

### (1) Afghan Lapis...

now a major contributor to conflict and extremism. The new Afghan mining law, which is currently being amended by the government, fails to include the actions needed to counter this threat," the report warns. "These lapis mines are one of the richest assets of the Afghan people and should be driving development and prosperity," said Stephen Carter, Afghanistan Campaign Leader at Global Witness. "Instead, the beautiful lapis lazuli stone has become a conflict mineral. The mines provide a tiny fraction of the benefit they should, and have become a major source of conflict and grievance, which is driving the insurgency and undermining hope for stability in Afghanistan - which could have consequences globally." "Unless the Afghan government acts quickly, these mines represent not just a lost opportunity but a threat to the future of the whole country," said Carter. "The Afghan government must urgently re-establish the rule of law at these mine sites, and strengthen oversight and transparency for mining across the country to make sure these natural resources serve the Afghan people to whom they belong."

Global Witness called for the Afghan government and its international partners to make problems around mining in Afghanistan a critical priority in order to tackle the crisis.

In particular, the current mining law fails to put in place the fundamental safeguards of transparency, accountability, and community engagement that are needed to secure and develop Afghanistan's mining sector, they said in their statement.

Global Witness is calling for the government to ensure publication of mining data, reform mining oversight, and support community monitoring of mining. "Governments around the world need to wake up to the fact that Afghanistan's mines are driving conflict in the country and do something to stop this before even more of the mines falls into the hands of insurgents and armed groups," said Carter. Global Witness says not only are the Taliban continuing to profit from the illegal mining of lapis and other jewels in Badakhshan, but that senior players in the Afghan government may have direct involvement.

But Gul Mohammed Bedar, a deputy governor of Badakhshan, denied allegations that government officials had their fingers in the illicit trade, but confirmed that the lapis mines are controlled by "illegal armed groups" as well as the Taliban, making it difficult for the government to manage.

Lapis mining was outlawed last year, but the mines now lie in a lawless region controlled by the Taliban and warlords of varying allegiances. Much of the illegal lapis is being smuggled out through neighboring Panjshir province, according to officials, home to some of Afghanistan's most powerful players. (Tolnews)

### (2) Ghani in Helmand...

He said government officials, Cabinet members and lawmakers accompanied the president on the trip.

The president comes to Helmand when clashes in various parts of the troubled province are ongoing between security forces and Taliban militants, who are in control of several towns. "We are the real heirs of the religion of Islam because it were us who strived for peace day and night," he said. The president said as the commander in chief of the armed forces it was his duty to defend the rights of the dead and injured security personnel. Ghani congratulated the nation on the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan and wished their worship would be accepted by Allah and help establish peace and stability in the country. (Pajhwok)

### (3) Taliban ...

surfaced about tax collection by the Taliban in areas under their control in the past. "The Taliban impose a tax on people to get funding to continue the fight against government. The highway is under the control of Taliban, all villages are under control of the Taliban and they collect tax," said ShasulhaqBarakzai, a member of the provincial council.

It is said that currently the Taliban control at least 100 villages in Baghlan. (Tolnews)

### (4) Turkey Backs ...

Afghans now have access to education and social services," he told journalists. "The last two years have been a turning point for Afghanistan. We witnessed the democratic transfer of power after the 2014 presidential election [where] the number of women voting was high." Mansour was killed in a U.S. drone strike in Pakistan last month and was succeeded by Haibatullah Akhundzadeh.

The Quadrilateral Coordination Group of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the U.S. and China held its first meeting in January in a bid to boost the peace

process. Yalchin said Turkey fully supported the talks and praised Pakistan's efforts. (Agencies)

### (5) Kabul Hosts...

the foundation for the successful summit in July, but a lot of work remains to do here in Kabul in order to ensure that we can have confidence in our collective vision for continued financial sustainability of the security sector beyond 2017," said Roberto Cantone Italy's Ambassador in Kabul.

The participants also urged the international community to support Afghanistan's achievements. Meanwhile, Defense Ministry spokesman DawlatWaziri said: "We are committed to carry on this combat successfully and terrorism will be defeated in Afghanistan, on condition that the countries that have committed to Afghanistan should boost their support to the country. The enemy has been defeated on all battlegrounds this year."

