

(1) Commissioners ...

Attorney General Farid Hamidi, a Supreme Court member and head of the Independent Commission for Overseeing the Implementation of Constitution (ICOIC).

The Presidential Palace said a final list of the new commissioners on the IEC and the IECC would be announced soon.

The Selection Committee had introduced shortlisted candidates for the positions to the president. (Pajhwok)

(2) Text of 5-...

Wednesday.

Bringing facilities to custom services, simplifying visa conditions and facilitating transportation of goods and passengers are main specifications of the agreement, it said.

The statement added delegations of all the five countries put their stamp of approval on the final version of the agreement and agreed that senior officials from the countries would sign it in near future.

All the five sides also agreed to create a joint consultative group to oversee the implementation of the agreement and provide conditions for the transit and transportation between the five countries.

The corridor connects Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey via road and rail, providing an appropriate transit trade route across Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Balkans, and Central Europe. It will also connect South Asia to European countries.

When built, the railroad will remove trade barriers, harmonise customs systems and boost trade between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. It will help cut transaction costs and expand market access. (Pajhwok)

(3) Relations ...

Abdali said: "Our relations in terms of student, teacher and cultural exchanges have increased over the years..."

His war-devastated country, having received support from India, was looking toward to enhanced cooperation between the two nations, the ambassador said, according to IANS news agency.

India's Minister of State for External Affairs VK Singh said: "Rebuilding of relations with other countries is largely dependent on the rise and exchange of education. I appreciate the rise of Afghan female students..."

Called Special Scholarship Scheme for Afghan Nationals (SSAN), the educational programme was initiated in 2005. The scheme is being renewed for another five years to 2021-22, with a special focus on encouraging female students. (Pajhwok)

(4) Islamabad ...

played an important role in maintaining peace in Afghanistan, which has been acknowledged by the international community."

More than 30 years of war in Afghanistan had produced grave consequences for Pakistan's security, stability and economic development, she was quoted as saying by the state-run news agency Associated Press of Pakistan.

Lodhi said the success of the reconciliation process depended on a responsible role by the Afghan people. Not only that, she assured that Pakistan wanted voluntary return of Afghan refugees to their homeland.

In her address, Pakistan Ambassador Maleeha Lodhi said the situation on the ground was a troubling picture of increasing insecurity, escalating violence, growing civilian casualties and rising threats to Afghanistan's political and economic instability.

"The presence of large numbers of terrorists, foreign terrorist fighters and militant groups in the vast ungoverned areas of Afghanistan presents an imposing challenge to the long-term stability of Afghanistan," she said.

"They pose a threat not only to Afghanistan but also to Pakistan and indeed the entire region. Afghanistan could once again become a source of global terrorism, with grave implications for the region and the world," Lodhi noted.

A dialogue between the Afghan government and the Taliban remained the only way to end Afghanistan's long night of suffering, she observed.

Progress would be assured only when the Afghan parties themselves conclude that there is no military solution to the Afghan war and work persistently through a meaningful dialogue process to achieve reconciliation and peace at home, she added.

The agreement with HIA confirmed that negotiations could succeed, she said, adding that Pakistan was ready to assist in reviving the dialogue with the Afghan Taliban, which it helped to facilitate in July 2015 at President Ashraf Ghani's request.

"Unfortunately this process subsequently stalled for reasons that are well known. However, this setback, though disappointing, should not deter us from renewing our efforts at reconcilia-

tion," Lodhi concluded. (Pajhwok)

(5) US, German...

Afghanistan in fighting terrorism.

"We also continue to stand united with Germany and our NATO allies in our ongoing efforts to build peace and stability in Afghanistan," said Obama. Meanwhile, Merkel also called for a political solution to be found to the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan.

Obama said that the international community has a single stance on the establishment of peace and security and fighting terrorism in Afghanistan.

"We have worked very closely together, for example, in Afghanistan, we are continuing to do so," Merkel said.

"I'm very pleased this military engagement together with a political road map that we developed, we were able to continue. We want to bring about a political solution there," added Merkel.

The development comes two days after the German government Wednesday approved the continuation of Germany's deployment of up to 980 soldiers to Afghanistan through the end of 2017, a government spokesman said.

