

(1) WJ Set to...

vote of confidence. Sixteen ministers-designate and National Directorate of Security (NDS) head have explained their programmes to the lawmakers. The Presidential Palace on Tuesday introduced two new ministers-designate of information and justice after the rejection of the earlier nominees on the dual-nationality issue. First Vice-President Sarwar Danish introduced Abdul Bari Jahani and Najib Aqa Fahim as ministers-designate of information and justice to the lower house for a vote of confidence. The assembly had previously rejected Sultan Khairi, President Ashraf Ghani's pick for information minister, and Ahmad Sair Mahjoor, nominee for justice minister. Zazai, who also heads the Wolesi Jirga International Affairs Commission, said documents of Jahani and Fahim were being evaluated by the commission. (Pajhwok)

(2) USAID Suspends ...

has a zero tolerance policy for mismanagement of American taxpayer funds and will take every measure at our disposal to recover these funds." The Washington Post reported that "since 2007, USAID has awarded more than \$2.4 billion in contracts and cooperative agreements to IRD," adding "several of those projects have been the subjects of investigations following allegations of waste and fraud."

One of the criticisms raised toward IRD was "providing lavish salaries and millions in bonuses to its employees, including the husband-and-wife team who ran the organization, as well as their family members." However, the nonprofit is permitted to complete ongoing projects, but new federal contracts have been blocked after the suspension took effect immediately.

IRD President Roger Ervin, who took charge of the nonprofit just six weeks ago, hopes to continue work with USAID after bringing changes to the organization.

"I take this as an opportunity to make some changes, and many of them are already underway," Ervin said. "I think we can show in short order that we can demonstrate that we are a good service provider for USAID, and I think we can address this pretty quickly."

IRD was founded in 1998 by an ordained minister, Arthur B. Keys, and his wife Jasna Basaric-Keys who have been reported in the Washington Post to have earned more than \$5.9 million in compensation between 2008 and 2012 and that their daughter and Basaric-Keys's brother had also received more than \$1.3 million as well. (Tolonews)

(3) President Introduces ...

Sarwar Danish introduced Abdul Bari Jahani and Najib Aqa Fahim as ministers-designate of information and justice to the lower house for a vote of confidence.

The assembly had previously rejected Sultan Khairi, President Ashraf Ghani's pick for information minister, and Ahmad Sair Mahjoor, nominee for justice minister.

Some of the nominees have already cancelled their second nationality and the lower house has since accepted their decision.

After long discussions, lawmakers allowed Salahuddin Rabbani and Noorul Haq Ulumi, who cancelled their second nationality, to introduce their future programmes to the Wolesi Jirga.

Speaker Abdur Rauf Ibrahim said only 23 of 186 lawmakers opposed the house decision on the reintroduction of the two nominees. (Pajhwok)

(4) Ghani Vows...

elections throughout the country. Ghani said: "I respect the independence of IEC and wants you to preserve your independence in a way that the people of Afghanistan and civil society organizations trust you."

Earlier, the president and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) during their election campaign promised to bring reforms in IEC.

Last year Wolesi Jirga members urged drastic reforms in the duties and responsibilities of election commissions, but no tangible steps had been taken so far. (Pajhwok)

(5) Foreign Minister...

security goals with a regional consensus to fight terrorism and illicit drug production; more importance to our economic interests; and establishing a firm regional and global foothold for Afghanistan," he remarked.

Rabbani said Afghanistan is an inseparable part of Islamic and Asian nations and he would try to bolster

its image in the region. "We can't choose our neighbors, but with constructive diplomacy we can change their behavior towards us."

Terrorism and narcotics, he reiterated were main national and regional challenges and the menace could be tackled with strong coordination with regional and global players.

"I will intensify fight against the scourge of terrorism and drugs by forming regional alliance with our neighbors," he remarked.

Close coordination and enhanced relations with the regional organizations, he said, was vital to ensure peace and stability. He pledged to evaluate the administrative structure of the ministry and embassies abroad and follow reforms.

