

(1) Tens of thousand

passengers adding that the kidnapped people were innocent civilians.

Relatives of the victims urged him at a recent meeting to play an effective role in securing their release. "They have blamed me for not raising my voice for these kidnapped individuals..." Haji Mohaqiq said. The deputy CEO said he had informally sent a delegation to Quetta, the capital of Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province. He added the group, to which the kidnappers were linked, had been told that innocent people had been seized.

Mr. Mohaqiq also voiced his concern over the delay in forming the proposed commission and introducing the electoral reforms. He said that Dr. Abdullah wants the problem (electoral reform) to be resolved and the president is also ready to issue a decree for constituting the panel and ensuring fair elections in the future.

Mohaqiq stressed the electoral system must be fixed in line with expectations of the nation and political forces so as to make poll results credible and acceptable.

Chief Executive Officer Abdullah addressing the gathering said the National Unity Government had been established on the basis of a clear agreement on reforming the election panels, adding that the people could not be satisfied without cleaning up the electoral system.

He believed the long-suffering Afghans had finally got the opportunity to come out of their miserable situation -- a legacy of decades of conflict and internecine bickering.

He further added that the "Transparent elections have been a key demand of the Afghan people. One of the fundamental issues in the formation of the National Unity Government was to reform the electoral system". Let me say in categorical terms that people won't accept anything short of transparent polls and thoroughgoing reforms in the electoral institutions, he reiterated.

Former President Hamid Karzai said on the occasion that Shaheed Abdul Ali Mazari had sincerely struggled for justice and prosperity in the country, adding that "The situation today is better today than five years ago and I hope the future will be a lot brighter."

He further added that, "The wave of violence in Afghanistan is a foreign conspiracy that we can defeat through unity and by standing firmly behind the government," he said, drumming up support for the new administration.

(2) Pakistan Seeks

cooperation, trade and economic partnership.

He called terrorism a common enemy that could be crushed with mutual endeavours. Both countries have had paid a very heavy price. "We have launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb which has broken the backbone of terrorists in the country."

Sharif said Pakistan was fully committed to the internationally-endorsed Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. The two countries should closely engage with UNHCR on devising a realistic roadmap for the repatriation of refugees, he stressed.

Sharif hoped Balkhi's visit would help advance the realisation of a "comprehensive and enduring" partnership between Afghanistan and Pakistan. He indicated his desire to visit Kabul to further bolster bilateral ties.

Balkhi thanked Pakistan for showing deep concern for their Afghan brethren affected by avalanches and for sending two plane loads of relief goods. He also conveyed best wishes from President Ashraf Ghani to the prime minister.

Balkhi said it was a blessing for the entire region that the prime minister was a visionary leader who had prioritised establishment of peace in the region. He said the desire of the Afghan people was to focus on economic development.

"We wish our security cooperation deepens and both countries work as one team, so that terrorists are given a decisive defeat," said Balkhi, who added an inter-ministerial board had been formed to oversee the return of refugees.

He apprised the prime minister of his earlier meetings in Pakistan at the SAFRON Ministry as well as at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (Pajhwok)

(3) Civilian

officials, United Nations has recorded 126 separate incidents in Maidan Wardak province where 70 people including women and

children were killed and 125 others wounded.

As per the information provided to the governor's office of Maidan Wardak province by the United Nations, out of 195 civilians killed or injured in 2014, 94 casualties were recorded in the attacks of the armed opponents, 51 in the security forces actions and 27 others were killed or wounded during the fighting by unknown sides.

However, the information that is provided to the governor's house of Maidan Wardak province by the United Nations shows that the civilian casualties recorded in Maidan Wardak province were 106 persons killed and 303 others wounded which is 53 percent more than that of recorded in 2014.

In the meantime, Abdul Majid Khogyani, the acting-governor of Maidan Wardak province has ordered the security agencies in the province to put all efforts in bringing the percentage of the civilian casualties to zero in 2015. (KP)

(4) Extremists

around the globe. Speaking at the School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, she observed: "Increasingly, they have sprung from within conflicts worldwide."

Sewall noted weak, illegitimate, and repressive governments inadvertently created opportunities for terrorists to capitalise on popular resentment.

In a repressive milieu, the official argued, extremists made common cause with local insurgents and criminal networks and operated in poorly governed territory.

She cited examples of these dynamics in the Pak-Afghan region, where the TTP has long traded on local grievances to keep itself alive and perpetuate its activities.

Al Qaeda network fighters blended with militants from the Council of Islamic Courts in Africa to create Al Shabab.

In Libya, Ansar al-Sharia exploited post-Qadhafi factional violence. The Islamic State group dramatically expanded its reach by exploiting Sunni political disenfranchisement in Iraq.

