

### (1) Provincial Councils ...

Council of the 34 provinces, they accepted our draft plan and based on which, the oversight role of the councils will return within a specific framework," IDLG spokesman Tawab Ghorzang said. "This draft will soon be finalized and will be sent to the president."

Before anything is finalized, though, some council members have said there are a few small adjustments that need to be made to the IDLG's policy plan. "In general, we agree with this agreement, but there are some minor issues that must be solved," Parwan Provincial Council Chair Ghulam Bahauddin Jeelani said. "We have assigned a joint legal commission, after which the issues that we disagree on will be solved and this draft plan will be finalized," he added.

But many Provincial Council heads are looking for greater expediency. Bamyán Provincial Council Chairman Tayeba Khaware told TOLONews that the new oversight policy should be implemented immediately on the basis of a presidential order because Parliament is still in recess. "Our suggestion is that the oversight role of Provincial Council members be returned soon, and until the return of MPs from their vacation, the agreed upon draft must be implemented with a presidential decree, and the law can be adjusted after the return of representatives." Kabul Provincial Council Chair Abdul Rahman Hashemi voiced a similar sentiment. "Our suggestion is that the president call the MPs back from their winter vacation, that this draft be presented, and that the oversight role of the Provincial Council members must be returned to them as soon as possible," he said. MPs were the ones to originally strip the Provincial Councils of their oversight powers, which prompted the local representative bodies to close their doors in various parts of the country for the past 10 days. (Tolonews)

### (2) MoE, UNFPA ...

family planning services; increase the availability of maternal health services in underserved populations and humanitarian settings; incorporate the rights and needs of youth in national development policies and programmes and increase availability of family life education; strengthen capacity of the health sector and law-enforcement bodies to respond to gender-based violence, with a special focus on child marriage; increase availability on reliable population data; and strengthen the capacity of government counterparts, parliamentarians and academic institutions in data utilization for policy development.

"UNFPA is proud to present this new country programme, tailored to the needs of Afghan people and aligned to Afghanistan's national priorities," said Dr Annette Sachs Robertson, UNFPA Representative for Afghanistan. "UNFPA first began working in Afghanistan in 1976 and since then we have provided support to the country in many ways; support for developing the National Reproductive Health Policy and Strategy for 2012-2016 the first-ever National Youth Policy; bringing maternal health care to the most remote communities through 82 Family Health Houses; attending more than 450 gender-based violence survivors through the establishment of six Family Protection Centers; and promoting the understanding of population issues through socio-demographic and economic surveys in six provinces. We are honoured to renew today our partnership with the Government and continue our work to deliver an Afghanistan where every pregnancy is wanted, every delivery is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled."

The commitment of the UN agency towards the promotion of maternal and reproductive health, gender equality, youth empowerment and access to reliable population data in Afghanistan was also highlighted by Hukum Khan Habibi, Acting Minister of Economy.

"The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is pleased to renew its partnership with UNFPA through the presentation of this fourth country programme," said Mr Habibi during his opening remarks. "The commitment to the objectives highlighted in this plan has been established in a participatory and consultative process under the leadership of the Afghan Government and involving key sectors and civil society organizations. We believe that the implementation of this programme has the potential to positively transform Afghan society and drive economic and social de-

velopment in the years to come." Key partners of the organization to achieve the objectives outlined in the plan will be the Ministry of Public Health, the Central Statistics Organization, the Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs, the National Police Academy, the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Agency, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and Kabul University.

Among the civil society, UNFPA will continue its partnership with relevant institutions such as the Afghanistan Midwifery Association, the Afghan Society of Obstetrician and Gynecologists and other significant implementing partners. (PR)

### (3) Afghan People ...

Support? as being a US secretary of defense and U.S. military operation has stopped in 2014. Do you think that Afghan national security force (ANSF) have ability to defend the country? said that "I think any measurement you want to apply to where Afghanistan is today versus where it was and I think also the progress every year gets better is significant."

Hagel added, sure questions remain, threats remain. This is going to be awhile before his think Afghanistan is going to be where they want to be. But the will of the Afghan people has been really pretty special and enormous in turning their country around so that their people have rights, have freedoms, have possibilities for their children, education. "I think, to start with, the progress made in Afghanistan since 2001, by any measurement, has been tremendous. I mentioned in my statement that we just witnessed, recently, the first peaceful transition of power in Afghanistan's history, there is some many problem but we are going in good direction," added U.S. Defense minister.

Hagel further added that he was in the first group of United States senators to go into Afghanistan in January of 2002, a few months after we had gone in into Afghanistan. And that was my first experience. And since that January 2002 delegation was there. By the way, that delegation was led by now chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator John McCain. And I've been back many, many, many times over the years since then, not just as secretary of defense, but as United States senator.