Salahuddin Rabbani is a son of former president Burhanuddin Rabbani and was born in Kabul city. He is from Badakhshan and is ethnic Tajik.

He received his bachelor degree in petroleum and mines marketing from Saudi Arabia and master in International Relations from Columbia University in New York. He also served as Afghanistan's ambassador to Turkey and head of peace council as well. (Pajhwok)

(6) Ulumi to Focus...

earlier rejected by the Wolesi Jirga on the dual-nationality issue, but lawmakers let him outline his priorities after he surrendered his second nationality.

Ulumi said he would improve the logistic system, coordination among security forces and judicial organs, fight against corruption and prevent plunder of national wealth.

Eliminating violence, encouraging women to serve as police officers, coordination on law enforcement and providing housing facilities for affected families and police with disabilities will be among his primary goals.

Deploying police to border districts, fighting against militants, framing an effective domestic security policy, enhancing police capacity, controlling casualties and reforming the ministry are also among his plans. He would convert prisons into learning centers, pay special attention to distributing electronic ID cards and ensure Transparency and accountability in the recruitment process.

"I would use all my power and experience to prevent injustice, land grab and law violations," he said. The ongoing violence in Afghanistan was the handiwork of foreigners, he alleged. (Pajhwok)

(7) Australia FM ...

Bishop said she would visit the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday. "In Abu Dhabi, I will meet with the UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs, HH Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan and host a roundtable with Australian businesses," she added. She said more than 350 Australian businesses are currently operated in the UAE. (AAP)

(8) ANSF to Take...

Afghans would be provided with work opportunities at these installations.

Governor Weesa thanked the foreign troops for handing over the sites to Afghan forces. He said the international forces' decade-long services would never be forgotten. He said consent of economic and agriculture officials would be sought for more effective use of the installations. He asked foreign experts to help train residents of Dand and Daman district on protecting these facilities. (Pajhwok)

(9) Helmandis Take ...

governor Amir Hafizullah Khan Haqyar told Pajhwok Afghan News that the government should task honest and God-fearing individuals with combating corruption. "Receiving giving bribes should be banned in government offices. The authorities should work out a plan by taking locals into confidence to ensure security in the province," he demanded. (Pajhwok)

(10) 70 Taliban...

Police Chief Sarwar Hussaini said. "The operation is currently underway in the district to clear the area of insurgents," Hussaini said. "During the raids 10 ANSF forces have been injured."

He added that a military operation has also been launched in Khaja Ghar district of northern Takhar province, which borders with Imam Sahib district of Kunduz.

However, the Taliban have not yet commented on the operation. (Tolonews)

(11) Taliban Confirm...

Din Muhammad, a Taliban member in Doha, visited China in November. The delegation discussed issues per-

taining to Afghanistan and the latest political situation in the region.

However, no specific details are available about the negotiations but the Taliban may have started thinking about China's role in ensuring peace in the war-torn country.

In a statement, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said: "We are in contact with the global community, specifically neighbouring countries. We are in touch with other states as well."

China, he said, was among the neighbouring countries and Taliban would maintain contact with them for a negotiated settlement of the dispute.

"We are in favour of peace talks and our delegations have travelled to other countries also to ensure peace in the country. However, reports that we have asked China to play a mediator's role are baseless and concocted," he added.

The visit of the Taliban delegation came shortly after President Ashraf Ghani paid a four-day official trip to that country. The president, while addressing the 'Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference' in Beijing, termed China as the key country which could help restore peace in Afghanistan.

Similarly, the Chinese ambassador to Kabul, during a meeting with Chief Executive Dr Abdullah Abdullah, also hinted at using its influence with Pakistan to promote the peace process. (Pajhwok)

(12) "Marg" Group ...

into existence in Afghanistan but their clothes were made off three colors which is the flag of Afghanistan, this can be their distinguish from other groups operating in Afghanistan.

Marg Group claims that more than 5,000 people have announced their allegiance with them to fight ISIS and Taliban.

Marg Group says there is no difference between ISIS and Taliban and that all of them are enemies of Afghanistan.

Marg Group also called on Afghans to join their group for defense of their country and people.

