

(1) WB Estimates ...

Afghanistan. In seven of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, the female literacy rate is 1%.

Even in Afghanistan's most educated province of Kabul, where the overall literacy rate is 47%, the female literacy reaches only 30%.

These statistics suggest that poverty reduction programs in Afghanistan can begin by focusing on improving the education of all Afghans while also closing the gender gap that is seen in school enrollment.

In order for more Afghans to be lifted out of poverty, they must have improved access to education. With better education, Afghans will have better opportunities to earn a higher income and lift themselves out of poverty. (Monitoring Desk)

(2) Continuation ...

national agreements still await approval by the lawmakers, including among others, the law prohibiting violence against women.

But some lawmakers vehemently oppose the continuation of Parliament after the term ends. This includes MP Ramazan Bashardost who told Wednesday's session that: "People say MPs traded with the government leaders on extending the Parliament term in exchange for collecting votes in their favor in the second round of presidential elections."

Afghan law experts meanwhile have warned that based on the Afghan Constitution, representatives in Parliament lose their mandate after June 21, at which point a set of representatives should be elected.

However, with no parliamentary election scheduled and electoral reforms still delayed, it is clear there will be no replacements ready by the end of the month.

One of the key points of agreement between President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah to form the National Unity Government was to reform the country's electoral system ahead of parliamentary elections.

But the election monitoring groups have expressing doubt about government's will to bring reforms to the country's weak election system.

"The NUG leaders do not have the will and commitment to bring electoral reforms," FEFA head Mohammad Yousof Rashid told TOLONews. "This is a blow to democracy, it challenges the rule of law and discredits the government and people will lose trust in the government." (Tolonews)

(3) Kandahar Now...

civil society activists, who suggested reforms to the president in areas of security, education, agriculture, economy and others.

In response to their proposals, the president said the provincial governor would complete the first phase of reforms over the next two weeks.

He said deep and drastic reforms would be carried out in the province and would be advanced in line with the established rules because officials removed from departments would be replaced in order to avoid any vacuum.

The president said his effort was to help government departments reach maturity like the cabinet, adding that youth would be provided jobs in provinces and districts and educated youth would be enabled to participate in elections as candidates.

Ghani also briefed the activists about his government's initial performance, saying the focus had been on security. The president said he had been working with the ministries of defence and interior to bring about reforms.

Due these efforts, the president said, the Afghan forces despite being under-resourced were able to go to areas where foreign troops had been unable to go with their advanced resources.

He said the first 100 days were the days of reforms in the ministries and the next 100 days would be the days of changes for governors and judicial departments.

He said the reforms would be implemented in line with the country's laws. "From now on, there are no parallel governments in Kandahar and the governor is my special representative," the president said.

As part of the reforms, the president said ministers and governors would hold regular meetings. He said the government had funds but the problem was the ability how to better use them, saying ministries had so far spent 17 percent of their budgets during the past six months. "This is the biggest failure."

The president said there had been problems in the ministries. For example, he said, surveys for the construction of dams were carried out through foreign firms, but the surveys were not acceptable to the international community and the World Bank.

Calling educated youth a precious asset, the president said currently 17000 students in India and 18000 in Iran

were busy pursuing higher education. He said a list of these students was being prepared to chase them and appoint them on jobs.

About Afghanistan economic development, the president said a huge financial resource existed from Herat to Kandahar and that was water.

In summers, the value of water exceeded that of gold, said the president, who added an organized plan had been devised to manage water and he was trying to implement the plan.

"From Herat to Kandahar, the gas, railways, fiber optics, water, electricity and transmission lines projects will be executed simultaneously and in this regard talks had taken place with Tajikistan. It will happen. Then Pakistan will need Afghanistan to find its way to Europe."

The president said Afghanistan was generous but its people lived in poverty. "There are huge gas deposits in Helmand and Paktika. Previously it was thought the country's largest iron ore deposits exist in Logar, but it has been discovered the largest one exist in Kandahar." The president said special gold mines were found from Zabul to Kandahar.

