

(1) President Underlines...

unity. The religious leader should focus to forge unity of the nation during their sermons.

The president also appreciated all lawmakers who gave vote of confidence to 14 parliamentarians and elected them as ministers.

The president also mentioned that he had given 100 days to the ministers to show efficiencies and bring visible change during the deadline. (Pajhwok)

(2) Security Forces...

in Khak Afghan district - where the abductees were allegedly transferred soon after being kidnapped by unknown armed men on Kabul-Kandahar highway.

"So far, the operation is going on very well and there has been no complaining regarding the operation," head of provincial council Ataulhah Jan Haqparast said. "If it continues the same way, we hope there will be achievements."

The abduction incidents have increased since February 24 - the first incident when 31 bus passengers were kidnapped by armed masked men.

Only this month, more than 60 passengers and employees of government and non-government agencies were abducted in Baghlan, Herat, Logar, Sar-e-Pul and Nimruz provinces.

The families of 31 hostages, however, look hopeless and disappointed as the fate of their loved ones is still unknown after two months.

These families have set up protest camps for more than 20 days in Zarnigar Park of Kabul. The protestors have repeatedly accused the government of doing nothing to secure release of their family members.

"The government has forces, helicopters and other resources. We need our passengers released," said Shahnaz, a mother whose young son is among 31 hostages.

"We are ready to die. We are ready to be burnt alive, so that we will be able to get rid of this situation," another protestor Abdul Hussain said.

President Ashraf Ghani, however, said during his visit of Iran that so far, \$6 million have been spent on tracking the hostages.

He stated that efforts were underway to secure the release of hostages.

But earlier, when the families of 31 hostages met with Ghani at the Presidential Palace, Ghani reportedly told the visitors that he could not guarantee the release of their loved ones - something that sparked huge criticisms by the families of hostages and the civil society activists. (Tolonews)

(3) China Urges ...

briefing.

"We support Afghanistan to push forward a reconciliation process that is dominated and owned by the Afghan people, and urge various parties of the country to seek a political settlement through negotiations," Hong said.

China is ready to play a constructive role in this regard, he added.

The Afghan Taliban announced on Wednesday their annual spring offensive will start on Friday.

This will be the first fighting season in which the Afghan national security force battle the insurgents alone, after U.S. and NATO-led troops ended their mission in Afghanistan late in December 2014. (Xinhua)

(4) NUG Cabinet...

get almost all of its top ministerial appointments settled. Although the critical Minister of Defense position remains to be filled, Thursday's meeting was the closest thing so far to the first full cabinet meeting of Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah's government.

The national unity government and its ministers will no face a steep, uphill climb in attempting to make up ground that was lost over the past half-year, which saw very little progress on major domestic policy fronts such as the national economy, security and social affairs. In fact, some policy areas, such as national security, have suffered immensely in recent months, in no small part thanks to the lack of accountability and proactivity among acting officials who have had no choice but to remain in leadership positions while the national unity government gets its act together.

Now, senior officials will have to deal with all the difficulties inherit in their respective areas of responsibility, while also facing the added pressure of having to navigate the tenuous political alliances formed by the national unity agreement.

Nevertheless, independent analysts have set out to encourage the new ministerial leadership amid all their challenges, urging immediate action on a number of policy fronts, but, most of all, focus on rebuilding public

trust. "The cabinet ministers should undertake a number of programs in their first 100 days in order to heal people's pessimism and mistrust," political analyst Mir Ahmad Joyenda said. "Therefore, the ministers should conduct good works including good governance, war on corruption and focus on qualifications."

Yet the continued lack of new leadership in the Ministry of Defense (MoD) is still a major point of concern. Given the deteriorating security conditions around the country over the past few months, with the spread of the Daesh group and two high-profile attacks in Nangarhar and Badakhshan provinces, commentators have said finding a new defense minister should be the national unity government's top priority.

"The cabinet is complete because the Minister of Defense, who is a key minister in the cabinet, hasn't been appointed," former defense minister Mohammad Amin Farhang said.

