

(1) Central Bank...

Waheed said the bank does not know the exact number of foreign exchange businesses in the country but to date more than 1,800 of them have registered with the bank.

"The total number of money exchangers (they know about) in the country is 1,810. Of this, 1,090 companies have registered (with the bank)," he said.

According to the Central Bank, the two new licensed business will not be able to offer savings accounts to its clients or to give them loans. Instead they will be able to exchange foreign currency and offer money transfer services.

The owners of these companies said they have plans to expand operations to towns and cities around the country.

"Within the next five years we will have more than 50 branches in every nook and cranny around the country," said Mohammad Bashir, head of Al-Bashir Exchange.

"Money services businesses have been digitalized, computerized and modernized for today's world. This should be done in Afghanistan too," said Jarullah Mansouri, CEO of Exchange Zone.

This comes as the Central Bank says in order to improve the country's money system, it is trying to legalize the activities of money exchangers across the country. (Tolo news)

(2) Apple Farmers...

fruit was purchased for government departments but farmers and traders have said this has not happened.

"Contractors are buying foreign fruit," Hakimullah, a civil society activist, said. "Government should ask its contractors and make it clear whether purchased goods should be local or foreign."

The farmers meanwhile said this was just the beginning of their protest action.

"This is the start of our protest. We will expand it and will close the Maidan Wardak Highway if our demands are not addressed," Ahmadzai Ahmadi, a resident of Maidan Wardak, said.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, Akbar Rustami, meanwhile said some cold storage facilities will be built for local investors and farmers in provinces.

"A lesser amount of fruit and vegetables are kept in provinces during the winter season due to a lack of cold storage facilities. This problem will be resolved as government will build eight cold storage facilities, each of them with a capacity of 5,000 tons," Rustami said.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, the ban on the export of Afghan fruit to Pakistan is because of the lack of quality control certificates after quarantine and that this was up to Pakistan to sort out. (Tolo news)

(3) Only 7pc...

their number in the next grade drops and only 400 girls graduate from high school each year."

Currently around 7,000 girls are sixth grade alone in Logar. The education director said he had shared all problems plaguing girls' education with relevant officials, who had promised to resolve them.

"We also started efforts in collaboration with tribal elders to resolve this problem", Stanikzai added. Shahla, a grade eighth student in Purk High School in Pul-i-Alam, said that she left the school this year due to some domestic problems.

"My father and uncles forced me to stop going to school, they told me that I am now a grown girl and I had learned enough in school to resolve my problems," she said.

Sayed Javid, a tribal elder from Pangram area of Charkh district, said that girls generally studied up to grade six in their district.

"Our local culture does not allow us to let our adult girls and women learn outside home, it is considered a shame, but if a family tries to break this tradition, the Taliban would threaten them," he said.

He said there were only primary schools in their district and secondary and high schools did not exist because girls were not allowed to get education beyond grade six.

On the other hand, Shima Zargar, provincial women's affairs director, confirmed these problem and said girls were denied many rights in the province.

Citing an example, she said besides barring girls from education, they were not allowed to work in offices either.

"Old traditions are still practiced in our society, people respect their culture more than the law and Sharia, people see it a big shame when their girls attend school or work in offices," she added.

Zargar said they had conducted several awareness programs for promoting girls' education.

"We also talked with Islamic scholars so they campaign against these bad traditions, it is a good way to deal with wrong cultures," she said.

Mualvi Sayed Azam Alhashemi, a prominent Islamic scholar, told Pajhwok that it was obligatory for both men and women to get education according to Islam.

He said there were many Hadithes and Quranic verses that supported education for all.

"Education for all is mandatory in Islam, it means it is important than anything else," he said.

Logar governor's spokesman, Salim Saleh, said it was a reality that many families did not allow their girls to go to school due to bad customs.

"The government cannot be blamed because men deny their women their legitimate rights and do not leave their girls to get education," he said.

The government has paved the ground for education for all people, now it was up to people to get education or no, Saleh said.

He said the government always encouraged families to let both boys and girls get education.

In Logar, 150,000 students including 35,000 of them girls are studying in schools. (Pajhwok)

(4) IEC Reports...

Asian Affairs

"Previously it was scheduled for 16 Saratan (7 July) the process will likely be delayed for three months, a new date will be announced in early days of the New Year (Persian New Year) after consultations," IEC's operational deputy chief Wasima Badghisi said.

"In the face of the work which already started, I think it would be difficult to conduct the elections in 1397 (solar year) starting on 21 March," said one MP Abdul Qader Qalatwal.