Ghani said the incumbent mines minister was highly capable and experienced person. He said there had been corruption in the mines ministry, which had been prevented and all contracts suspended.

The president called for patience to see the reforms were implemented, saying 80 percent of time was consumed by the conflict and security related issues.

Had he not prioritised security at the beginning, now districts would have been falling one after another and would have prevented the reforms from being enforced, Ghani said. He said he remembered all his promises with the nation and would work hard to honour them one after another. (Pajhwok)

(4) SIGAR Sees...

said that "the new unity government is actually doing something" in regards to fraud.

Ghani and Abdullah, who share some responsibilities through a tenuous power-sharing agreement, replaced Hamid Karzai in September 2014 at a low point in Karzai's relationship with Washington. (Monitoring Desk)

(5) Abdullah Meets ...

exchanged views on Afghanistan's relationships with neighboring countries.

The Secretary-General asked for Afghanistan's support in adopting and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals - which are a proposed set of targets relating to future international development. They are to replace the UN's Millennium Development Goals once they expire at the end of 2015.

Abdullah also addressed the conference-goers on Tuesday and spoke on Afghanistan's unique position in terms of water resources.

He said that Afghanistan is in this position both as a source, a transit point, a corridor and an estuary of water and that in line with this the government wants to use its position to maximize the usage of water at home and in the region.

He said: "We want to use our geography, resource capacity, and regional as well as international obligations to maximize usage of water for human, agricultural, power generation and other purposes under clearly mandated and legally binding regimes both at home as well as in the neighborhood."

Abdullah told the audience that over three decades of political instability and conflict have eroded Afghan infrastructure, capacities and resource management abilities. "But we have made significant strides in order to catch up with national development objectives as part of overall reconstruction strategies adopted over the past 13 years with the generous help of many friends in the international community, including all our neighbors."

On this note, he thanked all countries and international organizations present at the conference for their contributions and assistance to Afghanistan since 2001.

Abdullah, who has been an official visit to Tajikistan, also thanked his host, President Emomali Rahmon for his leadership on the critical and timely issue of Water for Life, and water sustainability.

He said that Tajikistan had initiated the process of Water for Life more than a decade ago at the United Nations, and today the country had brought all parties together to look back at the collective achievements, lessons learnt, best practices, remaining challenges, and the way forward. Among the dignitaries attending the conference is United Nations Secre-

tary-General Ban Ki-moon. His central Asia trip will cover five countries in as many days. They are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

Ahead of his departure for the region he said his aim was to support and promote a common response to many cross-border challenges central Asia faces - from environmental degradation to drug trafficking and water scarcity. (Tolonews)

(6) Ambassador Talks ...

assured that a pitch for investment in areas of traditional Russian involvement would be drafted soon. "We will prepare the list of enterprises that are profitable and need investment, and we will share the list with the donors soon," he said.

There were over 50 enterprises created during the times of the Soviets, often providing basic services. Most of them have discontinued operations over the years because of war and neglect. (Tolonews)

(7) Ghani Urges...

place for investment and it was Belgium's priority to invest and improve its business ties with Afghanistan.

The president said the flow of investment to Afghanistan had increased in different sectors following his official trips China and India, adding Belgium and other European countries could also get benefits from the available opportunities. (Pajhwok)

(8) Minister ...

said the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project will be focused on.

Saba said he is committed to creating an accountable system to gather revenue generated through the mining and petroleum sectors but acknowledged that his ministry is plagued with problems. However, he assured Afghanistan that he is working on ways to resolve the issues.

Another priority he said is to ensure transparency within his ministry. He said everyone had the right to information on all mines and minerals and that he will see to it that in future his ministry released information on the subject.

He said that all agreements signed in future will be published on the ministry's website. In addition, he said his ministry is working on a policy for the prevention of violence against women within the ministry's framework and that he is also committed to increasing the number of women employed in the sector.

