

## (1) Electoral Reform

a reform is the only option left to revive public trust in elections," head of the Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan (TEFA) Mohammad Yousaf Rashid said. "Time should not be wasted. This reform needs to happen soon."

So far between nine and 11 people have been recommended to be a part of the reforms commissions. These include representatives chosen by the president, chief executive, election monitoring institutions and civil society networks.

Members of the electoral reforms commission are expected to recommend a plan in bringing technical and transparent reforms in the election system within the next four, five months and later present their final result to the president and chief executive. (Tolnews)

## (2) US Rules out

continues to have confidence in. But the president continues to be open to taking advice from his military leadership, from the senior members of his national security team, to tailor that strategy to reflect the situation on the ground," the White House Press Secretary, Josh Earnest, told reporters at his daily news conference. Ahead of President Ashraf Ghani's US trip, Earnest said the US President has been very clear about what he believes the US strategy in Afghanistan should be, which is he has sought the responsible drawdown of US military personnel from Afghanistan.

"This strategy has been done in careful consultation with our military leaders, including our generals on the ground. It's been done in careful consultation with other senior members of the President's national security team, including National Security Council staff here at the White House, as well as our diplomats and our intelligence officers," he said.

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reconciliation process whereby the Taliban and the Afghans engage in talks to the settlements to resolve the conflicts in Afghanistan," U.S. State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki said. "In terms of the role of Pakistan, we have long encouraged Pakistan to support President Ghani's reconciliation efforts; we of course remained in support and in contact with president on these matters as well as certain countries like Pakistan who have a stake in the outcome."

Meanwhile, the Afghan analysts and MPs have also shown their support for the beginning of peace talks with the Taliban, believing it the only way to put an end to the years-long conflict.

"It is expected that these talks will begin in the first week of March," said Moeen Marastaly, deputy head of right and justice party. "The first round of these talks will likely be held in Qatar, second in Afghanistan and the third round in Saudi Arabia." (Tolnews)

## (5) Ghani, Sharif

discussed Afghan Transit Trade with the prime minister noted that bilateral relations between Kabul and Islamabad had been strengthening by each passing day.

Ghani, during the course of his conversation, had expressed satisfaction that relations between the two countries were moving toward positive direction.

Sources said that they reiterated their resolve to fight terrorism, which was a common enemy of both the countries. Ghani also thanked the prime minister and the conversation lasted for about twenty minutes.

It merits mention that Ghani would proceed to the US to hold meetings with senior officials and President Barack Obama. During his scheduled visit to the US, his discussion with the prime minister is viewed of immense importance.

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## (6) Ghani Wants

by Afghan refugees. Ghani asked the Refugee Ministry and the donors to evolve a comprehensive strategy and an organized programme for resolving refugees' problems.

The president said refugees' problems would be discussed in next cabinet meeting and initial attempts would be made at preventing their harassment in host countries.

As many as five million Afghan refugees are living in Pakistan and Iran and a majority of them live there illegally. The refugees make 20 percent of Afghanistan's population. (Pajhwok)

## (7) Tokyo Vows

social and trade relations between the two countries would further improve in future.

For his part, Abdullah said the unity government gave priority to maintaining good relations with its foreign allies and had so far taken a number of steps since the government was formed in September.

The CEO called as crucial Japan's help to develop Afghanistan's production sector and in this regard, he urged Tokyo to continue its current activities and initiate new ones. (Pajhwok)

## (8) Kabul, Tehran

Ashraf Haidari, told TOLONews that India plans to increase investments in Chabahar port as soon as the deal is complete so that the volume and frequency of transactions passing through it can rise.

"The draft of the transit agreement between Afghanistan, Iran and India is under review and with its finalization, Indian goods will make their way to Afghan markets and Afghan goods will make their way to Indian markets through the Chabahar port," Deputy Ambassador Haidari said. "This is good news for the expansion of Afghan trade to Asian countries." As a landlocked country, Afghanistan's lack of sea ports gives it a decided disadvantage in international trade. However, with the agreement to allow Afghan traders and businesses unencumbered access to the Chabahar port in Iran, that disadvantage will be remedied. Furthermore, political analysts have said that circumventing routes in Pakistan will allow trade between Afghanistan and India to flourish without meddling on account of the historic and still simmering tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad. (Tolnews)

## (9) Security Officials

Following apparent progress regarding peace talks, Ghani has recently held a telephonic conversation with Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, informing him about the advancements made in this regard. Welcoming Islamabad's role in bringing Taliban to the peace negotiation table, Ghani hoped the process would begin in near future.

In respect to boosted efforts of Afghanistan for achieving peace, the United States has welcomed the efforts of Afghan government for putting an end to the conflict.