"With up to 980 soldiers, the German army will in future advise, support and train Afghan security services," said the government in a statement.

Germany also leads the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission in northern Balkh province. (Tolonews)

(6) Stalled Luxury...

its allies were resolute in the commitments they made to Afghanistan in fighting terrorism.

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(7) No Meddling ...

committee to report their activities to the meeting participants.

Javed Rashid, head of the selection committee, said: "We started from scratch and received more than 400 applications, but we extended the deadline by a week to let more candidates apply."

He added a total of 720 candidates applied for both electoral commissions. The committee's initial scrutiny found that more than 300 applicants were ineligible on grounds of age and relevant education.

In finalising the list of candidates, the selection committee considered at least 10 factors, including education, experience and skills, Rashid informed the participants.

After several rounds of interviews, a final list containing 21 aspirants for the Independent Election Commission and 15 others for the Electoral Complaints Commission was presented to the president on Wednesday.

On the occasion, Mohammad Omar Daudzai, Wahidullah Sabawon, Anwarul Haq Ahadi, Farooq Wardak, Abdul Hakim Mujahid, Qazi Mohammad Amin Waqad, Mohammad Mohaqiq, Dr. Abbas Basir, Engin. Karim Amin, Abdul Karim Khurram, Amarullah Saleh, Atta Mohammad Noor, Mullah Syed Mohammed Akhund and Zazar Ahmad Moqbil presented their recommendations and views.

President Ghani welcomed comments and feedback from the participants, saying his administration in no way interfered in the affairs of other state institutions. Under the new electoral law, the first violation is considered a crime, something that will help prevent fraud. Transparent elections needed political consensus and cooperation from all stakeholders, remarked the president, who said all the candidates were interviewed based on the most important criterion of integrity for members of the commissions.

Ghani underlined the need careful consultations were needed on the subject of elections – an important national issue. He asked the political and jihadi leaders to present their views in writing to the Presidential Palace.

Addressing the participants, Vice President Sarwar Danish said: "All questions that you raised will be evaluated at the

next meeting." He added issues related to elections required all political forces to partners their suggestions.

At the end of the meeting, Chief Executive Dr. Abdullah said no one was meddling in the work of the selection committee. He urged all political figures to offer coherent views. Given cooperation from relevant quarters, fair elections could be held, he believed.

He stressed they had no choice but to hold elections and political will was there. Abdullah said suggestions from the participants would be evaluated at a meeting on Sunday. (Pajhwok)

(8) Political Rifts...

advise all the political figures to set their decisions and performances in a way that do not harm people and political parties. Arrogance and monopolization will destroy the country," he said in a message read out by Bashir Ahmad Tayyanj, spokesman for the National Movement Party.

Danish meanwhile insisted that government has a plan to assess the participation of all the tribes in the leadership of government institutions and will create the opportunity that all the ethnic groups living in the country will work in government departments and influence decisions that will be made by the NUG.

"We, the NUG leaders, political men and Afghan people must understand that unity and convergence without social justice and social balance is nonsense," Danish said.

Mohammad Hussain Sadiqi Nili was born in Nili district of Daikundi province in 1937. He was one of the founders of Jihad in the central parts of Afghanistan and was killed by enemies in 1990 in the house of one of his relatives in the province. (Tolonews)

(9) Paktika ...

than what is presented by government officials.

According to the activists the girls that received graduation certificates in fact did not attend school.

"We could not find even a single school in all Paktika where a girl was studying in secondary school," said civil society activist Sayed Anwar Shah Sadat.

In addition to this, some school girls in the province have said that the majority of girls in Paktika leave school after class 7 under heavy pressure from their parents.

"I am studying in class one and I am happy," said a student in Paktika.

"I want to become a doctor and serve the people of Paktika," said another student.

Some religious scholars have meanwhile said that learning is an Islamic obligation for both males and females and no one has the right to deprive girls of an education.

They also blasted government for not taking action against some unfavorable cultures in the country which are preventing girls from being educated.

"Seeking knowledge is obligatory for males and females, but there has not been any focus on the plight of women's education in this province," said religious scholar Maulavi Momin.