She continued: "Violent extremist groups have been expanding their control and resonance in South Asia, the Sahel, the Maghreb, Nigeria, Somalia, and in the Arabian Peninsula." (Pajhwok)

(5) Eyeing Islamic

future of Afghanistan.

Daniel Feldman, US special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, on Tuesday held crucial talks Pakistan with army chief General Raheel Sharif in Rawalpindi and "appreciated Islamabad's positive role for peace and stability in Afghanistan."

The US would not be part of the upcoming talks, but it has fully backed the fresh moves for the political solution, said the report.

The report added that efforts were being made to arrange the talks in Kabul in an effort to show that the process is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned.

"All sides are very much aware of the fact that the breakthrough has to be achieved before the Taliban's spring offensive."

Prime Minister's Advisor on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz also confirmed on Tuesday that the Afghan government and the Taliban were holding negotiations.

He informed Pakistan's Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs that both sides have already formed committees to pursue the peace talks.

But in a statement, the Taliban rejected all the reports as "baseless and untrue." Their spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told Pajhwok Afghan News the group had neither contacted the Afghan government nor entrusted the job to anyone else. "No doubt, every Afghan wants to lead a peaceful life but this can be possible only when foreign forces leave the country and empower the Afghan people," he observed.

The movement had been fighting against foreign forces for the last 13 years and focusing on the political aspect as well so that an Islamic system was restored in the country, he explained.

The Taliban, he reiterated, had been trying to resolve politically the problems stemming from the presence of foreign forces. He said the militants had good ties with foreigners and their representatives had travelled to various countries in the past.

But he pointed out that officials of the Taliban's political wing had never travelled to any country for peace talks or held meetings in this

regard with anyone. (Pajhwok)

(6) Taliban Eager

the same opinion when it came to peace process.

Speaking at a sapling plantation drive in Kabul, he said: "We are optimistic that in the coming year we will witness developments in peace building, security and stability in the country."

Earlier, a Pakistani media reported that Afghan government and the Taliban were preparing to hold face-to-face talks in the next few days as a result of efforts by Pakistan and other stakeholders.

The Express Tribune reported the two sides had been in contact but it was the first time that they would sit across the negotiating table to discuss the future of Afghanistan.

Sartaj Aziz, Pakistani prime minister's adviser on national security and foreign affairs, also confirmed on Tuesday that the Afghan government and the Taliban were holding negotiations. (Pajhwok)

(7) Efforts Must

Afghanistan to turn the country into southern Waziristan," he said. "They want to take the war in the south to the northern parts of the country. There are circles who are attempting to eliminate jihadi leaders from the political scene, but we know that these efforts will have no result."

Emphasizing on the role of jihadi leaders in the political arena, acting Governor of Balkh Atta Mohammad Noor said that if these leaders are not in the loop of political talks the country will face another threat: Daesh.

"If we are not politically aware, we won't understand the situations," he began. "We won't understand the moves of our enemies and when we don't we will burn again in the fire. This time the fire is known as Daesh." (Tolonews)

(8) Govt. Yet

earnestly desire reforms in the process, he explained, hinting at certain hurdles to the long-awaited improvements.

For instance, he said: "In Kabul and provinces, we have 160 posts vacant. We want these positions to be filled by qualified individuals..."

But the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Services Commission has not yet taken steps to hire the required professionals.

In 22 provinces, the chairman said, IEC offices were led by acting heads -- something that tends to create problems. "I want to make clear the point that the government is yet to details its electoral reform policy."

He urged the rulers to elucidate their reform plans and say in plain words whether they intended to replace the sitting commissioners or fix the system itself.

In line with the relevant law, nobody could dismiss the IEC commissioners from their positions for six years, he reiterated.

Article 83 of the constitution says Wolesi Jirga members shall be elected by the people through free, general, secret and direct balloting. The five-year assembly term will end after the announcements of election results on the 1st of June when the new parliament shall commence work.

The elections have to be held 30 to 60 days prior to the expiration of the lower house term. The number of the members of the house shall be proportionate to the population of each constituency, not exceeding a maximum of 250. (Pajhwok)

(9) Several Parliamentary

commissions of the lower house.

Also, Qais Hassan, Syed Ikramuddin Masumi and Musa Khan Nasrat were elected to the three slots on the communications commission. Mirdad Khan Najrabi, Abdulhai Akhundzada and Shekiba Hashimi grabbed the top positions on the domestic security commission. Administrative bards of the remaining panels will be elected on Saturday. (Pajhwok)

(10) Back Bribes

The decline in commercial traffic into the city has hurt the capital's industrial sector, the Afghan Industrial Union has said. "The stopping of trucks carrying raw materials and machines has pushed the factories to verge of collapse, because raw materials aren't available and the machines are stopped at Kabul's doors," Afghan Industrial Union deputy head Abdul Rahim Faizan said.