This group announces its existence after reports of ISIS arriving to parts of the country surfaced.

Zabul, Helmand and Ghazni are among the provinces of Afghanistan where reports of ISIS existence surfaced.

Taliban leadership has also instructed fighters not to allow ISIS function in the country. (KP)

(13) US Has Promised ...

Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen Raheel Sharif during his visit of all possible cooperation in bringing the insurgent to justice.

Khattak told the visiting delegation that Gen. Raheel had presented tangible evidence to top US officials of Indian involvement in subversive activities in Pakistan by using Afghan soil.

Fazlullah was elected TTP commander in November 2013, following the death of Hakimullah Mehsud. The TTP claimed responsibility for the December 16 attack on a school in Peshawar that resulted in the deaths of at least 150 people, mostly students.

Prior to becoming TTP leader, Fazlullah had claimed killing Pakistani Army Major General Sanaullah Niazi, as well as ordering the shooting of schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai. (Pajhwok)

(14) Afghan Troops...

militants across the country and dying at a rate of around 100 every week in the heaviest fighting of a 13-year conflict.

Without air support they say they will struggle to defeat the enemy, especially now that tens of thousands of foreign troops supporting them have ended their mission.

Nato is training and advising some 390 Afghan pilots, most with no tactical combat experience, and a limited number of planes and helicopters have been promised to bolster an air force of around 140 aircraft, mostly transport helicopters.

As a stopgap measure, the Afghans began fitting forward-firing 23mm machine guns and 57mm rockets to some of the 86 Mi-17 transport helicopters to supplement five larger Mi-35 attack helicopters that were the only combat aircraft.

"That's not enough to support all the missions," Col Abdul Shafi Noori, the air force's maintenance group commander, said of the expanded combat fleet, which should number about 30.

Nevertheless, it is a start, and, at the air force training base just outside the capital Kabul, Afghan pilots have been putting adapted Mi-17s through their paces.

Flying fast and low over barren hills,

a helicopter crew zooms its sights on the target: a group of trucks parked on a ridge, representing vehicles full of Taliban insurgents. "You see the threat?" The American trainer asks the pilot. "Target at 4 o'clock. Ready the rockets."

The crew fires off machine guns and a 57mm rocket that shudders the helicopter as it's released, before obliterating one of the trucks. This month, a newly modified Mi-17 came to the rescue in real combat, helping an Afghan patrol pinned down by insurgents firing from a ridge in Badakhshan province in the northeast.

The air force plans to have about a dozen weaponised Mi-17s by the spring fighting season that typically begins in April.

"Wherever they are going to be able to get into the fight, it's going to make a big difference," said US Brigadier General Michael Rothstein, commander of the Nato air force training mission.

By June, the air force will also have a dozen more MD-530 helicopters - smaller, swifter machines modified with armour and .50 calibre machine guns, with the first six arriving next month. Rothstein acknowledged that it was "hard to predict" exactly how effective the air force would be in the coming year, "...but I think they are going to be able to make an impact."

The air force, all but wiped out by civil war and the US-led campaign to topple the Taliban, has only a fraction of Nato's former air power. At the height of Nato's engagement in Afghanistan in 2011, the coalition flew nearly 133,000 flight missions that year, about 34,000 of those for close air support.

Last year, the Afghan Air Force flew an estimated 7,000 missions, a small fraction in direct support of troops on the ground. The seven-year-old project to build up the air force has been fraught with setbacks and delays.

Last year, most of the 20 Italian-made G222 transport planes the US bought for \$486m were sold for scrap metal after being grounded because Afghans could not maintain them, said the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. (Reuters)

(15) Wave of Judicial ...

potential accomplices, acted out of support for anti-government insurgents or for another reason, though police officials referred to him as a "terrorist."

"The terrorist has been arrested and is in the Kabul Police Department," Kabul Police Chief Abdur Rahman Rahimi said. "He was carrying a gun with a silencer." (Tolonews)

(16) 13 Suspects

indicate that these people wanted to affiliate with the terrorist groups who are trying to operate under different names in our country," the Ministry of Interior (MoI) spokesman Sediq Sediqqi said, referring to the rumors about the emergence of IS fighters who have seized some large cities in Syria and Iraq.