Statistics show that there are about 347 schools operating in Paktika with 333 schools without proper buildings. Currently 156,000 students are enrolled at schools in Paktika, including 30,000 girls. (Tolonews)

(10) HIA Deal ...

address to the General Assembly.

The recently signed peace agreement with the HIA leadership marked the government's strong commitment to peace and the fact that they were willing to take hard decisions. "The implementation process has already begun with cessation of active hostilities between our security forces and those loyal to the group.

"We hope this agreement can serve as a model for reconcilable Taliban who are willing to give up violence and embrace peace," Saikal said, believing the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, comprised of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the US, could still be a useful platform to facilitate dialogue.

"Yet, achieving any degree of progress requires clear and decisive action to honour commitments within the framework of the QCG Road Map," the ambassador stressed. The group has held several rounds of inconclusive talks.

The General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution on Afghanistan, pledging continued support, in particular as the government rebuilt a stable, secure and economically self-sufficient state free from terrorism and narcotics. It voiced alarm over a recent spike in civilian casualties and the influence of extremists. (Pajhwok)

(11) Afghan Taliban...

controlled areas don't allow the farmers to grow poppies, but in some areas like the Ghorak district where the government only has a loose grip, the farmers can cultivate poppies and run the easy, profitable business," Mohammad said recently.

"Planting opium poppies and converting the plant's nectar to heroin is a prof-

itable business for the villagers here in Ghorak where government forces barely exist," the farmer said, adding that the farmers have gained experience in growing poppies and that is why they can earn three to four times more over the past few years than in the last decade.

Kandahar and the neighboring Helmand, Zabul and Uruzgan provinces where anti-government militants including the Taliban are active, are areas responsible for producing a major part of all opium poppies harvested in Afghanistan annually.

According to Mohammad, parts of the Ghorak, Miwand and Khakriz districts where security forces' presence is slim are suitable places for the farmers to grow poppies. Meanwhile, officials in Kandahar's provincial capital of Kandahar city have claimed that poppy cultivation has been eradicated in government-controlled areas.

Nevertheless, the officials have admitted that in spite of the government's tireless war on drugs, people in unregulated areas take advantage of the situation to grow poppy fields to fuel the lucrative heroin trade.

The growing of poppies and their by-products have been on a constant rise in Afghanistan since the collapse of the Taliban regime in late 2001, and a survey conducted by the Afghan Ministry for Counter-Narcotics and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, released in October, revealed a 43 percent increase in the amount of drugs being harvested, compared to a year earlier.

The estimated opium production in 2016, according to the survey, was 4,800 tons, compared to 3,300 tons in 2015 and, similarly, the land used to cultivate poppies in the current year had increased 10 percent to 201,000 hectares compared to last year.

The majority of the opium, the raw material used in the manufacturing of heroin, according to officials, has been produced in the troubled provinces where Taliban militants are active.

A Taliban fighter on one poppy field, who spoke on condition of anonymity, confessed his support for growing poppies and producing the drug, saying, "Although growing poppies and producing heroin is forbidden in Islam, poverty has forced us Taliban to support poppy growing."

"It is a source of income for the farmers as well as for the Taliban, as the Taliban collect one kilogram from every 10 kg of opium produced by the farmers as 'Ashar' (an Islamic principle to collect one-tenth from legal crop yields to help the Islamic government and poor families) to support Jihad (holy war) in Afghanistan," the Taliban fighter said. (Xinhua)

(12) Kandahar, Sistan...

(MoU) in 11 articles were signed by the two sides.

According to the MoU, the two sides should activate transit route of Kandahar-Milek-Chabahr and try to remove possible obstacles in this way.

In the field of generation and distribution of electricity in Kandahar province, it is due that the two sides cooperate with each other and primary talks and consultations to start in 2 months.

In order to promote scientific and educational cooperation and training needed man power by Kandahar province, the two sides agreed to use capabilities of Sistan and Baluchestan universities.

The two sides agreed to use technical, engineering capacities and urban services of the two provinces and exchange experiences in this concern and implement development and infrastructure plans through exchanging expertise delegations.

Sistan and Baluchestan province is due to prepare grounds for visit of Kandahar farmers, farming industrialists as well as agricultural officials to get acquainted with Sistan and Baluchestan agricultural capacities and experiences.