National security experts have also said that the new cabinet must ensure politics do not corrupt security policy. "No warlord, lawbreaker and groups should be allowed the chance to intervene in the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior and National Directorate of Security," military analyst Atiqullah Baryalai said. "If they interfere, then the army doesn't remain a good army and likewise police and NDS." (Tolonews)

(5) Ghani to Visit ...

and New Delhi, significantly the sales of military equipment - which has apparently faded to silence as Ghani has focused more on relations with India's rivals, Pakistan and China - would also be revived during Ghani's first official visit since taking the power last September.

This comes after India earlier this month delivered three light helicopters to Afghanistan.

However, the Indian officials and analysts are apparently concerned about recent visit of Chinese President to Pakistan who announced investment of \$46 billion in Pakistan. They fear India could lose influence in South Asia as China, what they believe, is seeking access to Arabian Sea and Afghanistan's resources.

"China's footprint to our west will continue to grow bigger as it seeks access to the waters of the Arabian Sea through Pakistan, the energy resources of Iran and the mineral resources of Afghanistan," Reuters quoted Vikram Sood, former head of India's external spy agency and an influential South Asia strategist as saying.

But the Afghan analysts believe Ghani's visit can remove India's concerns recently raised over close ties between Kabul and Islamabad. "I think Afghanistan's foreign policy needs a strong review. In respect to our current situation, our relations with regional countries should be balanced," MP Sayed Abdul Qayyum Sajjadi said.

India was somehow concerned when Ghani suspended purchase of arms from that country, military expert Zulmai Wardak said, adding that Ghani's visit would help remove these concerns. (Tolonews)

(6) EU Extends...

Under the new agreement, he said, the EU would continue the civilian mission until the end of 2016.

For her part, Stjernvall said the EU had been assisting Afghan police for the last nine years in order to become professional in their behavior with people.

"The basic aim of our assistance is that police deal with civilians in a professional manner," she said, adding that the EU had been trying to develop close liaison between Afghan police and the judiciary.

About new operations against insurgents and the Taliban's announcement of starting their spring offensive from Friday, the interior minister said Afghan forces' capabilities, equipment and military tactics far exceeded when compared to those of the insurgents.

The Taliban on Wednesday announced launching their annual spring offensive codenamed "Azm" (determination) from Friday (tomorrow).

Ulumi said everyone killing Afghan security forces and civilians would not be spared. "I have told the police that individuals who do not recognise the country's laws and threaten the country's stability, all resources be used against them."

To a question, the interior minister said there were no spies in ranks of Afghan security forces and even if a minor example of espionage was reported, it would follow a legal action. (Pajhwok)

(7) India Delivers ...

Cheetah Helicopters with allied

equipment and spares to Afghanistan based on the agreement with the Ministry of External Affairs.

The helicopters, he said were dispatched to Afghanistan on April 9, 2015, he informed. These helicopters have been test flown and accepted by Afghanistan pilots, he said.

The Cheetah Helicopter (identical to LAMA SA 315B Helicopter of Eurocopter, France) is a high performance helicopter designed for operation over a very wide range of weight, centre of gravity and altitude conditions.

The five seater Cheetah helicopter is versatile, multi role, multipurpose, highly maneuverable and rugged in construction. It holds the world record in high altitude flying among all categories of Helicopters. (Pajhwok)

(8) 'Electoral Reforms...

Abdullah Abdullah had raised concerns.

He stressed the unity government leaders should go beyond rhetoric by taking practical steps for reforms, otherwise, he warned the available opportunities would be lost and the nascent democracy retrograded.

Rashid urged the newly-created Electoral Reforms Commission to formally launch its activities at the earliest and come up with suggestions and solutions.

"The draft amendments to the law on structure, responsibilities, and powers of the poll panels remain undecided in the lower house of parliament. We want the lawmakers to finalise their discussions on the proposed changes."

Rashid said it was necessary to firm up a specific date for holding the next parliamentary elections. However, the government has said the elections might be postponed for a year, citing a shortage of budget.