The rumors about the existence of IS militants in Afghanistan were increased after some local officials of southern Helmand and Nimruz provinces acknowledged sightings of the newly-emerged militants.

Earlier, the MoI officials rejected the presence of IS fighters who have recently topped the headlines in the west, saying they were the same Taliban and Haqqani groups who have now changed their physical appearance to gain more points.

According to military experts and analysts, these new militants were the combination of Pakistani, Afghan and Central Asian insurgents that needed the attention of the government.

"One thing that is more concerning about Daesh [IS] is that they recruit from all sects unlike the Taliban," military analyst Javed Kohistani said, adding those who have not even received religious education are also recruited in the group. (Tolonews)

(17) 64pc of Afghans ...

27 ministers-designate, the National Directorate of Security (NDS) and the Afghanistan Bank heads and introduced them to the lower house for a vote of confidence.

So far 17 cabinet picks have explained their future plans to the public representatives, but the Wolesi Jirga refused to hear seven nominees and the Afghanistan Bank head for having second citizenship.

Earlier, the lower house passed a resolution asking members not to give the trust vote to ministers-designate with dual nationality. Meanwhile, some lawmakers started have launched efforts to reverse the resolution.

Article 72 of the Constitution says: "Cabinet picks should be citizens of Afghanistan only, in case he/she has another nationality, the lower house has the power to accept or reject the them."

During the PAN survey, 258 people expressed opposition to the confidence vote cabinet choices with dual citizenship. They gave the following reasons for their opposition.

Asylum opportunity: Twenty-seven percent argue ministers with dual nationality, after committing corruption, could escape and seek asylum in other countries.

Maryam, 21, a student of journalism faculty, said: "In the past 13 years, people of Afghanistan have seen those with multiple nationalities never remained loyal to Afghanistan. Majority of them proved to be traitors and ran away with millions."

Abdul Sattar Jalal, an employee of information and culture department in northern Jawzjan province, said ministers with dual nationality could leave the country in hard times. An Afghan minister better knows the ground realities and remains aware of people's problems.

Lack of loyalty:

Around 24 % said ministers with dual nationality could not work efficiently due to a clash of interest between the counties they belong to. Mohammad Amin, a resident of Mazar-i-Sharif, the capital of northern Balkh province, said minister with dual citizenship could never be loyal to the supreme interest of Afghanistan.

Ahmad Farid, a resident of Bagrami district of Kabul, said ministers with dual nationality could easily leave the country in troubled situations by choosing a more comfortable environment in his/her country of second citizenship.

Spying: Over 19 percent of interviewees feared ministers with dual nationality could spy for other countries. Fatima Alamdar, a resident of central Bamiyan province, said: "We should not allow someone with dual nationality to become minister. He/she could reveal to another country Afghanistan's secrets."

Local talent:

Around 12 percent said instead of nominating individuals with dual nationality, the government should make use of local talent. Mohammad Nasim, a resident of Maimana, the capital of Faryab province, said a lot of talented and qualified people were available in the country and they could become ministers.

He said the president and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) should give an opportunity to such individuals to serve the country. Nasim lamented that President Ashraf Ghani, being the second greatest thinker of the world was unable to choose 25 cabinet picks out of a 25 million population. Renouncing second nationality Around 12 percent of interviewees said the nominees with dual nationality must give up their second citizenship. Dr. Saleh Mohammad Faiz, a resident of Mazar-i-Sharif, said: "If a nominee renounces his/her second nationality then he/she should become a minister, but those who want to stick to their second passports, we don't need them."

Legal issues

Six percent of the interviewees showed aversion to the nomination of ministers-designate because they thought it was against the constitution. Ariana, a Balkh University student, said based on article 72 of the constitution, now that lawmakers decided not to approve individuals with dual nationality then the decision should be respected.

Support for dual nationality As many as 132 individuals (33%) voiced support to nominees dual nationality holders for the following reasons: Professionalism

Some 54 percent of the respondents said those with dual nationality having spent time abroad were better-educated and good technocrats. They could play a highly significant role in nation building.