U.S. Defense minister start from that perspective on what we've seen. More young people girls and boys are in school. More rights for women, more possibilities, more commerce. More institution-building than Afghan has ever seen, to govern themselves that many countries, including many of the NATO countries and others have participated in, added Hagel. "I think you've got to frame this up in the longer term, where all this started? What did it look like 14 years ago? Where are we today?"

Answering a question regarding considerable threats in Afghanistan, Mr. Hagel said that absolutely Afghan security forces, are capable to defend their country, that's a question that still remains to be seen, adding that, "I think the progress they have made, the capabilities they have developed, is impressive, and I think they will be capable of defending that country. And you think, again, of the historical framing of that country over many, many years, and a lot of war. I'm encouraged."

In his final appearance at a NATO meeting as Defense Secretary, Hagel delivered a sobering message to the allies, saying they must be able to address all challenges on all fronts at the same time.

"I am very concerned by the suggestion that this alliance can choose to focus on only one of these areas as our top priority, across the spectrum of military capability," Hagel said.

### (4) UN Urged to...

refugees from roads and streets and putting them behind the bars. He demanded that the Afghan government should take notice of the situation.

Ihsan claimed over 3,000 Afghan refugees had been deported from Pakistan and that their harassment was against international norms and agreement between the government of Pakistan and the International Organization of Migration (IOM).

Earlier, the IOM in Afghanistan said that thousands of Afghan families are fleeing Pakistan to escape harassment after a deadly Taliban attack on Army Public School in Peshawar. In a statement posted on its website, Richard Danzinger, the IOM's mis-

sion chief in Afghanistan, said more than 22,000 undocumented Afghans flocked across the border at Torkham in January, more than twice the figure for the whole of 2014.

In January this year nearly 24,000 undocumented Afghans entered Afghanistan's Nangarhar province through Pakistan's Torkham border crossing. (Pajhwok)

### (5) KP Police ...

them the intensified deportation and detention of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Other members of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf party led by Imran Khan attended the meeting, a statement from the Afghan Embassy said.

The meeting also conferred on relations between the two countries, particularly between Afghanistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the PTI rules.

The statement said Janan Musazai thanked the Pakistani government and people for hosting Afghan refugees for the last more than three decades.

Imran Khan assured Musazai that they would continue assisting and cooperating with their Afghan brethren and said KP police would no more harass Afghan refugees.

The meeting comes after a marked progress in bilateral ties which previously often remained tense between the neighbours.

Musazai also discussed other issues of mutual interest with the (PTI) chief, including terrorism. Khan assured Afghan refugees would not be harassed and be treated in accordance with the country's laws.

He directed the KP government to make sure that Afghan refugees were treated in accordance with the law. He also directed the government to make arrangements for return of Afghan refugees.

According to a press statement issued by the PTI, Khan and Afghan envoy discussed a joint forum on trade, health and education.

The meeting decided a committee also involving officials of the Afghan Consulate in Peshawar would be set up to investigate problems being faced by Afghan refugees. (Pajhwok)

### (6) 89 Militants ...

during which they also discovered and defused 154 pieces of anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines during the operations, the official further said.

He also added that the security personnel have also seized 65 pieces of assault rifles from the militants during the crackdowns.

All the security organs including police, army and national directorate for security are capable enough to overcome security challenges and ensure law and order elsewhere in the country, Sediqi stressed. (FNA)

### (7) Leadership...

in the making."

In the reformation plan drafted and suggested by the commission states that in order to prevent fraud precision will be taken into consideration for the recruitment of employees, a distribution method of election materials, and the choosing of centers. Recently, the second vice president shared with election observing institutions that discussions between the Presidential Palace and IEC is only for information gathering and that at the end of the day the commission delegated to talk in regards of the reforms will decide.

"The second vice president told us that the recent presidential decree does not mean the replacement for the special reform commission, which was discussed in the National Unity Government agreement and that this is only to gather information and hear suggestions," Zekriya Barakzai, Director of Afghanistan Integrity Watch, said.

The creation of a committee in bringing reforms to the electoral commission was among the agreements of the NUG government. The CEO's office had asked the president's office to immediately introduce the commission in charge of bringing reforms as soon as possible and that time should not be wasted in bringing changes to the electoral methods and system. (Tolonews)

### (8) Ghor Ranks ...

and Social Affairs Department and Hajj and Religious Affairs.

Reacting to the survey, Governor Syed Anwar Rahmati said every government employee tried to make money, but his administration had launched efforts to do away with corruption and other such anomalies.

He said bribes and illegal transfer of money from one hand to another had become a trend in government departments. Rahmati lamented most people believed they could

not get their problems resolved in government offices without paying kickbacks.