The FEFA also released a 288-page report on last fall's presidential elections. The report discusses challenges in the elections and proposes a set of suggestions for electoral reforms.

Naem Asghari, FEFA programme manager, said both the poll panels had violated laws at least on 36 occasions during the previous elections. "In order to resolve such issues, changes to the electoral law and the constitution are necessary."

Hekmat Safi, FEFA's parliamentary affairs oversight head, said fraud was a major issue that tainted the previous elections and affected public trust in the democratic exercise.

"Now we are concerned that if those involved in fraud last year are not introduced to judicial organs, the parliamentary elections would also witness the same fate and fraud would become a custom," he added.

FEFA also underlined the importance of electronic ID cards, saying their distribution would drastically decrease electoral fraud. (Pajhwok)

(9) Ghani and ...

enemies of the country.

"This war is being imposed on us. We all want peace. Eternal peace," he said adding that in speaking with the families of the victims all they asked for was peace and security.

He said: "Our message to everyone is that our spirit is high and our resolve is solid. We won't succumb to violence."

In a message directed at insurgents he said: "If you have got the courage, face our soldiers, not our children."

Earlier this week, Daesh claimed responsibility for the deadly suicide attack in Jalalabad that killed at least 34 people and injured 125.

This was the first major attack claimed by the extremist group in the country.

The Jalalabad explosion took place when a suicide bomber detonated his suicide vest in a line of people queuing for salaries near the New Kabul Bank branch in Jalalabad city, eastern Nangarhar, at 08:00 am on Saturday. (Tolonews)

(10) Pak, Afghan ...

Council, and the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan, aims to strengthen the competitiveness of Afghan and Pakistani business women. Olson reiterated that the US Trade and Investment Framework Agreement Memorandum of Understanding on Women's Economic Empowerment, signed with the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan, will enable both countries to increase cross-border trade and investment and ensure more women's participation in the economy.

The Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Chambers of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI) led a series of discussions with participants covering a wide range of topics including regulatory issues in Afghanistan-Pakistan cross-border trade, business financing, business-to-business networking, and cyber training. Leading business women from Af-

ghanistan and Pakistan came together to discuss legal and regulatory issues important to women-led small and medium enterprises active in international commerce and had the opportunity to network and form cross-border business-to-business relationships. (Pajhwok)

(11) US Operations ...

two hostages were American national Dr. Warren Weinstein, and an Italian, Giovanni Lo Porto. "Warren and Giovanni were aid workers in Pakistan, devoted to improving the lives of the Pakistani people," he said.

After Warren was abducted by Al Qaeda in 2011, I directed my national security team to do everything possible to find him and to bring him home safely to his family. "I spoke with Warren's wife Elaine and Prime Minister Renzi of Italy. As a husband and as a father, I cannot begin to imagine the anguish that the Weinstein and Lo Porto families are enduring today," he said.

"I realize that there are no words that can ever equal their loss. I know that there is nothing that I can ever say or do to ease their heartache," said the US President, taking full responsibility for all American counterterrorism operations, including the one that inadvertently took the lives of Warren and Giovanni.

Obama said initial assessment indicates that this operational was fully consistent with the guidelines under which US conduct counterterrorism efforts in the region, which has been the focus for years, because it is the home of Al Qaida's leadership, and based on the intelligence that we had obtained at the time, including hundreds of hours of surveillance.

"We believed that this was an Al Qaida compound, that no civilians were present and that capturing these terrorists was not possible. And we do believe that the operation did take out dangerous members of Al Qaida," he said.

"What we did not know, tragically, is that Al Qaida was hiding the presence of Warren and Giovanni in this same compound," he added.

In an earlier statement, the White House Press Secretary, Josh Earnest, said Ahmed Farouq, an American who was an al-Qa'ida leader, was killed in the same operation that resulted in the deaths of Dr. Weinstein and Mr. Lo Porto.

"We have also concluded that Adam Gadahn, an American who became a prominent member of al-Qa'ida, was killed in January, likely in a separate US counterterrorism operation," he said. (Pajhwok)

(12) Ulumi Denies ...

investigation into the matter.