"Those who didn't have dual nationality and became ministers had done nothing for their country. They were looking after their own interests," alleged Karishma, a resident of Kabul. "Those who have come from abroad are not that corrupt."

Honesty Around 19 percent of the interviewees opined those with dual nationality were honest. "The holders of dual citizenship had been forced into leaving the country. I think they are less corrupt," commented Abdul Rahman Rahmani, another resident of Kabul.

Being Afghan

More than 15 percent of the respondents said people with dual nationality had the right to benefit from their Afghani passport. "Dual nationality

holders are also Afghans. They have the right to become ministers and hold public offices," said Anisa Habiba Noori from Ghazni.

Ahmadullah, a resident of Maidan Wardak province, said it was more important to evaluate their qualifications, professionalism and patriotism than to stick to the issue of passports.

Two of the interviewees believed candidates with dual nationality could easily attract more aid to Afghanistan. Around three percent declined to comment on the subject. (Pajhwok)

(18) Livelihood ...

directly benefiting farmers, but it did not occur.

"This demonstrates incompetency of local officials," he said, adding that counter-narcotics department was not involved in decisions taken by the officials.

Abdul Chafoor, personal assistant to acting governor, confirmed the money had been spent on other projects but said the decision was taken by the provincial development committee. (Pajhwok)

(19) 9 Held,...

An amount of 200,000 afghanis was also recovered from the rebels' possession, he added.

In northeastern Badakhshan, police eliminated five rebels who wanted to storm an Afghan Local Police (ALP) check-post in the area.

Deputy police chief, Col. Abdul Qadir Sayyad, said the bodies of the militants were left on the battleground. One of them was a Tajik and another Uzbek. (Pajhwok)

(20) Obama Defends ...

terrorism or dealing with regional stability," Obama said in a CNN interview that aired in advance of Obama's arrival.

New King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud Salman formally greeted Obama and the U.S. delegation at the Erga Palace on the outskirts of Riyadh, where dozens of Saudi officials filed through a marble-walled room to greet the Americans under massive crystal chandeliers. After a short dinner, Obama and Salman sat down for their first formal meeting without making any comments to reporters covering the visit.

His first flogging took place in early January in front of dozens of people in the Red Sea city of Jiddah, though a second round has been postponed after a doctor said his wounds from the first lashes had not yet healed.

"On this visit, obviously a lot of this is just paying respects to King Abdullah, who in his own fashion presented some modest reform efforts within the kingdom," Obama said.

Stepping off the plane earlier in Riyadh, the president and first lady Michelle Obama were greeted by Salman and a military band playing both countries' national anthems. Some of the all-male Saudi delegation shook hands with Mrs. Obama while others gave her a nod as they passed by. Mrs. Obama wore full-length clothing but no headscarf, as is typical for many Western women in Saudi Arabia, despite the strict dress code for Saudi women appearing in public. Obama cut short the final day of his trip to India to make the four-hour stop in Riyadh. Further underscoring the key role Saudi Arabia has long played in U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East was the extensive delegation that joined Obama for the visit. (AP)

(21) AU, China...

discussed that we need to cooperate with People's Republic of China in a number of areas at the continental level, mainly around the infrastructure sector," recalled the chairperson of the AU Commission.

She further revealed that teams and sub-committees have already been set up to deal with detailed issues of the cooperation between the two sides on those areas. Each sector has a team with a sub-committee to work on details of projects such as starting point, costs, and means of funding among others, according to the chairperson. Speaking on China-Africa relationship, she said that China and Africa have been enjoying long-standing and historic relations with ever growing cooperation.

"This would be the first continental project that Africa and China will be undertaking in all these areas," she said. It is cooperation on infrastructure and industrialization sectors to be carried out under the cooperation framework between China and AU, whereby the AU plays a coordinating role in the implementation, according to the special envoy.

He said China has rich experience and mature technologies in the areas of high speed railways, highways, aviation and in industrialization projects. (Xinhua)