According to manufacturers, the lack of standardized resources and facilities for the storing of products, and unloading of goods and machinery has also contributed to the problems faced in commer-

cial transport into the capital. "We are facing a lot of problems, there are no cranes and other necessary equipments here so that we can relocate the machines," a factory owner named Ahmad Nawid said. "Also there are no ports in Kabul to relocate the machines."

In addition, non-commercial drivers, often carrying tag-along passengers into the city, report that they often have to pay bribes to enter the capital as well. "We are stopped in squares and police ask for money, if we refuse money, they stop us," a driver named Mohammad Amin said.

The National Security Council decided last month to prevent heavy loaded trucks from entering the city, asking drivers to empty their trucks before entering. "As per the decision of the National Security Council, no heavy loaded truck is allowed to enter the city, however, there are some exceptions," Mol deputy spokesman Najib Danish said. (Tolonews)

(11) Afghan

changes."

He insisted that Afghanistan has now become a safe place for everyone, but acknowledged still many challenges were ahead of the country.

"I think we have come a long way as Afghanistan has improved a lot since the fall of Taliban regime."

His students also praised his efforts for an educated society, saying Royesh was a role model for all Afghan educators.

"I believe he is the one who helped me choose my way," a student said, urging that Afghanistan needed such personalities to defeat war by education.

"The important thing we learned from Royesh is hope," another student of Marefat School said. "He has taught us to not give up hope at any situation."

Royesh first established Marefat School in Pakistan after fleeing the Taliban in 1994, which he moved back to Kabul in 2001.

"If awarded the Prize, Azizullah would use the funds to renovate and expand his school. He also aims to launch a professional teacher training academy so that Marefat's model of education can be applied throughout the country," the foundation said in its website.

The nine other finalists include three educators from U.S. and six others from India, Haiti, Cambodia, UK, Kenya and Malaysia. (Tolonews)

(12) Senator Blames

Salang highway is a frequent subject of grievance among commercial truck drivers, commuters and everyday travelers alike. Pock-marked with gapping and destructive holes, submerged in mud, and fully underwater in some places, the highway is notorious for its horrid conditions.

"In the past we would reach Baghlan province in four or five hours, but now due to bad roads it takes seven to eight hours to get to Baghlan province," one driver along the Salang highway named Mohammad Zarif told TOLONews Wednesday.

Winter months are thought to be the worst for the highway, particularly the Salang tunnel, which is deteriorated by water, snow and ice. If it continues to deteriorate at its present pace, some say, it could be shut down for the rest of the season. (Tolonews)

(13) Dostum Vows

and we will definitely resolve this issue."

The protest began about a month ago when members of the National Olympic Taekwondo Team resigned their positions and demanded redress for what they said was corruption on the part of the National Olympic Committee. They claimed members of the committee, particularly its president, Fahim Hasimi, were involved in embezzling money, stealing earnings from athletes and forging signatures in order to do so.

Meanwhile, members of the Olympic Committee have rejected the allegations and maintained their innocence. They have said the grievances of the athletes should go through convention channels, such as the special committee appointed for the settlement of athletes' issues and a delegation from the International Taekwondo Federation.

"A delegation from the International Taekwondo Federation and the complaints commission, which was appointed by the president for the settlement of athletes' problems, should intervene in the issue and express their views regarding the matter," Olympic Committee

representative Rafi Ferdows said. "The National Olympic Committee is always there to offer support to all federations after these two bodies announce their verdict." (Tolonews)

(14) Obama Commends

efforts of Afghan forces to improve security, and the importance of countering extremist threats from groups like Al Qaeda, Schultz said. Ghani and Abdullah are scheduled to arrive in the US later this month, their first trip to the country after coming to power last year as a result of controversial presidential elections.

"The president encouraged to accelerate Afghan progress towards forming an inclusive national unity government, and expressed his expectation that their visit to Washington will demonstrate our mutual commitment to a strengthened US-Afghan strategic partnership," he said. (Pajhwok)

(15) President Orders

Palace, Ashraf Ghani directed officials of the Ministry of Interior and the Attorney General Office that the incident be probed from different angles and justice ensured. (Pajhwok)

(16) Pressure on

presidential campaigns, our leaders used to say that no Afghan is less than another Afghan, but why have they forgotten it now then, and do not ask about our hostages?" asked Nazar Muhammad, a relative of one of the hostages.

Amid contention over the formation of the remaining cabinet, implementation of electoral reform prior to the next parliamentary elections and getting the ball rolling on Taliban peace talks, many feel the Afghan government has short-shifted the Hazara hostage situation.

Meanwhile, at a gathering in Balkh province, Haji Muhammad Mohaqiq, the deputy CEO, and arguably the most powerful leader of the Hazara community in Afghanistan, expressed his own dissatisfaction with the governments response to the situation.

"These days, something that has increased on Facebook and other social media sites is people cursing the government and questioning what the government has done to get these hostages released," Mohaqiq said.