He said change in leaderships at local departments held key to eliminating corruption, saying officials holding positions for decades had developed relationships that paved the ground for corruption and illegal demands.

"We want the unity government should replace local departmental heads with educated and young, energetic people in order to banish corruption from government offices," Governor Rahmati said.

Meanwhile, senior civil society activist, Khudayar Waqif, said government's failure to try corrupt officials during the past 13 years had resulted in increased corruption in its institutions.

He cited various forms of corruption plaguing public sector departments from bribes to appointing disqualified persons based on relationships, land-grabbing, and misuse of power.

Provincial council member Abdul Rahman Attash said the judiciary and education departments and aid-giving NGOs all were rife with massive corruption.

He said schoolteachers in many areas did not attend classes, but they regularly received salaries. There were no schools in some areas, but teachers existed and were paid stipends, he added.

Attash said the menace of corruption could be eliminated if a proper mechanism was put in place ensuring that laws were implemented and coordination between government departments and civil society organizations was increased. He called for a system of punishment and reward.

The survey corroborates deep concerns Ghor residents have been expressing about corruption in government institutions.

Dwellers of several localities said corruption and mismanagement in judicial institutions had forced them to approach insurgent commanders for resolving their disputes in a swift manner.

Ghulam Mohammad, hailing from Pasaband district, said: "I gave 200,000 afghanis in bribe to court officials and waited for three years to get resolved a dispute over a five-acre of land. But my efforts yielded no result and the land dispute remained unresolved."

A disappointed Mohammad took his case to local Taliban leaders. His issue was addressed within a week and he got his land back in accordance with a decision by ulema.

Officials confirm more than 4,500 illegal armed men associated with nearly 100 different groups are waging a struggle against the government in Ghor. Their activities have undermined people's trust in the government.

President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah have vowed to ensure good governance, end corruption, reform the electoral system and judicial organs and improve women's situation.

Ghani had so far dismissed a number of Farah officials and referred them to judicial organs following corruption allegations. (Pajhwok)

### (9) Residents Want ...

corrupt Baghlan officials are sacked."

The protesters warned they would take weapons and upraise against local officials torturing them if they did not mend their ways.

But Baghlan deputy governor Abdul Qadim Niazai said a delegation had been sent in to the district to report the situation. Another delegation came from the capital Kabul to the area to evaluate the local governance, he added.

Niazai promised the accused officials would be brought to justice if the local residents' claims were verified. Guzargah Noor district is located 200 kilometres away from Pul-i-Khumri, the provincial capital of Baghlan. (Pajhwok)

### (10) MoI Undermines...

propaganda measure to influence the masses, but the security forces were able to deal with challenges.

Seddiqui's remarks come after Logar province officials on Saturday said the frequency range of some radios increased in Charkh district after Taliban established a transmitter they had brought from Pakistan to an unknown location.

Charkh district chief told Pajhwok Afghan News: "They insult our security forces through these radios and they try to deceive the youth to join Taliban ranks."

Last week also, a group of armed men claimed to be members of ISIS had prevented residents of Charkh from watching television.

But MoI spokesperson denied the existence of such groups in the country and called it propaganda. He urged the media to avoid broadcasting such reports. "No group or individual can challenge our security."

In over 79 operations across the country last week, as many as 89 insurgents have been killed and 90 more detained, Seddiqui added.

Furthermore, the MoI denied media reports about sacking of police officials in Kunduz province. "Nobody has been fired or detained."

Kunduz Governor Mohammad Omar Safi on Saturday said at least 12 policemen had been detained in connection with cooperating with insurgents and kidnappers. (Pajhwok)

### (11) 20 Rebels Join...

districts of the province.

He said the government would take necessary steps for the rehabilitation of those who returned to normal life and renounce violence.

Deputy Governor Mohammad Hanif Gardiwal called on other insurgents to shun violence and join peace.

Former insurgents' commander Amjad Shinwari said their armed struggle against the government was as a result of their ignorance. He pledged to encourage other rebels to join the peace process in larger national interests. (Pajhwok)

### (12) Bullets, Bombs...

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### (13) Taliban Free ...

to ensure the release of the detained persons. Muhammad, a resident of the locality, said the detainees were the relatives of Humayun, police chief of Pashtoonkot district.

Last week, he said Humayun arrested a leading militant, which prompted Taliban to abduct seven persons in retaliation.

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

### (14) 'War Rugs' Reflect...

Kevin Sudeith, a collector, tells NPR's Arun Rath that he has long been impressed by the craftsmanship of Afghan rugs.