Areas of concern for him are however that of security and that of illegal mining. However, Saba said that he is gathering information on the illicit extraction of minerals that is being done in parts of the country.

This comes only days after Saba told lawmakers in Parliament that Daesh is posing a grave threat to the Afghan mining industry.

Decreased interest from foreign companies in investing in the Afghan mining sector, including the voiding of the Aynak copper mine and Hajigak mine contracts, were what prompted the minister's visit to Parliament on Monday.

According to him, Daesh affiliates in Afghanistan are trying to finance their operations through the illegal exploitation of Afghan minerals, much similar to what the group has done with oil in Iraq and Syria.

"The presence and activities of Daesh are a new security challenge for us, because Daesh is looking for ways to access economic resources. The mines of Afghanistan can be a good economic source for this group," Saba said.

"The activities of this group create insecurities; for example, we have 339 contracts, of which we cannot monitor over 100 of them due to security challenges."

The Chairman of the House called Saba's statements shocking and demanded the National Unity Government take immediate action to address the issues facing the mining sector as well as the ministry more specifically. Close to 40 MPs asked questions during the session.

In addition to the challenges posed by Daesh, Minister Saba outlined a number of other more internal problems facing his ministry. He said there is an overall lack of capacity, vague policies and absence of strategies when it comes to the mining sector.

"With the capacity that I saw at the Ministry of Mines, I had goose bumps; if we move forward with these capacities, we will go toward a disaster rather than welfare," he said. (Tolonews)

(9) Afghan Sikhs ...

were pressured to convert to Islam and forced to pay a special tax and publicly identify themselves with yellow patches on their clothing. Muslims were encouraged to avoid doing business with them.

During this period many Sikhs and Hindus were either forced to sell their land or had it openly seized by armed warlords.

And today, they say, societal discrimination and isolation continues.

Community figures and analysts believe that intolerance for non-Muslims has grown as constant violence and upheaval has made Afghans wary of those they perceive as outsiders - both Sikhs and Hindus are widely regarded as foreigners, more readily identified as Indians and Pakistanis.

For Afghan Sikhs, the constant discrimination is particularly bitter because many proclaim themselves to be proud Afghans.

Arinder Singh, a Sikh religious scholar said: "Our Muslim brothers know our history, they can see our Afghan passports and National Identity Cards and our records in governmental offices, but when we go to them, they still tell us that you are not Afghan, you are an Indian go back to your country. I want to say that Afghanistan is our country and this is the place of my birth, and as I believe we were born here and we will die in this country."

Jasmit Singh, an eight-year-old schoolboy said: "When we go out other kids pull off our turbans and sometimes beat us or even steal whatever we have in our hands."

An attempt in 2013 by former Afghan president Hamid Karzai to reserve parliamentary seats for Sikhs and Hindus was rejected by lawmakers who feared other minorities would make similar demands.

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom noted in a 2009 report that while there is no longer any official discrimination against Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan, "They are effectively barred from most government jobs and face societal hostility and harassment." (Tolonews)

(10) Donors Threaten...

employees."

To make matters worse, if the Electronic ID Cards Administration fails to utilize its equipment within a reasonable timeframe, it could face even further financial pains. "Our technological equipment has a warranty, and if the warranty for this equipment ends, we will face financial losses," Mohtat said.

Donor agencies have reported the only way to resolve the issue is to settle on a time for the new ID cards to be distributed. But the Electronic ID Cards Administration has been waiting for months for government orders to start the distribution process.

According to some lawmakers in Parliament, the delay is the result of MPs over-politicizing the program. "In Parliament, MPs have politicized the electronic ID cards process, and that has resulted in the donors ending their aid, because there is no news of the timing," Kabul MP Shenkai Zaheen Krokhal said.

The electronic ID cards are expected to help make elections in Afghanistan more fair and transparent, by providing a standardized and verifiable method of identification for all Afghan citizens. (Tolonews)

(11) Balkh Seminar ...

presidential election last year gave birth to multiple issues and resulted in formation of the unity government. Safwat said government's and powerful individuals' meddling, violations of women rights during elections, women's right to enfranchise and other related issues were discussed in the seminar.