Seventeen days ago, masked armed men kidnapped 31 passengers in Zabul and took them to the Khak Afghan district. The men were reportedly speaking an unidentifiable foreign language. The hostages are thought to have been since relocated to another part of the province, or even perhaps another province all together. (Tolonews)

(17) Kandahar Police

eight "strongmen" linked to police, intelligence, and militia forces responsible for serious abuses in recent years. (Pajhwok)

(18) NSC Calls

traffic jams.

NSC insisted torture was unacceptable under any condition and presented a set of plans to ban it. The council asked the organs concerned to implement the its decisions on banning torture.

Some suggestions and measures were also taken in order to reduce the number of casualties among security personnel, added the statement. (Pajhwok)

(19) Lack of Progress

peace talks would begin at the start of March, with news that U.S. officials were already meeting with Taliban leaders in Qatar to discuss the terms of the talks. But that timeframe has come and gone with little news of progress.

Government sources, on condition of anonymity, have maintained that China has already been chose as the venue for the talks, and that Syed Ahmad Gillani would be appointed as the head of the High Peace Council (HPC) in order to lead up the negotiations. The President and Chief Executive are then reportedly to decide together over any terms of agreement with the Taliban.

Political analysts have said one of the key goals of the talks should be to get the Taliban to endorse the Afghan Constitution, agree to respect human rights, particularly women's rights, and, more generally, to preserve the gains of the past 14 years. (Tolonews)

(20) ACSEN Warns

of the electoral reforms commission. Our demand is that members of the commission should be professionals and civil society should

have a major role in their nomination," he added.

Earlier, the Independent Elections Commission (IEC) and Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) welcomed the reforms but warned against giving extra-constitutional powers to the commission. (Pajhwok)

(21) Hundreds of

Khalid, the former head of the National Security Directorate, and General Abdul Raziq, the Kandahar provincial police commander.

While taking a swipe at the HRW findings, he said Afghan officials' contribution to stability should be acknowledged and misleading propaganda against them countered effectively in the supreme national interest. (Pajhwok)

(22) Preemptive Steps

as Dayesh, which is a great joke on the long-suffering nation," he noted.

Cleric Maulvi Najibullah Haqyar said the government should respect religious figures and jihadi commanders for the sake of lasting peace and security in the country. Jamaluddin Sayar, a provincial council member, said another catastrophe was in the making in the shape of Dayesh. The government and people should work together to ward off that threat, he suggested. (Pajhwok)

(23) UK's Upgraded

older helicopter the crew would first have to check loading tables for temperatures and weights ahead of any flight in 'hot and high' conditions, with the HC.2 "we can just load up and go!" (Agencies)

(24) ALP Personnel

ALP men wounded. (Pajhwok)

(25) 4 Police Personnel

during a clearing operation in Lashkargah, the capital of Helmand, and Greshk district. Deputy police chief Col. Pacha Gul Bakhtiar said the Taliban wanted to storm police check-posts in Khashkabi and Nehr-i-Siraj localities. (Pajhwok)

(26) 300 Saplings

it has on every living specimen. Hashmat Khan Lake was once an area where people flocked with their families, but has now turned into a waste-land endangering the animal's habitat. (Tolonews)

(27) 16-Member

had renounced violence in the province and the government had provided them with jobs.

"Earlier, we provided insurgents who returned to normal life with jobs but now the government pays the command-er 13,000 afghanis and each fighter 8,000 afghanis a month," he added.

Rough Gul said: "We were involved in anti-state activities in Ghanikhel and Batikot districts. But now we understand that we were on the wrong path, destroying our own country." (Pajhwok)

(28) Mangal Bagh-Led

Sajna -also abandoned the The Pakistani Taliban alliance, which had been founded by Baitullah Mehsud in December 2007. (Pajhwok)

(29) Key Taliban

20 soldiers dead. (KP)

(30) NDS Claims

Separately, NDS operatives arrested four other men from Taloqan on charges of kidnapping and killing a resident of Farkhar district. (Pajhwok)

(31) Tackling Disasters

contained in the Hyogo Framework for Action," he said.

Talks could continue through Tuesday, in a form to be decided on Saturday, so that a final version of the plan could be presented for approval on Wednesday, when the conference is scheduled to close. (Reuters)

(32) EU Unlikely

that we could talk about cancelling sanctions," Lajcak told reporters in Slovakia.

The asset freezes and travel bans on 150 people and 37 organizations were extended for a further six months, until Sept. 15. Details will be published in the EU's Official Journal on Saturday.

The decision was a formality after EU foreign ministers agreed in January to extend the sanctions. (Reuters)

(33) Dushanbe Hosts

Member States agencies directly, and to reinforce their synergies with the EU's border management programme for Afghanistan, BOM-NAF; (Agencies)