"So far what has become clear to us is that the previous government had ordered distribution of assistance to refugees in Paktika last year. The then governor and other provincial officials were present during the distribution process."

Ulumi said the aid distribution happened at a time when there was no group in Afghanistan by the name of Daesh.

He also said the media had quoted Paktika governor out of context as he meant to say families linked to some groups might have benefitted from the aid.

"The bottom line is the previous government had distributed aid in Paktika to displaced families and in this regard there was no accusation against the NSC."

Ulumi said the Paktika governor was an experienced and wise man, who had introduced some development programmes, which had been endorsed by the president.

Interior security commissions of both houses of parliament had also decided to summon National Security advisor Hanif Atmar and Paktika governor Abdul Karim Matin to explain the matter. (Pajhwok)

(13) Pentagon Can't ...

directly to American military officers there in a bid to bypass bureaucracy and rush the aid to urgently needed roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, water-treatment plants and other essential infrastructure.

A yearlong investigation by John F. Sopko, the US special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, or SIGAR, found that the Pentagon could not - or would not - provide basic information about what happened to six in 10 dollars of \$2.26 billion it spent over the course of a decade on the Commander's Emergency Response Program, which goes by its acronym CERP in military circles.

"In reviewing this data, SIGAR found that the Department of Defense could only provide financial information relating to the disbursement of funds for CERP projects totaling \$890 million (40 percent) of the approximately \$2.2 billion in obligated funds at that

time," Sopko's report said.

When Sopko's staff divided the Pentagon expenditures into 20 categories set under the emergency program, from transportation and education to healthcare, agriculture, water and sanitation, by far the largest category was in a 21st category that the inspector general termed "Unknown."

That category applied to 5,163 projects, compared with 4,494 projects in all of the 20 defined areas put together.

The Pentagon did not respond directly to Sopko's main findings in comment he sought while conducting the probe, and which he released along with his report on the investigation. In one somewhat cryptic comment, the US Central Command, which oversees military operations in Afghanistan and 19 other countries in the Middle East and Central Asia, suggested that some of the CERP money was redirected from reconstruction aid to more direct war needs.

"Although the (SIGAR) report is technically accurate, it did not discuss the Counter Insurgency strategies in relationship to CERP," the Central Command stated in a Feb. 25, 2015, email to Sopko's office. "In addition (to) the 20 uses of CERP funds, it was also used as a tool for Counter Insurgency."

However, with the bulk of the Afghanistan war's \$800 billion price tag for the United States having gone to battlefield needs, it is not clear why money set aside for urgent reconstruction needs would need to pay for counterinsurgency, which has been a core part of the US military campaign there since the October 2001 invasion following the Sept. 11 terror attacks.

Brief descriptions of the 20 categories defined by Pentagon regulation under the emergency-response program, also included in Sopko's report, do not mention counterinsurgency.

The closest categories to anything battle-related are "condolence payments" to Afghan civilians, or their families, who die or are injured because of the war and "hero payments" to the surviving spouses or next of kin of Afghan soldiers or police killed in the conflict.

The SIGAR report suggests how intertwined US military and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan became, and how difficult it is to separate the two.

While Sopko found that the CERP money was disbursed for projects throughout virtually all of Afghanistan's 35 provinces, almost half of it went to the two - Kandahar and Helmand - that have seen the most Taliban activity and the war's bloodiest battles.

A total of 1,507 American service members have perished in Kandahar and Helmand provinces, almost two-thirds of all 2,357 US fatalities in the war.

Kandahar, dominated by ethnic Pashtuns on the Pakistan border in southern Afghanistan, has been a Taliban hub since the insurgents took it over in 1994 during the civil war that followed Soviet occupation of the Central Asia country.

About \$289 million, almost one-third of the CERP money that the Pentagon could account for, was spent in Kandahar, according to the new SIGAR report.

The Pentagon may have good reason to redirect money away from reconstruction projects: SIGAR, which Congress established in 2008 to track US nonmilitary aid to Afghanistan, has issued dozens of reports documenting billions of dollars lost to waste or corruption.

