

### (1) Senate Decides...

and the Independent Election Commission (IEC).

However, Abdullah Qarlaq, Meshrano Jirga secretary, told Pajhwok Afghan News that there was no need for the administrative board election as the parliamentary and district council elections were only six months away.

The IEC has previously announced that the Wolesi Jirga and district council elections would be held on October 15, 2016.

Qarlaq said a number of Meshrano Jirga members had suggested not conducting the board elections.

"Most of the 42 senators who were present on January 17 voted in favour of continuation of the current administrative board. It is also election when a majority of Meshrano Jirga members vote for a decision," he said.

He said the parliament would begin its legislative session for next year on March 6.

According to Article 107 of the constitution, the parliament shall hold two regular sessions annually. The term of both regular sessions shall be nine months every year, and when needed, the assembly shall extend its term.

However, Senator Haseebullah Kalimzai, who represents Maidan central Maidan Wardak province in Meshrano Jirga, said: "We do not allow anyone to occupy seats on the administrative board and violate the Article 87th of the Constitution."

"If the administrative board elections are not held in-time, the management of the house would be disrupted and we would see more anarchy for which the president would be responsible," he said.

"The occupation of parliament seats would lead to flexing of muscles in the house, we know some senators involved in corruption fear their crimes would be exposed if they lost their positions," he added.

He claimed they had evidence that some senators had pressed and cut deals with others to vote for the continuation of current administration board.

Kalimzai also lashed out at the president for his silence over the situation and said the president was the main cause of current problems. (Pajhwok)

### (2) Iran Completes ...

election which will most likely fall in mid-April.

Rahmani Fazli did not elaborate on the number of the seats, the fate of which would be decided in mid-April. (Xinhua)

### (3) Afghanistan ...

between Kabul and Tehran, Iran has allocated 54 hectares of land to Afghan merchants for transiting their products.

India Prime Minister's Office in a statement announced that investment in Chabahar will provide opportunities for India to have wider presence in the region and Delhi is negotiating with Iran to boost trades via this port.

During his latest trip to India, Abdullah Abdullah requested Indian PM, Narendra Modi to implement trilateral agreements among Iran, India and Afghanistan accelerating investment procedure.

India's Minister for Road Transport and Highways and Shipping, Nitin Gadkari and Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Abbas Akhundi inked \$75m agreement for India to invest in Chabahar earlier during April to May, 2015.

India tends to access Central Asia, Caucasus and Europe markets through Chabahar pathway. (IRNA)

### (4) Kerry ...

analysts say.

But Kerry said the US maintained close ties with both Pakistan and India to bring down tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbours. The US had been trying to advance a rapprochement between them, he added.

The secretary's statement came ahead of defence cooperation talks between Islamabad and Washington. Kerry and Advisor on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz will lead their respective delegation. (Pajhwok)

### (5) Helmand ...

"Our first attempt is to slow the fighting, to quiet the fighting," he added.

In some places, however, that has looked like retreat.

The army recently abandoned its last bases in the districts of Musa Qala and Now Zad, pulling out as many as 1,500 soldiers in an appar-

ent move to strengthen a security belt around Lashkar Gah. American Special Operations forces have been drawn into the fight, recently moving to help clear roads to the provincial capital and getting involved in planning its defense.

Mr. Qahraman, 58, has been here before. His command was the last bastion of the Russian-backed Communist government in southern Afghanistan, and he became personally identified with its collapse here in 1993, when he withdrew his forces and turned Lashkar Gah over to the C.I.A.-backed mujahedeen. He went into exile in Moscow for a decade afterward.

He returned to Afghanistan after the United States invasion in 2001 and the fall of the Taliban, and became a member of Parliament. His views on how to engage the resurgent Taliban are a sympathetic fit with those of Mr. Ghani, who has tried to open talks with the insurgency's leaders in an effort to reach a political end to the long war.