"We certainly remain in support of Afghan-led and Afghan-owned

Sherzad, the Police Chief of east-end Nangarhar province, told TOLONews on Monday that more than 17 drone attacks were conducted in Khogyani, Pachera Gam, Chaparhar districts and some other regions of the province over the past two months. He claimed they killed roughly 69 militants and wounded eleven others, while not leaving a single civilian casualty.

"Drone attacks have been effective in curbing the militants," Chief Sherzad said. "When the Taliban fighters seek refuge inside the civilian homes, in that case, it is only the drones that can target the Taliban militants without posing a harm to civilians," he added. Washington's drone warfare has traditionally received a lot of criticism in Pakistan and Afghanistan for causing civilian casualties. However, claims around civilian versus combatant casualties are always marred by speculation and unsubstantiated claims on both sides of the issue. What is indisputable, however, is that drones have been critical in targeting specific militant leaders and hideouts that would otherwise be near impossible to reach.

Dawlat Waziri, the deputy spokesman for the Afghan Ministry of Defense (MoD), said drone warfare was essential for effective intelligence operations. "We cannot use drones in war fronts, but drones maintain a crucial role in the intelligence war and they can eliminate targets accurately," he said.

Over the past eleven months, more than 50 drone attacks were conducted in the eastern province of Kunar. And according to the Kunar Police Chief, the attacks killed up to 150 armed opponents and wounded another 58. "The attacks conducted by drones have been effective in the province, because militants exist in some remote regions and the drones can easily target them," Police Chief Abdul Habib Saidkhalil said.

Officials in Nuristan province, on condition of anonymity, confirmed that over the past year more than 40 drone strikes were carried out in the province.

According to political and military experts, drone strikes have recently increased in the eastern part of Afghanistan and across the border in Pakistan in part because the government in Islamabad has become more supportive of the U.S. strategy. "The main reason that the drone attacks increased in the eastern region of the country is that the militants exist in these areas and also it was a call from Pakistan to the U.S. for suppressing the militants," political analyst Jawed Kohistani told TOLONews.

In recent months, Pakistan appears to have turned over a new leaf in its approach to the Taliban insurgency. Military and political leaders in Islamabad have taken concerted action to support peace talks between the Taliban and the Kabul government, as well as taken steps to curb militancy within their own borders. (Tolnews)

## (10) Surajkund

and diversity of the handicrafts, handlooms and the cultural heritage of India and its neighbours. The idea of hosting the Mela is to recreate a pristine rural ambience for foreign and domestic tourists, tell the patrons of arts and crafts of the skills involved in creative arts, to introduce crafts persons directly to the buyers, and to identify, nurture and preserve the languishing crafts of the country. The event witnessed participation from 20 countries around the world. Indian Embassy, Kabul with the support of SAARC Division of Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India facilitated participation of eight Afghan nationals who established an Afghan pavilion showcasing products like carpet, handicraft items and precious stone/semi-precious stone jewellery. It was a moment of great pride when Mr Mohammad Ishaq Timorzada of Turkistan Timorzada Carpets Ltd, Afghanistan was awarded "Kala Ratna 2015" (Art Diamond Award) by the Governors of Haryana and Chhattisgarh. The Afghan carpet was a major source of attraction for most of the visitors. (PR)

## (11) Afghanistan Wastes

much of that water, which fills riverbeds around the country, finds its way into neighboring countries without being accessed or utilized to any significant degree by the Afghan public. "We should tackle the issue seriously and take advantage of resources that are essential in energy generation," former minister of commerce Amin Farhang told TOLONews. "Since we aren't able to do so, we must take money from the countries where our waters flow on the basis of contracts," he added. The annual water flow through

Afghanistan is estimated to reach around 57 billion cubic meters, with about 18 billion cubic meters of underground water. Nevertheless, just 21 million cubic meters of the above ground water is used for agricultural purposes, while the remaining 36 percent flows untapped outside the country. Of the underground water, just three million cubic meters is used, while what is left remains unutilized.

"Work has been done and a sufficient budget was also provided to us," Deputy Minister of Water and Energy Shujauddin Ziayee said. "Every year the donor countries provide us support to revive and reform our irrigation system, and, so far, 2,300 projects have been implemented. However the basic job, which is to manage and control the water of resources of Afghanistan has yet to be done." Although Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are all among the countries that benefit from the water resources of Afghanistan, the only country that has signed a contract with the Afghan government over water usage is Iran. The contract allows Iran to use 26 cubic meters of water from the Helmand river per second. However, despite the contract being in place, because Afghanistan lacks the mechanisms needed to manage the flow of water effectively, Iran is able to access the river limitlessly. (Tolnews)

## (12) Mechanism to

agricultural land and if the droughts prolonged, more than 85 percent of the country's population would be affected.