This comes after Afghan security and defense forces have had a tough fighting season against the Taliban and other terrorist groups this year, but according to security officials they have succeeded in this battle. (Tolnews)

### (6) Wolesi Jirga ...

to give their nod to the presidential decree on electoral reform. Mohammad Naeem Ayoubzada, head of the Transparent Election Foundation (TEFA), accused the lower house of taking no interest in the decree. He said: "The Wolesi Jirga earlier rejected the presidential decree and we fear this time too some 50 percent lawmakers are unwilling to approve the second decree despite having no legal issues."

He said the Wolesi Jirga could not delay the approval or rejection of a legal document for more than a month. He asked lawmaker to approve the decree as soon as possible.

HumeraHaqmal, women's rights activist, said the unity government should honour its pledges about electoral reform. She lamented despite the passage of 20 months since the unity government came into being, electoral reform could not be executed. She believed Afghanistan might go into turmoil if the presidential decree was not approved and reforms were not implemented.

Electoral reform is one of the key components of the unity government deal between then presidential candidates Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah after 2014 disputed election. (Pajhwok)

### (7) Afghan ...

of the precious stones were being illegally excavated.

"The national treasury is annually deprived of \$300 million because of the illegal excavation and smuggling of natural riches," said Rahmani.

He said natural resources were the wealth of the state, but unfortunately precious stones of the country were illegally extracted and smuggled to neighboring countries.

He said there was a dire need for a proper strategy that could bring a halt to illegal mining and protect the minerals from being smuggled through unauthorised channels.

Ahmad WalidMajidyar, deputy head of Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA), expressed his concern over illegal excavation and smuggling of precious stones.

He said currently Afghanistan earned \$17 million from its natural resources and the earning could reach \$250-\$300 million if smuggling and illegal excavation of precious stones was prevented.

He warned illegal excavation of stones and smuggling would increase if the practices were not discouraged.

According to Majeedyar, Indian and Chinese businessmen were willing to invest in precious stones deposits but the lack of a proper strategy and framework to manage the process remained a hurdle to the investment.

Ghazal Habibyar Safi, acting deputy minister of Mines and Petroleum, said his ministry had prepared a strategy thorough which illegal excavation and smuggling of natural riches could be stopped. Without going into details, he said currently some precious stones were being exported without processing and asked businessmen to invest in processing of precious stones. (Pajhwok)

### (8) Turkmenistan...

million in the next stage of the multibillion dollar TAPI pipeline project. The agreement was signed during 24th meeting of the steering committee of the TAPI pipeline project which was held in Ashgabat.

Turkmengaz and Turkmennebitgazgurlushyk are undertaking construction of the Turkmen section of the pipeline which will run from Galkynysh gas field to the Afghan border. In Afghanistan and Pakistan contractors will be chosen on the basis of international tenders. In recent weeks, Turkmenistan has

held talks regarding financing of the project with international agencies such as Islamic Development bank, the Saudi Fund for Development and the Japanese government. These international entities are expected to participate in areas of trade, supply equipment, financing through provision of loans and investment in the TAPI project and in development of the Galkynysh gas field. (Agencies)

### (9) Govt, UN ....

added that Taliban will be further defeated on the battlegrounds.

UN Special Representative to Afghanistan, Nicholas Haysom, meanwhile said in his message that he wishes all Afghans a safe Ramazan month.

He added that he hopes it will provide the ground for lasting peace in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, a number of Kabul residents criticized the Ulema Council for taking a weak stance against terrorists. They called on insurgents let the people live in peace during Ramazan.

"We urge militant groups to respect Ramazan month and give up their crimes against the people," said Abdul BasirSatarzadeh, a resident of Kabul.

"Those who are against peace in Afghanistan should come up with a ceasefire during Ramazan," said Haris, another resident.

ShafiqullahShafiqNooristani, a member of the Afghanistan Ulema Council, meanwhile said the silence of religious scholars against insurgent activities is because of a lack of their safety. (Tolnews)

### (10) Ghani, Kerry ...

be sorely missed, Kerry said. "Teresa and I send our thoughts and prayers for these courageous individuals to their colleagues, friends and families," Kerry said. The Committee to Protect Journalists also mourned the death of Afghan interpreter Zabihullah Tamanna and American photographer David Gilkey. The two were traveling with an Afghan army unit near Marjah, in Helmand province, when the convoy came under attack. "Even though much of the world's attention has shifted away, let no one doubt that Afghanistan remains a dangerous place for journalists - local and foreign - working to cover that protracted conflict," said Bob Dietz, CPJ's Asia program coordinator.