The two sides also agreed to prepare ground for scientific, educational cooperation and exchanging students and professors between Sistan-Baluchestan University and Kandahar National University of Agriculture.

Governor General Ali Ousat Hashemi on the head of delegation is visiting Kabul and Kandahar since Monday. (IRNA)

(13) Questions Raise...

failure to spend their development budgets.

However, some critics have said that in 2014 the majority of ministers failed to spend their development budgets, while this had improved in 2015.

Concerns have also been raised over the transparency of the impeachment process.

"The House of Representatives has 249 members, this means there are 249 ideas, if personal relations were all right, then they (ministers) would get votes, if relations weren't good, then they would not get the vote," said Abdul Rauf Enaami, secretary of house of representatives.

Some critics have said that the MPs voted before fully hearing each minister's report back on their budget spend.

"They (MPs) are doing deals, first they say that that thing is black, they an hour later they say that no it is not black; there are deals, financial, political and ethnic issues, otherwise how is it possible that one person a hour ago was bad, but become a good person an hour later," said MP Ramazan Bashardost.

Following the dismissal of ministers by parliament, the Afghan government strongly reacted to the move and referred the matter to the supreme court in order for it to review the constitution regarding the dismissal of ministers.

The government then told the sacked ministers to continue their jobs until the supreme court announces its verdict.

The ministers who failed to secure a vote of confidence are the minister of communications and information technology, Abdul Raza Wahidi; minister of higher education Farida Momand; the education minister Asadullah Hanif Balkhi; the minister of transport and civil aviation Mohammadullah Batash; the minister of public works Mahmood Baligh; the minister of labor, social affairs, martyrs and disabled Nasreen Oryakhil and Salahuddin Rabbani, the minister of foreign affairs. (Tolonews)

(14) Germany to ...

allows for refugees to be sent home, particularly if they come from large urban centers that have now been deemed safe. "There is no confirmation that the situation has worsened," the interior ministry was quoted saying in the newspaper. "The threat to Afghan civilians in the country as a whole has not changed in comparison to last year."

The decision drew criticism from far-left party Die Linke, which called the decision irresponsible. "The government's attempt to gloss over the security situation in Afghanistan is despicable," said one of its members, Ulla Jelpke.

According to EU data, some 213,000 Afghans sought asylum in Europe in 2015, more than from any other country except Syria, and officials estimate that more than 60,000 would not qualify for international protection. (Agencies)

(15) Astana Concerned ...

Force, which left Afghanistan, have not yet been solved, either," Safronkov told the UN General Assembly session on Afghanistan.

According to Omirtay, the terrorists are struggling to infiltrate in central Asian nations from Afghanistan.

"Unfortunately Afghanistan still remains a place for terrorism, extremism and drugs," said Omirtay.

He said some youths influenced by the propaganda of terrorist groups such as Daesh have flocked to Afghanistan to fight side by side with the militant group.

"We evacuated many individuals with the help of security...several individuals initially came from Kazakhstan and joined the terrorist groups, but later they regretted it and said that (Daesh Islam is not the true Islam) and asked us to send them back to their country," said Omirtay.

Safronkov also highlighted the readiness to assist Afghanistan with the support of the "proven structures." He noted the potential of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the possibility of strengthening counterterrorism and anti-drug cooperation in Afghanistan with the help of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Analysts say that Russia and China and other central Asian countries can play a constructive role in fighting terrorism in Afghanistan, adding if these countries take robust action in this sphere, Afghanistan can be removed out of the ongoing crisis.

"Central Asian countries, China and Russia in the structure of Shanghai Cooperation Organization can help Afghanistan to eliminate groups such as Daesh and Taliban," said political analyst Ainuddin Bekzada. (Tolonews)

(16) Taliban Kill 8 ...

Afghan security forces in recent months by planting roadside bombs and staging suicide attacks or ambushes of security forces or civilian convoys across the country. (AP)

(17) Legal, Hadith...

plained seminaries had suffered a lot of damage in recent years. Their administrators were tortured on one pretext or another, he alleged. (Pajhwok)

Sheikh Abdul Manan, hailing from Orgun district, said Islam set store by peace, affection and brotherhood. "The current situation in our country has also harmed madaris, with many students killed under different pretexts..."