He said the previous elections had disappointed the masses and eroded their trust in transparent vote. This issue was discussed at the seminar and the public representatives and civil society activist agreed to try to restore people's trust in elections.

If the provincial council members carried out awareness-creating programs for the masses in a proper way, the result from future elections would be positive.

Mohammad Ibrahim Khair Andish, the Balkh provincial council chief, said the gap between the government and the people had widened due to irregularities in the last fall presidential election.

However, he said the government could shorten the gap by holding transparent future elections and promptly announcing a date for the parliamentary elections to restore public trust.

The PC chief also said if the Wolesi Jirga continued beyond its constitutional term, it would increase problems for government, which might lose its direction. (Pajhwok)

(12) USAID to ...

Public Health Minister Feroz thanked the USAID for its support. He said out of 100,000 mothers, 327 lost their lives during childbirths.

With execution of the USAID project, he said, the maternal deaths would decline to 255.

He promised his ministry would strictly observe the programme during its implementation and would evaluate its results regularly. (Pajhwok)

(13) First IT Expo...

also display its mobile application developed for accessing news on Android and IOS devices.

CAE Director Abdul Saboor said the exhibition was aimed to display new technological tools and products in the area of information technology. He said 120 companies mostly owned by Afghans would participate in the exhibition.

Mobile phone service providers would share their achievements and types of SIM cards while business companies would showcase products they imported and supplied to the market, Saboor said. He added the CAE was founded in 2015 and had organized three exhibitions across the country so far. (Pajhwok)

(14) TIKA Repairs ...

for its generous aid.

"The students before had a computer class, but had no computers," Davuzai said, adding that the students now would have a chance of doing their experiments in chemistry, physics and biology classes at the new laboratories.

About 1,800 students get education at the school.

The opening ceremony was also attended by an Afghan lawmaker, Enayatullah Babur Farahmand, District Governor Abdul Sami Sharif and several other officials.

Earlier, the Turkish agency repaired a health center in the same district and also supported the agricultural sector in the area.

Established in 1992, Turkey's government-run TIKA agency is responsible for implementing Turkey's developmental cooperation policies overseas. (ANADOLU AGENCY)

(15) US Drones Play ...

at eliminating insurgents," a spokesman for the provincial governor of Nangarhar, Ahmad Zia Abdulzai said.

Abdul Habib Sayedkhili, Provincial Police Chief of Kunar also said that "the airstrikes are very effective because most of the areas have difficult ways to pass and are mostly forests. Because of these strikes are effective in eliminating insurgents."

The Interior Ministry officials also said that troops have launched military operations in Yamgan district of north-eastern Badakhshan province.

"We were witness to ground force operations and airstrikes in Yamgna district and the Taliban insurgents have recorded massive casualties in these operations," Sediqi said.

Military analysts believe that drone operations in the country are very effective - especially following the withdrawal of foreign troops at the end of 2014.

A recent TOLONews study found that over the past month, up to 20 air attacks have been conducted around the country, including 13 drone attacks, seven of which were in Nangarhar.

All told, drone attacks conducted by international forces in Afghanistan over the past month have killed an estimated 196 militants and wounded 30 more. In addition to the seven attacks conducted in Nangarhar, four were in Kunar and two in Nuristan, according to statistics. (Tolonews)

(16) Taliban Can't ...

Chechen, Uzbek, Tajik and Pakistani, were fighting against security forces in Raghistan district and another 250 in Yamgan and Juram districts.

The former provincial council chief asked the government to pay special attention to security of the strategically important Badakhshan province.

He criticised the deployment of only 30 policemen in some districts to maintain the law and order situation. Tayyibi claimed spy networks of regional countries were involved in fueling instability in Badakhshan.

The Taliban have intensified their attacks amid several rounds of informal talks between them and the Afghan representatives.