Massoud said the government was working jointly with foreign NGOs on a mechanism how to deliver quick relief to farmers in the hardest-hit areas.

The World Food Programme (WFP) says more than 30 percent of Afghans live below the poverty line. (Pajhwok)

## (13) Indo-Afghan

said he would meet West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday and put forward a proposal for an agreement for according Kolkata the 'sister-city' status to Afghanistan's Mazar-e-Sharif City, the capital of northern Balkh province.

"Both Kolkata and Mazar-e-Sharif have similarities. They are fast developing cities. I will meet the Chief Minister tomorrow and propose her to make a 'sister-city' relationship between the two cities," he argued.

Speaking on an alternative transit route, he said: "Pakistan is the current route. However, the draft MoU transit trade agreement had been submitted to Iran by India and Afghanistan over the issue of Chabahar port."

He said India has offered \$200 million to upgrade the Chabahar port in Iran. Abdali invited businessmen from Kolkata to grab the business opportunity in the Asian country. "We want you all to grab the business opportunity and develop trade relationships between India and Afghanistan," he added. He said the bilateral trade between India and Afghanistan is likely to touch \$3 billion in future.

"If Chabahar port gets operational then we will witness an increase in the trade between two nations," he said. (Pajhwok)

## (14) Wardak PC Fails

Commission (IEC), told Pajhwok Afghan News that his department sent letters repeatedly directing the provincial council to appoint the administrative board but the council had to reach any decision.

The IEC formally requested all PC members to attend the council's meeting to appoint the administrative board but only a few of them appeared in the council's office. The Wardak provincial council has 15 members and presence of all of them is mandatory for voting to appoint the board. Wardak said the issue had been brought into the notice of central government and the governor's house.

Meanwhile, a provincial council member Khawani Sultani said the cause of delay in appointing the board was their office closure over Wolesi Jirga's decision that deprived them of right to evaluate the performance of local departments.

But acting deputy head of the council Mirwais Amiri linked the delay to differences among members. "There are two groups in the PC. One group has headed by Kalimzai which has eight members and Kalimzai made his way to the Meshrano Jirga. The other group is led by Akhtar Mohammad and has only seven members," Amiri said. (Pajhwok)

## (15) Atmar Holds

His visit comes at a time when reports are circulating that face-to-face

talks between Afghan government and Taliban would start next month. During the meeting, both the sides focused on bilateral relations between the two countries and ways to support and develop them in various fields.

The reports a day earlier quoted a Taliban leader as saying their leadership had approved initial peace talks with representatives of the Afghan government and the talks were expected to start in March.

Some leaders affiliated with the Taliban political office in Doha are expected to visit Pakistan soon for discussions to explore ways for the proposed peace dialogue, another Taliban leader said on Sunday. "A small delegation will be visiting Pakistan in days for consultations," he said.

However, Ajmal Abedi, presidential spokesperson, told Pajhwok Afghan News that the national security advisor was in Qatar to attend a conference on Afghanistan. He said representatives of foreign and rural rehabilitation ministries were also accompanying Atmar.

Taliban in a recent statement have announced support for talks. Pakistani media have also reported that a Taliban representative headed by Qari Din Mohammad had arrived in Islamabad to hold talks with the country's officials. (Pajhwok)

## (16) Tajikistan to

Afghan News temperature and water of every area was being considered in export of seedlings.

"It is important to consider temperature and water conditions because seedlings grown in warm areas do not survive in cold areas. We have grown seedlings which meet environment conditions of Tajikistan and for which Tajikistan has made a demand."

Rad Murad said the rate and the amount of seedlings to be exported to Tajikistan were yet to be discussed. He said exports of tree saplings to foreign countries resulted in improved economy of nurseries' owners.

He said millions of tree seedlings were each year exported from Takhar to Badakhshan, Kunduz, Baghlan, Jawzjan, Sar-i-Pul, Faryab and Balkh provinces.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Raza, the head of Takhar nursery owners association, said 200,000 seedlings were ready for sale in the market, with their prices ranging from 100 afghanis to 200 af.

He said Tajik traders bought from him 12000 seedlings of guava and cherry and took with them to their country this year.

The Agriculture Department says so far hundreds of nurseries have been established in Takhar and the department has issued permits to only 30 nurseries and the rest operate on their own.