But in the immediate crisis, tribal elders here see his efforts as impractical and hopeless — the desperate acts of a nostalgic commander. The Taliban, instead of responding to his peace calls, have challenged him to a "face-to-face" fight, and they do not like the government's chances.

"I think Mr. Qahraman is in day-dreaming mode," said Hajji Mohammad Tahir, an elder from Sangin District who recently attended discussions with Mr. Qahraman. "Right now, the Taliban have the upper hand, the government is beneath. Once you bring them down militarily, then it would be possible for local Taliban to put their weapons down and join the peace process — not now."

Mullah Abdul Rahman Ehsan, a Taliban commander in Sangin, said Mr. Qahraman had clearly returned to Helmand to make up for past humiliations.

"Let's fight first, and forget about peace and laying weapons down," Mullah Ehsan said. "First we need to fight, then work on the peace process."

Others even saw cynical motives in the recent events in Helmand, particularly after the surrender of the army bases. After a disastrous year militarily, the government might be striking deals with the Taliban in the districts to keep them away from the city, just as the Communist government did in its final days in southern Afghanistan.

The suspicion is furthered by the fact that the man in charge of Helmand operations is talking peace, and that the minister at the helm of national defense, Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai, was until last year effectively in charge of the national peace process.

"The question that is going through my head, after they just retreated from Musa Qala, is what if they are saying we won't resist in the districts and you don't attack the city?" said Abdul Majid Akhundzada, the deputy head of Helmand's provincial council, whose father was a leading rebel commander against Mr. Qahraman in the 1980s. "If that is not the case, why are they leaving without a fight?"

Mr. Qahraman, who said the recent retreats were necessary and not part of any deal, admitted to facing an uphill task.

In Helmand, the government has lost to the Taliban not just most of its districts, but also, over the course of the past few years, much of its public support and any semblance of corruption fighting. The allure of opium profits has ensnared Taliban and government officials alike.

Deep in the deserts that are supposedly Taliban territory, officials and local elders report nighttime drug raids by security forces. Bodies are left behind, but lucrative bags of opium end up disappearing.

"If you send me out in the whole of Helmand right now and say, 'Jabar, find me a couple good district governors, a few good district police chiefs, a few good directors,' I can't find you one in the whole of Helmand. I absolutely can't," Mr. Qahraman said. "Even if you appoint these men closest to me, they will turn into wolves — the mentality has turned like that. The bad has become good in the perceptions."

After a few disastrous months of fighting in Helmand, with the government territory shrinking, a delegation of senior officials recently dispatched by Mr. Ghani found that only about half of the Afghan Army force there on paper was actually on duty. Many troops were missing because of desertion, casualties or corruption, one member of the delegation said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to dis-

cuss delicate information.

While acknowledging such problems, Mr. Qahraman said there should be enough forces in Helmand to fight an insurgency that he believes does not number more than 2,000 fighters. The Afghan forces are well supplied, he insisted, calling the modern army's NATO support "a genetically modified cow that gives good milk" compared with the Soviet support a generation ago, which he called "a skinny cow."

The problems lie in how the forces are managed, he said, and in corrupt leadership eating up supplies before they reach the units.

"Their only art is that they are mobile," Mr. Qahraman said about the Taliban. "For us, on the other hand, even preparing the convoys takes days. They have an upper hand — they are locals, they know the terrain, and their load is smaller."

Still, Mr. Qahraman said he hoped to make a difference in Helmand. He recited a Pashto poem:

"If you keep swimming after it, it will come to your hand / Who says there are no pearls in the sea?"

But Hajji Sharafuddin, 53, a mujahedeen fighter who battled Mr. Qahraman in the 1980s, fears that the former general's history in Lashkar Gah will continue to repeat itself.

"Tomorrow, you will have another plane come for you," Hajji Sharafuddin said, "and we will be left here watching." (KP)

### (6) Migrants Protest ...

Balkan clampdowns come hot on the heels of a move by Austria, further up the migrant trail to Germany and Scandinavia, to introduce a daily cap of 80 asylum applications and a limit of just 3,200 migrants transiting through per day.