The latest informal talks between the two sides took place in Dubai and the Norwegian capital, Oslo.

The meetings involved Taliban representatives based in Qatar and members of the High Peace Council (HIPC), Afghan civil society members and some female lawmakers. (Pajhwok)

(17) 41 Militants...

He told Pajhwok Afghan News his group had been operating against the government in Chapa Dara district. "The outsiders had motivated us to pick up the guns. Now we have real-

ised the war in our country is dictated by others." Khair Mohammad vowed to play his role in Afghanistan's rehabilitation. (Pajhwok)

(18) Afghan Man...

"It must be clearly stated that there is nothing at all 'honourable' in what you proposed be done ... and that it reflects a skewed moral or ethical paradigm that is entirely unacceptable in this or any society," Emerton said.

"It shows a profound disrespect for the lives of others and for the rule of law," she added. (KP)

(19) Tajik Border...

Afghan Interior Ministry, has told reporters that he was shot dead by Tajik border guards while illegally crossing the Afghan-Tajik border in Kunduz province.

25 kilograms of narcotics were reportedly found on the spot.

Pajhwok Afghan News' office in Kunduz reports the killed officer was brother-in-law of Afghan parliament speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahim.

Abdul Rauf Ibrahim is an Afghan parliament legislator. He is currently the Speaker for the Wolesi Jirga, the lower house of its bicameral National Assembly; he has been speaker since at least 2011

Born in the Imam Sahib district of northern Kunduz province in 1962, Abdul Rauf Ibrahim is ethnic Uzbek. He finished high school in 1979 before entering the Languages & Literature Faculty of Kabul University. But he joined the jihad when the former Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

Following mujahidin's victory, he was appointed as Sher Khan Dry Port director in 1993. Subsequently, he was appointed the commander of 3rd southern border police zone.

After the collapse of the Taliban regime, he served as the commander of border police in 2002 before being elected as Emergency Loya Jirga member the same year. Ibrahim was elected as Wolesi Jirga member from Kunduz in 2005. He won a parliamentary seat for the second time in 2010 when was elected as speaker of the Wolesi Jirga. (Asia-Plus)

(20) 9 Rebels...

airstrike, said Maj. Reza, who said the slain Taliban commander was involved in killing security personnel and influential individuals in the area.

Separately, three rebels were killed and a policeman was wounded during a clash on the outskirts of Fiazabad, the capital of Badakhshan province, on Tuesday night.

Provincial police chief Col. Sakhi Dad said the clash lasted two hours and broke out after the insurgents attacked a police post in the area. Three attackers were killed and four were wounded, he said. The bodies of two rebels remained on the scene, he said. Police also seized some weapons and ammunitions from the fighters.

A resident of the area, Hayatullah, said the government had failed to ensure security even in four kilometers of Faizabad city. He claimed a small group of militants active in Spin Gul district carried the attack. (Pajhwok)

(21) US Envoy...

political dialogue agreements. The latest ceasefire forged with France and Germany's help in February threatened to rupture last week as exchanges of artillery and rocket fire killed around 30 people living in towns straddling the twisting -- and hotly disputed -- line separating the two foes. (AFP)

(22) S. Korea...

versity Hospital and the Daecheong Hospital in Daejeon, a city in central South Korea, and the Hallym University Medical Center in Hwaseong, Gyeonggi Province respectively. The death toll increased to nine as two more deaths, including the 76th and 90th patients, were added. The authorities said on Tuesday that it will test all pneumonia patients in Seoul, the Gyeonggi Province, Daejeon and Asan city in South Chungcheong Province to detect potential carriers of the MERS virus. (Xinhua)

(23) Jeb Bush...

that U.S. troops should be embedded with Iraqi forces to train them and identify targets and he reiterated this view during his trip to Berlin. (Reuters)

(24) At Least 43...

a Saudi-led coalition flew sorties overnight against Houthis outposts in the Bir Ahmed area north of Aden, killing 12 members of the Zaydi Shi'ite Muslim group. (Reuters)