Nurseries registered with the department produce standard seedlings, which have a greater capacity to resist diseases, grow fast and suit environment. (Pajhwok)

## (17) 37 Insurgents

were also wounded during confrontations with Afghan National Army. Operation Zulfikar began by hundreds of Afghan Security Forces over a week ago in Helmand Province but is tend-ed to spread to other provinces in the south after clearing the target areas in Helmand. (KP)

## (18) Reconstruction of

heavy vehicles carrying commercial goods from Pakistan.

The deputy minister urged the provincial administration to make efforts at preserving the key road. He said they planned to reconstruct roads in the Zazi Aryub and Lazha Mangal districts.

Hamdard expressed his pleasure over the road's reconstruction, which he said would help resolve many problems.

He said if the road was properly rehabilitated, it would not only facilitate businessmen but also encourage their other colleagues to bring commercial goods from Pakistan through the route.

The Gardez-Patan highway connects eight districts of Paktia and leads to Pakistan's Kurram tribal region. Dozens of vehicles carrying goods from Pakistan play the road on a daily basis. (Pajhwok)

## (19) 1 Million Saplings

among some environmental agencies in the capital. (Pajhwok)

## (20) 160 People

meter snow was measured on the tunnel and some avalanches created problems for people and halted traffic flow in the area.

Abdul Bais, one of the rescued passengers, told Pajhwok Afghan News over the telephone that they remained trapped in snow for five

hours on Monday.

He said all those trapped yesterday could have died if ANA forces had not rescued them. He tanked security forces for risking their own lives to save others.

Separately, ANA troops rescued 50 people threatened by a flooded river in eastern Laghman province, the governor's office said in a statement. It added: "Around 50 individuals of four families were rescued by security personnel after they got trapped by river water in Qargayi district and the individuals could have drowned." (Pajhwok)

## (21) 1 Hurt, 26

recognized by security forces. Col. Saifuddin Nangialai, the district head, said evidence collected from the scene showed there were three people in the vehicle.

The blast left a bakery worker wounded and 26 shops partly damaged, Nangialai said adding that windowpane of hundred of nearby houses shattered because of intensity of the explosion. (Pajhwok)

## (22) Gunmen

around 5pm Monday afternoon, Mohammad Ullah Ahmadi, the district police chief, told Pajhwok Afghan News.

He said the unidentified armed men forced the 30 passengers off a 303 public transport bus, but identity of the hos-tages could not be ascertained.

Initial investigation showed the passengers were Afghan refugees returning from neighboring Iran, he added.

Security forces had launched their investigation into the abduction and had detained some suspects, the police official said, adding the hostages had been moved to the Arghandab district.

There has been no claim of responsibility for the abduction. The gunmen only took away with them men and spared children and women on the bus. (Pajhwok)

## (23) Sher Khan

der is upto 50 vehicles daily, he added. Governor Mohammad Omar Safi called the decrease of the revenue unacceptable and vowed that steps were on to increase the imports to Afghanistan. He added that he plans to construct trading port section, improve private sector and pave the ground for cross border trading that could convert the port to one of important income source of the country. (Pajhwok)

## (24) Teenage

town's administrative head. He said an explosives-filled jacket, a Kalashnikov assault rifle and some hand-grenades were recovered from the 17-year-old, a resident of Paktika's Sarobi district.

The detained would-be suicide attacker told media representatives he had studied religious education in Pakistan, where his teachers convinced him to carry out a suicide attack in Afghanistan, but police arrested him. He said he had spent three years fighting alongside Taliban militants. Provincial acting police chief Nisar Ahmad Abdul Rahimzai said the attacker wanted to target the Sara Roza police chief, but police had prior information about a possible suicide attack. (Pajhwok)

## (25) Winter Adds

calls fall on deaf ears," a returnee Sallam Khan, 55, told Xinhua. "We don't have enough food, heating materials and winter clothes. If the government and humanitarian organizations do not pay attention to our plight, we may lose our children due to the bitterly cold weather," Abdul Rahim, himself also displaced, said. (Xinhua)

## (26) IS Abducts at

negotiations. Military experts following Syria said Islamic State was trying to open a new front to relieve pressure on the group after the string of losses since being driven from the Syrian town of Kobani near the border with Turkey. "Families are coming to Hasaka seeking safety," said Abdul Rahman al-Numai, a textile trader said via telephone. (Reuters)

## (27) Ukraine Rebels

units and building up ammunition." The EU said it was not worried about supplies: "At the moment, gas flows to the EU are normal and we expect that the gas transit to the EU will not be affected," European Commission spokeswoman Anna-Kaisa Ikonen told reporters. (Reuters)

## (28) Putin Rules ou

mander close to the hotspot village told AFP that three of his fighters were killed by Ukrainian bombardments Monday and that there was "daily fighting". (AFP)