Sopko, however, has broadened his focus to examine what happened to some US funds for Afghan soldiers and police. (Agencies)

(14) IOM Voices...

Islam Qala Port is the main border-crossing between Iran and Afghanistan, and hundreds of families are now forced through it back into Afghanistan by Iranian police on a daily basis. The deportations are often conducted in a seemingly haphazard and callous fashion, with many Afghan immigrants claiming Iranian police have split up families, deporting some parents without their children and some children without their parents. (Tolonews)

(15) No Official...

months to form and sparked doubts about the coalition government's competency.

CORRECTION: In an earlier version of this story TOLONews stated that the presidential spokesman Ajmal Obaid Abidi had said no final decision has been taken on the MoD candidate and that the president and the CEO are still discussing the matter. This was a misquote and was not said by the spokesman.

TOLONews apologizes for any inconvenience incurred through this. (Tolonews)

(16) 200 Nurses, ...

from the Public Health Department, the governor's house and the provincial council supervised the exam in order to ensure it was transparent. (Pajhwok)

(17) Unfilled Key ...

ministers-designate last week, but the defence minister portfolio remains vacant.

Other institutions being headed by acting officials are Supreme Court, Attorney General's Office (AGO), Da Afghanistan Bank, Kabul Municipality, and governors of some provinces.

Ahmad Zaki, head of CMSJ, told journalists in Kabul people suffered for months following political wrangling until the formation of unity government. "The latest wave of insecurity and widespread poverty have paralyzed the people virtually." (Pajhwok)

(18) India's Jindal ...

Deputy Directors in various Afghan government ministries, in the next few weeks on its Sonipat campus in Haryana state, about 50 kilometres from capital New Delhi.

These civil servants will be trained at Jindal University in topics like Leadership, Human Resource Management, Law & Justice, Organizational Change, Good Governance and Post-Conflict Institution Building. (Pajhwok)

(19) Italy Targets ...

arrested in Italy and others were believed to have left the country, he said, adding that the operation was still in progress. (VOA)

(20) 12 Militants ...

elements.

In addition, police defused and neutralized several mines planted by militants in Parwan. The Ministry of Interior accused Taliban for planting mines and roadside bombs, which often caused civilians' casualties.

However, Taliban have not yet commented on the offensives. (Pajhwok)

(21) 5 Dead in ...

were in stable condition.

Abdul Wali, a local resident, said the fight erupted due to a land dispute and both parties belonged to same village in the area. (Pajhwok)

(22) Land Mafia...

"Forests have been completely demolished in Helmand. We have plans to develop forests again once the security situation gets better", Qalam added. (Pajhwok)

(23) 14 Illegal ...

stated that he was signaling immediately after he noticed the group but he didn't manage to stop the train on time to avoid the accident. (Xinhua)

(24) Civilians Suffer ...

Both the commanders are armed with small and heavy weapons which they were using to target each other position, another resident of the district said.. (Pajhwok)

(25) 15 Insurgents...

commented on the clash as of yet.

It merits mention that Taliban's spring offensive codenamed Azm (Determination) would start from today's (Friday) afternoon. (Pajhwok)

(26) New Plastic ...

the government can support us," the owner of the new factor Najeullah Seddigi told TOLONews on Thursday. "The chairs that we produce are of a very good quality, but at the moment, the market is in the hands of neighboring countries and the government has shown a lack of support for the industry." (Tolonews)

(27) Militants Launch ...

He said police had the capability to retaliate every attack of the enemy and to protect civilians from attacks. (Pajhwok)

(28) Documents Show...

families through a commission. However, Paktika governor Abdul Karim Matin recently alleged that the National Security Council (NSC) had distributed the money to families of fighters aligned with the so-called Islamic State or Daesh group. His allegation prompted the NSC to form a committee, headed by the interior minister, to investigate the matter. Interior Minister Noorul Haq Ulumi on Thursday told reporters in Kabul the Paktika governor had been quoted out of context. (Pajhwok)