The controls have had a knock-on effect in Greece, where migrants have continued to arrive en masse by boat from Turkey.

Merkel said of eastern European countries that have tightened their border controls: "The problem is that they acted independently and unilaterally, but it's not good if a country is not involved. "Greece was simply left on the outside."

The tension has resulted in a public spat, with Austria accusing Greece of failing to adequately police its borders under its duty as the southeastern flank of Europe's Schengen passport-free zone.

Chancellor Faymann compared Greece to a "travel agency" for migrants, adding in remarks to Austrian media: "Last year, Greece took in 11,000 asylum seekers, we took in 90,000. That can't be allowed to happen again."

But Mouzalas said Austria's politicians were talking with one eye on the electoral calendar: a presidential poll is due in April. (AFP)

### (7) Afghan ...

participated in a competition in Bangladesh," Masooma said.

"As head of the national cycling federation, I was very proud to hear the news that the efforts of our female cyclists have delivered positive results," Sadiq Sadeqi, head of the national cycling federation said.

The Nobel Peace Prize is one of five Nobel prizes created by the Swedish journalist Alfred Nobel. The other are for Chemistry, Physics, Physiology or Medicine, and Literature. Since 1901, it has been awarded annually (with some exceptions) to those who have "done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses". (Tolonews)

### (8) Ex-Taliban...

desire of all Afghans and peace could be achieved only through negotiations.

He dubbed the four-ways talks in Islamabad and Kabul as "ineffective" because details of what discussed in the talks remained hidden from the nation and Taliban representatives were not present in the talks involving Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the US.

A former justice minister during Taliban's regime, Agha said: "Both the warring sides should show flexibility in stance on making the peace process effective. If the government accepts some legal demands of Taliban, I believe the peace process would succeed."

Akbar Agha, who is leading the Afghanistan Salvation High Council, said that the Afghan government had not been honest in its efforts to end the ongoing war and to advance the peace process.

"When a peace process begins with

realities, no side including the Taliban and the government could deny it," he said. "The outlook of efforts by Kabul doesn't inspire hope," he added.

Despite being divided into different factions, the Taliban were united in demand stance over foreign troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan, he said. (Pajhwok)

### (9) Uncertainty about...

day for direct talks within the first week of March, because they are seriously concerned about a possible insurgent offensive with the spring arrival, said the sources. (Monitoring Desk)

### (10) Offensive Ops...

about 2,500 Taliban are activate in the districts of the province but their numbers are changing as every day they are facing casualties," said Mohiuddin Ghorri Pami, ANA's 20 division commander.

The ministry said that currently the Afghan forces are engaged in fighting against the armed opposition in thirteen provinces across the country and talked about the achievements in those operations.

In the past few days, about 69 insurgents were killed and 20 others wounded in operations, said the ministry.

The ministry stated that insurgents suffered a heavy casualty toll in operations in Dande Ghore district of Baghlan province on Wednesday. They said 29 militants had been killed. (Tolonews)

### (11) Mol Starts ...

and the army arrested him," said Bashir Ahmad Shakir, a member of Helmand Provincial Council.

He urged security organizations to seriously investigate the incident. This incident comes during ongoing fighting between security forces and the Taliban in Sangin. The district is under siege and during the first week of the fighting 65 army troops surrendered to the Taliban. (Tolonews)

### (12) 'Centuries-Old' ...

said they decided, after consultations with religious scholars, to transfer the historic copy of Quran to the Khost Museum.

Mohammad Amin Shah Ulfat, information and cultural director, said currently as many as 400 historic monuments were kept at the museum. (Pajhwok)

### (13) 28 More...

Massoud Ahmad Massoud, deputy head of Junbish-i-Islami party, said 32 fighters, including commanders Maulvi Kandahar, Haqyar, Ghani and Izzatullah, had been killed and dozens wounded in Khwaja Musa locality.