"We are deeply saddened by the deaths of Zabihullah Tamanna and David Gilkey. There are too many journalists who have given their lives to tell the Afghan story," he said.

"President Ghani condemned killing of Afghan journalist Zabihullah Tamanna and (U.S.) photographer David Gilkey in strongest terms possible," the palace said in a statement.

"By indiscriminately targeting journalists the Taliban show their increased atrocity against harmless civilians. Tamanna and Gilkey, who were on the front line to report about the truth, themselves became victims of Taliban brutality," the statement reads. "History will remember the two journalists as fighters for freedom of information and expression. And those who committed the heinous crime will be remembered as forces of hatred," it said.

The president also offered condolences to the families of the victims. Tamanna, 38, served as photojournalist for Xinhua News Agency Kabul Bureau from 2003 to 2010. Xinhua reporters, who worked with him, recalled his professionalism and personality, saying Tamanna was a capable photojournalist and a very good colleague to work with.

Several journalists voluntarily gathered in front of Tamanna's apartment in Kabul Monday morning to express sympathies and condolences to his family. Helmand, notorious for poppy growing, is also a known Taliban stronghold. Around 50 journalists have been killed in Afghanistan over the past one and half decade, six of them since 2015, according to Nai, an agency supporting media in Afghanistan.

Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC) expressed condolence over the death of two experienced and hardworking journalists and considered it a great loss for the journalists, media community and the notion of freedom of expression in Afghanistan. AJSC calls on all sides of the conflict to make journalists safety, as the impartial group their utmost priority, because journalists risk their lives to share the stories and realities to the world. AJSC also asks journalists and the media community to think of their personal safety more than anything else, because no report is more important than the life of a journalist. (Xinhua/Pajhwok)

### (11) Taliban Used ...

executed 10 on the spot and later killed another two. The majority of hostages have been released but the fate of at least eight is still unknown. Kamawal said the released passengers were all tested by the Taliban before being freed. "The passengers said Taliban

had a machine which checked their fingerprints. Most of the passengers were not familiar with the machine but we knew it was a biometric device that could identify security force members from amongst civilians," he told Tolnews.

He also acknowledged that police force members had been slow in reacting to the incident. Reports indicate that police saw the busses pulling over to the side of the road but were unaware that it was the Taliban who had pulled them over. They initially thought the bus drivers had stopped for morning prayers.

"It would not be true if we escape from this and say that security forces were not responsible for the incident. We apologize to the people and we promise that such an incident will not happen in the future," he added. (Tolnews)

### (12) 15 Key Taliban...

of Wardak province. Mullah Abobakr, Mullah Ibrahim Khalil and Ghulam Muhammad Din, the three key Taliban leaders were also killed in Anar district of Farah province. In a clearing operation in Raghistan district of Badakhshan province, QariZubair, one of the famous Taliban commanders killed along with his three colleagues.

Afghan forces killed the brother of Abo-Hafiza, chairman of Al-Qaeda network and QariNajib in their air operation in Chahardarah district of Kunduz province. Qari Abdul Hadi, deputy of Taliban shadow governor were also eliminated in Dasht-e Archi district of Kunduz. Mullah Rahman, Taliban district shadow governor were killed in Sar-e Pul province, Mullah Hasan deputy of district governor killed in Takhar province and Sangari and Qari Amin the two top Taliban commanders were killed in Arghandab district of Zabul province.

The Afghan security forces have beefed up security operations against militants recently after the spring fighting season starts in the country.

The Taliban militants, which ruled the country before they were ousted in late 2001, renewed armed insurgency, staging ambushes and suicide attacks, killing combatants as well as civilians. (Agencies)

### (13) Logar Chief ...

"I was busy working in my office when I heard firing. Everyone was running and I hid in the corner."