"The thing that awed me about the war rugs ... is the combination of a very ancient tradition and ancient designs and patterns that are tied to specific towns and regions of Afghanistan ... coupled with the most contemporary subject matter," Sudeith says. "And the war rugs document that self-consciously, succinctly and beautifully."

During the 1990s, after the end of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Sudeith began to notice images of Soviet weapons mixed in with the geometric patterns on the rugs.

"The first rug that I bought was a red rug that had four Kalashnikovs on it, on the sides, and then a mix of tanks and helicopters in the middle," he says.

Before long, Sudeith wasn't just collecting the rugs; he started selling them to other collectors, who were also fascinated by the living history reflected in them.

"There were some map rugs in the '80s, for example, that showed Afghanistan beset by war and refugees fleeing to Pakistan," he says. "And then in the 1990s, those showed the similar pattern with the map of Afghanistan and the Soviets pouring out of Afghanistan through Uzbekistan."

"What I found was the opposite, that people became really interested in Afghanistan and interested in the war rugs in particular," he says. And just as they had during the Soviet occupation, the rugs began to reflect the latest machinery of war. This time it was American hardware, like F-16s.

The latest drone rugs have been very popular with collectors. But Sudeith says the Western interest in war rugs brings with it an unintended consequence: as demand for the war rugs increased, the rug makers responded to the market, and began making more war rugs. Designs that sold well would get reproduced.

Sudeith says he won't be surprised if this current interest results in a surge of drone rugs in the near future. (NPR)

### (15) Taxi Drivers ...

the non-custom paid vehicles earn more than me." Traffic Director Col. Ghulam Dasta-

gir Humayun said that Pul-i-Khumri was a small city and more than 1,800 cars had the taxi licenses. In addition, he said, that around 300 other vehicles were also being used as taxis.

He noted majority of non-custom paid vehicles belonged to government officials and they did not allow the traffic officials to perform their duty. (Pajhwok)

### (16) Militants Increase...

by the Taliban and other militant groups involving the extortion of private telecom companies operating in Afghanistan.

Telecommunication services have expanded significantly over the past few years in Afghanistan and the growth has benefited local communities, businesses and the government. Access to new methods of communication and sources of information has helped connect isolated groups across the country, spur economic growth and social development.

However, for all those reasons, and the fact that the businesses behind the spread of telecommunication technology around the country are so profitable, militant groups have looked to impede the development process and exploit companies for their own gain. Through threats of violence and forced system failures, armed anti-government groups give telecommunication companies the choice between paying money or having their towers targeted by attacks.

According to the Deputy Director of ATRA, Khair Muhammad Faizi, out of the 5,900 cell towers registered nationwide, 300 across the 34 provinces are facing security threats. "These threats have been ongoing from the past four years, and they are increasing," Mr. Faizi said. "The anti-government armed groups are trying to create threats and that is why they try to disconnect the telecommunication services of the companies at night."

Six telecommunication companies in Afghanistan manage the 5,900 total towers. Of those that are knower to be facing threats, the towers distributed across the southern, south western and eastern regions of the country dominate.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) has called on businessmen and companies operating under such conditions to turn to the police for assistance. "We want the traders and the private companies to trust their police and we are committed to protecting them," MoI spokesman Sediq Seddiqui said.

According to ATRA officials, the Afghan government received a revenue of 300 million USD from taxes on private telecommunication companies last year. Since the companies are not obligated to continue their work in the face of threats, Kabul leaders now faces a crisis in which many telecom companies with towers in restive areas could close up shop if conditions do not improve, which would have major implications for local communities and broader regional development in Afghanistan. (Tolonews)

### (17) Ludin Wants 2nd...

JALALABAD - The acting governor of eastern Nangarhar province on Saturday asked the construction firm concerned to complete the second Behsud bridge project within the stipulated time.

Alokozai, the firm head, said his company had so far spent \$1.27 million from its own resources on the bridge's fundamental works and the government was yet to reimburse the costs. After his complaint, Ludin phoned acting Public Works Minister Noor Gul Mangal and urged him to release the allocated funds to the construction company.

The governor insisted work on the bridge should not stop and complete the project as agreed in the contract. Public Works Department official Abdul Karim Farahi briefed the meeting on the launch of practical work on the Kabul-Jalalabad highway. He said public order police had established their posts from Surkhrud to Memla area and practical work on the road had been launched. The governor said his administration would fully cooperate with the firm constructing the Kabul-Jalalabad road.

The bridge connects Nangarhar with Kunar and Nuristan provinces and residents belonging 22 districts daily cross it.

The bridge is on the verge of collapse after two suicide attacks took place on it targeting NATO forces two years ago. Few months ago, a high-level government delegation launched repair work on the old bridge and construction work on a new parallel bridge. (Pajhwok)