But Qari Yousaf Ahmadi, the Taliban spokesman, confirmed the security forces attacked Khwaja Musa area with heavy weapons and tanks. The Taliban launched a counter-attack.

He said 11 security men were killed, 25 others wounded and three tanks destroyed. One tank and a machinegun were seized by the fighters. (Pajhwok)

### (14) Kunar Residents ...

Assad Abad, the capital of the province towards border regions with Pakistan, warning that the security situation will deteriorate next summer unless government take steps and eliminates the insurgents in these regions.

"We are facing major challenges after insurgents intensified their activities. Therefore, we ask the government to consider comprehensive security measures for Kunar as it is located in border regions," he said.

"Kunar residents are deeply concerned about the security situation as threats noticeably increased not only in the center but also in other parts of the province," a civil society activist from Kunar, Shoaib Gharwal, said. (Tolonews)

### (15) Gen. Salangi ...

need all the support this critical time."

The remarks by Gen. Salangi comes as the Afghan officials have long been criticizing the Pakistan's spy agency for interfering the internal affairs of Afghanistan, besides sheltering the anti-government elements inside the Pakistan.

The National Security Adviser Hanif Atmar said late in November last year that the Pakistan-based Haqqani Terrorist Network and Taliban's Quetta Council (Shura) still operate against Afghanistan from their safe havens within the Pakistani soil.

Atmar further added that the government of Pakistan has not taken important steps to prevent the ac-

tivities of the two groups in their soil.

The remarks by Atmar followed almost three months after the Presidential Palace slammed Pakistan for the existence of the Haqqani network command and control in Pakistan. (KP)

### (16) 4 Dead, 2 ...

injuries while being treated. Bin-yamin, a resident of Karja area, said: "The four children from our villagewere grazing animals when the incident happened." (Pajhwok)

### (17) 6 Militants, ...

six militants and one civilian dead," district governor Nasrudin Nazari told Xinhua.

Ten others including four women were injured during the firefight, the official added.

He also noted that sporadic fighting has been continuing in the area. Taliban militants who are active in parts of Kunduz province have yet to make comments. (Xinhua)

### (18) Loss of 3 ...

all his hopes died with the loss of his sons on Saturday evening," he remarked.

Akbar added his elder nephew Habibullah, 30, had five children. His second nephew Ihsanullah (28) had four children and the third is survived by two kids.

Jaafar, 18, is his fourth nephew, who was wounded seriously. He is currently struggling for life at the Jalalabad Civil Hospital. "He recently graduated from high school and started working alongside his brothers in eking out a living."

Akbar Khan said: "Now my 10 years old nephew has to take care of the 21-member family, including his parents and their grandchildren." The victims had five sisters -- one of them married and four still at home.

As a routine affair, the victims' father would wait on a rooftop of his home for his sons. "His wait has finally come to an anguished end. Allah will punish the terrorists who have left us in a state of mourning."

Kunar Governor Wahidullah Kalimzai vehemently condemned the incident, saying his heart went out to the victims' families, particularly the three brothers who lost their lives in the terrorist act. (Pajhwok)

### (19) Cut off ...

reason for their closure and nor the Afghans had tried to get them reopened.

He said the routes were not only used by Maroof residents to cross into Pakistan, but residents of Zabol's Shamulzai and Atghar districts also did so.

The closure has created many problems for residents of the three districts because even sick people were not allowed to cross into Pakistan, he added.

"These are the shortest routes to Pakistan through which people would take their products like raisins, agriculture products, almonds and others to Pakistan for sale and would bring in food items."

Afghan said people of Maroof, Shamulzai and Atghar would travel through the routes to Pishin and Quetta, the capital of Balochistan province, taking their emergency patients.

He urged the Afghan government to take measures for reopening the routes the closure of which had a negative impact on their lives. He said the closure had led to increased prices of food items besides causing joblessness.