According to Usman, the attackers hurled hand grenades and were firing. He said after the gun battle, there were dead bodies and injured persons in the courtyard. "I had not seen such a horrible scene in my life," Usman said. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. The group spokesman, ZabihullahMujahid, said the attack was in revenge for the execution of their six death row prisoners last month.

The Governor House, the Education Department and the provincial attorney's offices are situated near the appellant court facility in Pul-i-Alam, the provincial capital. The attack took place when a ceremony to introduce the newly-appointed chief prosecutor was underway. (Pajhwok)

### (14) Heavy Clashes...

In the meantime, Provincial Council officials have asked security forces to create a number of check posts on the Marja and Lashkargah highway.

"There is war in the past few months in Marja and the factor of the war is the government's negligence. Now we are asking the government to use all its efforts for the security of Marja," head of Provincial Council Attaullah Afghan said. BarialaiNazarai, a member of the Provincial Council also said: "We are asking the security forces to eliminate the insurgents so the people can live in peace over there."

The Marja battle started eight months ago after hundreds of insurgents attacked security forces and took control of a number of villages. The capital of the district is still under control of the insurgents, according to officials. (Tolnews)

### (15) Young ...

the wedding ceremony. "We convinced our families to allow us to celebrate our wedding with these vulnerable children," she added.

According to Nilofar, they saved a vast amount of money this way and spent only about 100,000 Afghanis on their wedding ceremony. Balkh residents meanwhile said wedding expenses range from 400,000 to 800,000 Afghanis and that because of this, many young people today remain single.

"A number of young people who want to get married have to borrow money for their wedding expenses and then they must go to Pakistan or Europe to work and earn it back," said Noor Mohammad, a resident of Mazar-e-Sharif. This comes after religious scholars

said the message of Islam is that the best wedding is the one that costs the least. (Tolnews)

### (16) Man Allegedly...

Women are still facing domestic violence in different parts of the country despite efforts by the government and international community to reduce the violence. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) in its report released late in November last year said "statistic of violence against women, obtained from the registered cases of violence against women during the first six months in 1394 exceeds 2579 cases."

The report further added that figure was reported 2403 cases during the six months in 1393 which shows 7.32 percent increase in 1394, the last solar year. (KP)

### (17) 27 Daesh, 4...

Logar, four Taliban were killed and six others wounded during separate clashes, Salem Saleh, the governor spokesman said.

Security forces captured a rocket and a three machine guns during the operation conducted in Porak, Babos, Dadokhel and Kamalkhel localities. (Pajhwok)

### (18) Obama Greets...

of their own homes this year or afford to celebrate Eid with their children. We must continue working together to alleviate the suffering of these individuals," Obama said.

The US president said, the sacred time reminded of our common obligations to uphold the dignity of every human being. "We would continue to welcome immigrants and refugees into our nation, including those who are Muslim," said the US President.

Extending his best wishes to Muslims across the United States and around the world, Obama said for many, this month was an opportunity to focus on reflection and spiritual growth, forgiveness, patience and resilience, compassion for those less fortunate, and unity across communities.

"Each lesson is profound on its own, and taken together forms a harmonious whole. It's also a time of year that brings some of the best dishes to the table across the world as families and neighbors gather for iftar," he said. "Here in the United States, we are blessed with Muslim communities as diverse as our nation itself," Obama said. There were those whose heritage could be traced back to the very beginning of our nation, as well as those who have only just arrived.

Doctors, lawyers, artists, teachers, scientists, community organizers, public servants, and military members, each night will all break their fasts together in cities across America, said the US President.

The US Secretary of State, John Kerry, in a statement also wished Muslims in the United States and around the world a happy and blessed Ramadan. (Pajhwok)

### (19) Syrian ...

control of Aleppo would be a huge prize for President Bashar al-Assad. Russia's military intervention since September has helped to bolster Assad's government.

State media said missiles fired on Sunday on Hamadaniyah, Midan and other neighborhoods by insurgents killed at least 20 people, in the second day of intense shelling of government-held areas. The death toll over the whole weekend was at least 44.

Syria issued a toughly worded statement denouncing Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, holding them responsible for the latest surge in rebel-attacks and accusing them of wrecking any effort to reach a U.N.-backed political settlement. (Reuters)

### (20) US Must ...

implementing the nuclear agreement clinched by the two sides, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), on January 16.

