille with their harbours), large urban areas (e.g. London, Amsterdam, Madrid, Berlin) and tourist or coastal areas (e.g. Côte d'Azur, Murcia, Malaga or European capitals).

Southern Spain, for example, attracts dirty money from Italian mafias, Russian criminals and northern European biker gangs. In recent years, criminal investments focused on "renewable energy, waste collection and management, money transfers, casinos, VLT, slot machines, games and betting".

Recommendations on these issues have been made repeatedly to the member states and the European Commission through resolutions, reports, and policies approved by the European Parliament, but they have all yet to be enacted.

Among those requesting action are Eurojust and Europol, which are well aware of the risks posed by the mafia. Nevertheless, the EU does at least have a definition of organised crime.

A Council framework decision from 24 October 2008 defines it as: "a structured association, established over a period of time, of more than two persons acting in concert with a view to committing offences ... to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit." (Agencies)