A resident of Shamulzai district, Abdul Samad, told Pajhwok Afghan News that the closure of the three routes had compelled people of the three districts to embark on a longest route to reach Quetta. He said people had to reach Spin Boldak border town and then cross into Pakistan to reach Quetta -- a route also insecure and expensive. (Pajhwok)

### (20) NDS Foil ...

vice and hundreds of rounds of ammunition were also confiscated by the intelligence operatives.

The anti-government armed militant groups have not commented regarding the report so far. Kandahar is among the relatively peaceful provinces in southern Afghanistan where fewer insurgency related incidents are reported during the recent months. (KP)

### (21) Slow Work ...

to hasten work on the key bridge." Dr. Nasir Kamawal, a provincial council member, said residents of 27 districts crossed the Behsud bridge on a daily basis. But due to rush and snarl-ups, patients cannot

reach hospitals on time. Government employee and students also get late.

Public Health Director Najibullah Kamawal confirmed the traffic jams on the bridge affected the evacuation of the injured and other patients to hospitals.

Those injured in Saturday's explosion in Kunar had to be transferred to Jalalabad for treatment, he recalled, complaining ambulances had to wait for a long time at the site. Somehow the injured were taken to Jalalabad. (Pajhwok)

### (22) Migrants Play...

from their migration, but also contribute to the development of their countries of origin and destination through their work and the remittances they send home, migrants also face hardships and abuse, so action needs to be taken to maximize these benefits by ensuring that migration is orderly, safe, regular and responsible. (Xinhua)

### (23) Syrian...

the cessation was largely holding with casualties greatly reduced compared to before the agreement took effect.

The cessation of hostilities, the first of its kind since the war began in 2011, is a less formal arrangement than a ceasefire. It is meant to allow peace talks to resume and aid to reach besieged communities. (Reuters)

### (24) ASEAN Economic...

Retreat is viewed as the first meeting of ASEAN economic ministers, albeit in unofficial fashion, since the bloc was re-established as the AEC late last year. (Xinhua)

### (25) More than...

conditions for retail are set to worsen significantly. The most vulnerable people and places will be impacted. The government will need to work hard to mitigate their impact. (Xinhua)

### (26) Joint Israel...

Arab countries to promote inter-cultural dialogue through music.

The orchestra has performed at the main international festivals and music centers, as well as at the General Assembly Hall of the United Nations in New York, and the Human Rights Council Room in Geneva. (Xinhua)

### (27) U.S. Warns...

caution, we would like to underscore that prompt evacuation offers the most effective tool to save lives of the hundreds of thousands of people," the security message said. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said on Sunday precautions were being taken, but described the likelihood of such a scenario as "extremely small". (Reuters)

### (28) Syria Ceasefire ...

including by air, have been continuing against zones controlled by the moderate opposition." French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault told reporters at the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva.

"All this needs to be verified. France has therefore demanded that the task force charged with overseeing the cessation of hostilities meet without delay. (Reuters)

### (29) Hungary's PM...

marks were in response to his Italian counterpart Matteo Renzi, who said last week that the EU should cut funding for eastern European members unwilling to accept migrants, warning that Italy will take action in the upcoming talks on the 2020-26 EU budget. (Xinhua)

### (30) Indian PM ...

which will become the first-ever visit by any Indian prime minister to the kingdom in the past six years, the sources said. The Indian prime minister's visit to Riyadh assumes significance, given the current geo-political situation in the Middle East amid strained relations between the Gulf kingdom and Iran, another strategically important country for India. (Xinhua)

### (31) At Least 7...

and nearby medical center. The volatile town of Maqdadiyah witnessed escalation in sectarian tension especially after January 11, when massive bombings claimed by the Islamic State (IS) militant group hit a coffee shop in the town attended by Shiite residents, pushing Shiite militiamen to bomb and burn several Sunni mosques and tens of shops owned by Sunnis in the town, along with executing dozens of Sunni residents in retaliatory attacks. (Xinhua)