Under the deal, all nuclear-related sanctions imposed on Iran by the European Union, the Security Council and the US would be lifted. Iran has, in return, put some limitations on its nuclear activities. However, many large European banks still refrain from engaging in transactions with Iran for the fear of US penalties. Zarif also pointed to cordial relations between Iran and Armenia and the exchange of visits between their officials and expressed hope that "constant consultations will help expand the two countries' relations and promote regional peace, development and welfare." (Agencies)

### (21) Iran, Austria ...

The Iranian and Austrian ministers also agreed to finalize agreements to avoid double taxation as soon as possible.

Following the implementation of last July's nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), between Iran and

the P5+1 group of countries, Tehran signed several deals with different countries to strengthen its cooperation in banking, trade and economic sectors. Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - the United States, France, Britain, China and Russia - plus Germany started implementing the JCPOA on January 16. (Presstv)

### (22) Turkish...

The PKK was listed as a terrorist organization by the European Union and the United States. More than 5,000 terrorists have been killed in the past few months. (Xinhua)

### (23) Saudi-Led...

number of violations" including "attacks on schools and hospitals". Saudi Arabia launched the intervention in Yemen in March last year in support of the internationally recognised government of Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi against Huthi rebels accused of having links with Iran and army units loyal to Saleh, who was forced out of office in 2012 under a Gulf-sponsored deal. The war has left some 6,400 people dead, according to the UN.

Assiri said the coalition was in Yemen to "protect the Yemeni people, including children, from the actions of the Huthi militia."

He cited a \$30 million Saudi aid programme for Yemen launched in cooperation with the UN children's fund (UNICEF). (AFP)

### (24) Nearly 60%...

capital Doha, which incorporates shops, cinemas and a cricket stadium. The complex can house up to 70,000 foreign workers and is one of seven workers' "cities" being developed which will accommodate almost 260,000 people in total.

The population of gas-rich Qatar has soared over the past three decades as it has imported a huge migrant workforce to develop its infrastructure. In 1986, just 373,000 people lived in the emirate. (AP)

### (25) WB approves ...

learning environment of government and non-government colleges affiliated with the National University.

"To reach middle-income country status by 2021, Bangladesh needs to focus on priority areas, which include creating a skilled and competent workforce, and helping weather-dependent sectors cope better with climate uncertainties and natural disasters," said Qimiao Fan, World Bank country director for Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. (Xinhua)

### (26) Indian PM ...

Qatari businessmen and encouraged them to invest more in India, calling it "a land of opportunity." The Qatar Investment Authority has several large-scale investments in India, including a more than \$1 billion stake in telecommunications company Bharti Airtel. Qatar Airways has expressed interest in expanding its routes to India and in buying a stake in budget airline IndiGo.

Modi arrived on Saturday and met with Indian laborers that evening, telling them he is aware of the conditions they face in Qatar. Modi, who is active on Twitter, posted photos of himself dining and chatting with the workers. "If you have some issues on changing some rules and regulations, I will work with you all to bring about these changes," Modi told the workers. (AP)

### (27) Pakistan, US ...

on average. In totality on account of CSF, economic and military assistance, Pakistan had received around 14 percent inflows from US compared to its estimated losses of \$118 billion. Pakistan and USA's relations had always witnessed boom and bust cycle over last several decades but Islamabad always complained that Washington had abandoned Islamabad after collapse of USSR by 90s that ultimately resulted into surfacing of Taliban phenomena in this region. Now after becoming an ally of US led war against terrorism since 9/11, 2001, Pakistan had suffered losses of \$118 billion but in return it had received peanuts in terms of civil and military assistance.

However, according to Center for Global Development, the United States began providing economic assistance along and military aid to Pakistan shortly after the country's creation in 1947. In total, the United States obligated nearly \$67 billion (in constant 2011 dollars) to Pakistan between 1951 and 2011. The levels year to year have waxed and waned for decades as US geopolitical interests in the region have shifted. Peaks in aid have followed years of neglect. In several periods, including 1990s, US had halted aid entirely and shut the doors of the USAID offices. This pattern had rendered the United States a far cry from a reliable and unwavering partner to Pakistan over the years, it concluded. (Monitoring Desk)