Misbahul Uloom founder Nazar Mohammad told Pajhwok Afghan News 22 Islamic legal experts, 25 Hadith specialists and four memorizers of the Holy Quran were awarded degrees at the ceremony. (Pajhwok)

(18) Analysts See...

interest in Afghan affairs and held secret meetings with Taliban leaders, he pointed out.

He Afghan-Russian ties had been on the upswing after 2014 when most of foreign troops left Afghanistan and Kremlin tried to jack up its influence in the

region. About the role of Russia in the Afghan reconciliation process, Paikan said Moscow's military assistance to Kabul pointed to its interest.

He viewed growing insecurity in northern Afghanistan indicated growing rivalries between Washington and Moscow and a huge responsibility was on the leaders of the national unity

Abdul Shakoor Salangi, another political analyst, agreed the US and Russia had been engaged on major issues such as the Middle East, Eastern Europe. However, their competing influences persisted on other issues.

He opined Washington would never allow Moscow, Beijing and other regional rivals to take its place in Afghanistan and play a proactive role in areas of peace, reconciliation and political stability.

Concern over the increasing conflict between Washington and Moscow comes after the Afghan government asked Russia for military assistance.

In a significant gesture, Moscow expressed its willingness to help Afghanistan security force.

Moscow provided military gear and weapons to Afghanistan as secret meetings happened between Russian officials and Taliban leaders. Russian leaders also met some former jihadi figures and members of Khalq and Parcham parties as well.

Bashir Bezhani, another analyst, thinks the current situation has brought other countries to Afghanistan. A new chapter of regional rivalries had opened but old methods would not be adopted by regional powers to attain their goals, he commented. (Pajhwok)

(19) A Dozen Insurgents...

large quantity of arms and ammunition. But a source in the main provincial hospital claimed receiving the bodies of seven policemen from the site. Six wounded policemen are under medical care at the hospital, he said. (Pajhwok)

(20) Battle for ...

fiercest of the past three days. "The bombs struck areas on Aleppo's outskirts as well as in the city itself. The toll keeps mounting by the hour," he said. (AP)

(21) 2016 Sees...

passage separating Turkey and Greece, while 62 people lost their lives on Western Mediterranean routes.

A total of 343,589 migrant sea arrivals have been registered on European shores since the start of the year, down from close to 729,000 between January and October last year. (Xinhua)

(22) Canada Extradites...

victims and survivors," he said. NPPA says that in 2007, gacaca courts had tried Seyoboka case and handed him a 19-year jail sentence for genocide crimes.

Gacaca courts are homegrown courts that has tried over 2 million cases related to crimes committed during the 1994 genocide. (Xinhua)

(23) Malaysian PM...

the police. The Malaysian prime minister said the group was actually a "puppet" of the opposition, as almost all the rallies it had held and wanted to hold were led by leaders of opposition parties. (Xinhua)

(24) Iranian Official ...

brethren."

The Iraqi official, for his part, lauded Iran's full support for his country.

He described terrorism as the biggest challenge gripping his country and expressed hope that stability would be restored to Iraq in the near future. (Presstv)

(25) Palestinians Count

McCully, and called on New Zealand, a member of the UN Security Council, to nack the choice of the two-state.

On Thursday, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas met with McCully and stressed to New Zealand's top diplomat that the Palestinian leadership is exerting all efforts to keep the choice of the two-state solution. (Xinhua)

(26) Iraqi Forces...

with AK-47s to take a few pot shots. An hour later, a U.S.-led coalition airstrike pounded an Islamic State mortar position before soldiers launched a dozen mortars of their own in a bid to eliminate a gunman who had been spotted and only seemed to get closer.

A commercial drone circling overhead drew gunfire from troops unsure if it belonged to Islamic State or the Iraqi military. (Reuters)

(27) Ukraine's Shadow...

poor external economic environment as well as trade and transit restrictions imposed by Russia, which used to be Ukraine's leading trading partner for decades. The financial and insurance sectors along with the mining industry remain the areas with the highest share of the shadow economy, the ministry said. (Xinhua)