After assuming office, both President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah pledged to bring about systematic reforms in Afghanistan's election system.

But election experts and monitoring groups have leveled serious accusations against government leaders about what they claim to be a deliberate attempt by government to delay the polls and implement reforms in the election system.

This comes two days after UNAMA Chief Tadamichi Yamamoto said in his report to the UN Security Council that the IEC must make sure elections are held on time.

The IEC must ensure it gets assistance from government institutions so elections can be held as scheduled, he said. (Tolo news)

(5) Govt 'Interfering'...

government and warned that he will not allow anyone to speak out against President Ashraf Ghani.

"My tongue is now speaking, now I will sit there and see how someone dares to take the name of the president like that," said Ahmadzai.

But some other MPs said that lawmakers should instead focus on issues of national interest rather than provoke disputes.

"We must try to work for national unity, stability, peace, rule of law and legalizing the future systems in Afghanistan to address the chal-

lenges we face," said MP Mirdad Nejrabi.

There were meanwhile reports that security guards from the two rivals engaged in an armed confrontation within parliament premises following the argument between the two parliament members.

Based on the constitution, the tenure of the House of Representatives ended on June 22, 2015, and parliamentary elections should have been held within sixty days after the completion of the term. (Tolo news)

(6) Girl, 16...

"I started a new life with my step-mother, sisters and brothers, but we had no good life and we spent years full of problems," she said.

"I was 12 when the bitter incident happened. That day I was alone in our home and busy in the kitchen, my stepfather came in and suddenly gripped me from behind. I was shocked and tried to shout but he put his hand on my mouth and then raped me."

As she swallowed down a lump in her throat, she said: "I wish I was covered in a shroud and buried in grave instead of wearing the wedding dress. Now I feel like I am buried alive."

Nafas Gul (not real name), 50, the mother of Shazai, who went to Logar province to visit her daughter, said after the death of her spouse, she married a man who had three daughters and two sons from his first wife.

Gul, who apparently looked perturbed and wretched, said she accepted her second marriage due to suffering from poverty and her colleague's emphasis.

About her and her daughter's lives after marrying her colleague (Gul Mohammad), NafasGul said, "We had a hard life, I wanted to send my daughter to school but my husband did not allow this. He would say education is unnecessary for girls because they get married."

She sighed sadly and said: "My husband threatened me and my daughter with elimination if anyone got aware of his sexual assault on Shazia."

Gul, an uneducated woman, said she heard a few days back about her daughter's situation but she could not share it with anyone or with the government because she did not know about legal cases.

"It was four years ago when a man from Mohammad Agha district of Logar province requested my daughter's engagement to his son. I did not agree because his son was jobless, but my husband emphasized I had no option but to accept the proposal," she said.

While clearing her tears with her shawl, the woman said: "My husband took money from that man and he sold my daughter. The family members of the bridegroom came a few days later of the engagement and took my daughter to their home without organizing a wedding party."

"But not very longer, the bridegroom brought my daughter back in a car and threw her at our home saying take your girl back, the groom also gave me a cassette in which my daughter's story of her rape was recorded," she added.

She said: "For the protection of our dignity, I told the groom not to make noise about the issue and take my daughter back with him, he took my daughter back but he married a second woman and now my daughter is used as a slave, she is tortured and beaten on a daily basis."

She said that the situation of her daughter never improved whenever she visited her. "For the first time when I visited my daughter in her house, she was beaten with a poker and her body was red and dark. "For the second time when I visited her, her eyes were turned dark because she endured beatings, but we have tolerated this situation," NafasGul said.

Shams Rahman Frotan, an Islamic scholar about this case, said: "The stepfather of this girl has committed adultery and he must be pun-

ished according to Islamic rules, he can be hanged if investigations found him guilty."

"This girl did not commit any sin, the sinner was the person who forcefully assaulted her. This girl can divorce her husband with whom she has no good life and she can live where she feels happy and honorable," he said.

LatifaSultani, the women's affairs head for the human rights commission of Logar, seriously condemned the incident and said the case had not been reported to the commission so far.

"Whenever the victim of this case approaches us, we would not only help her but would closely follow her case with judicial organs and we would advocate to get punished the perpetrator," she said.

She said similar cases happened in other areas as well but they went unreported because the victims were threatened.

Mohammad Hassan Salimi, Trafficking in Person (TIP) high commission secretary at the Ministry of Justice, said, "The husband of this girl should not torture her because she had not committed any sin."

However, about the violence the girl was suffering, he said, "The girl is treated as a sex slave, it is a type of human trafficking which should be addressed, this girl should be supported."

ShimaZargar, the provincial women's affairs director, said the case had not been reported to them so far.

"If this girl refers to us we can take her divorce from her husband and rescue her from the unfortunate life," she concluded.

Article 11 of the "Law to Combat Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants" says "If the perpetrator is the spouse, parent, guardian or custodian of the victim, or a public official, long term imprisonment of not less than ten years."

"If the perpetrator committed adultery (zina) or sodomy with the victim; in absence of the conditions for implementing of Had (Sharia punishment) long term imprisonment of more than 12 years," the article says. (Pajhwok)

(7) 4 Held in...

armed men, who attacked a house in Shirabad area of Qarabagh district ten days back.

Angered by the deaths, hundreds of residents of Qarabagh blocked the Kabul-Kandahar highway in their area and Ghazni City. (Pajhwok)

(8) Afghanistan...

event to mark International Women's Day that the number of child addicts was also extremely high - at 100,000.

The children, officials said, were all below the age of 10.

Sunday's ceremony was held at a drug rehabilitation center in Kabul. "There are between 900,000 and million women and around 100,000 children who have turned to drugs," Yusuf said.

A number of women at the ceremony said they turned to drugs as their husbands were addicts.

"I took on drug as my husband was using at home," Naznin, a woman said.

"Bringing us here (for treatment) will have not results. When we leave here, again we will turn to drug as long as there are smugglers (and dealers). They should be stopped. It is the reality," Marwa-Musavi, another woman said.

Currently, there are at least 20 drug rehabilitation centers across the country that treat women and children. Officials have said however that there are not enough centers to treat women and children.

Last year, statistics were released that Afghanistan has over three million addicts but that rehabilitation centers have the capacity to help only a small percentage of the total number.

However, the public health ministry's disclosure indicates that the total number of addicts could be a lot higher than thought if women

drug addicts alone total about one million. (Tolo news)

(9) Senate Asks...

process."

Rahmatullah Achakzai, a lawmaker from Kandahar province, said he supported the government offer to the Taliban for reconciliation.

"If the Taliban are an independent they should accept the government peace offer," he said.

Mohammad Ajan Mangal, a lawmaker from southeastern Paktia province, remarked the government peace offer had been unprecedented and needed greater people support.

He added the government offer was inclusive and now no pretext had been left with the Taliban to reject peace and reconciliation.

Senate Chairman FazalHadi Muslimyar said: "We hope the Taliban will finally listen the voice of the people of Afghanistan and prepare themselves for peace talks."

He, however, said growing incidents of insecurity in some provinces showed that the Taliban did not want peace or there was another group that wanted to sabotage the government peace strategy. (Pajhwok)

(10) In Takhar...

admitted that police vehicles were being used by some former officials and unauthorised groups in the Takhar and other provinces.

He recalled an announcement made two weeks earlier that all such vehicles would be surrendered to the ministry. Similar misuse of government vehicles in Kabul has created problems for the people. (Pajhwok)

Saudi sets up departments to investigate, prosecute corruption cases

DUBAI - Saudi King Salman has ordered the establishment of specialized departments in the public prosecutor's office to investigate and prosecute corruption cases, the government's information office said in a statement on Sunday.

The move is intended to increase effectiveness and accelerate the process of combating corruption, the statement quoted Attorney General Sheikh Saud al-Mujib as saying.

Saudi authorities detained hundreds of top businessmen and royals in November and held them for several months at the Riyadh Ritz-Carlton in a sweeping anti-corruption probe.

Most detainees have since been released after reaching financial settlements with the government, but several dozen others remain in custody and may stand trial.

Officials have not released the names of those still held, the allegations against them or plans for how the cases could be prosecuted. (Reuters)

Four Arrested After Balcony Protest At Iranian Embassy In London

LONDON - The four were arrested on suspicion of causing criminal damage and being unlawfully on diplomatic premises, a spokeswoman for London's Metropolitan Police said. No one was hurt during the incident and the four were arrested when they came down voluntarily after around three hours. Iran's ambassador to Britain, Hamid Baeidnejad, tweeted that the assailants were "advocates of the Shirazi cult" and had replaced Iran's national flag with that of their group. He said all staff at the embassy were safe.

Shi'ite cleric Grand Ayatollah Sadeh Hossein Shirazi, whose son was recently arrested for insulting Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has been a fierce critic of Iran's clerical leadership.

Iranian state television quoted a Foreign Ministry spokesman as saying that Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi had protested about the incident to the British ambassador in Tehran. (Tolo News)