

(1) Germany, US ...

of the international community's commitment and support for Afghanistan.

He said based on the agreement on which the unity government was formed it was necessary that the electoral reforms commission start its work.

He expressed concerns about a spike in insecurity in northern provinces, saying training of Afghan forces was ongoing in an effective manner. (Pajhwok)

(2) Rula Ghani ...

on Saturday.

A statement from the RS mission said that the Committee will assist in determining how internationally donated funds on gender plans, programs, and projects will be invested in Afghanistan.

The meeting, the statement said was attended by key stakeholders from the government of Afghanistan, ambassadors, and representatives from international organizations.

Stakeholders discussed the priorities for Resolute Support's efforts toward the enduring participation of women in the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), and how their full and safe contribution to the security and stability of Afghanistan would best be secured. The protection of the human rights of women and girls was also discussed.

"Today marks an important milestone in Resolute Support's ongoing backing to gender initiatives within the Afghan Security Institutions (ASI)," said General John Campbell, Commander of Resolute Support mission. "This committee will serve as a valuable forum and platform through which we can better coordinate our collective efforts to support Afghan women in uniform. " Afghan servicewomen already have, and will continue to play an increasingly important role in protecting the Afghan people. Female soldiers and policewomen—just like their male counterparts—have already proven their willingness to lay down their lives in defense of this nation. I salute the courage and commitment of all the brave women who currently serve in uniform. They are setting a model example of selfless service for generations to come."

Col. Amanda Fielding, Resolute Support Senior Gender Advisor said: "The establishment of the Advisory Committee is an important step. The committee's role will be to provide political and strategic guidance on the plans and programs to support gender integration within the armed forces in Afghanistan."

The advisory committee will be chaired by the commander of Resolute Support, General John Campbell. Among other members are Ms. Dilbar Nazari, Minister for Women's Affairs; Dr. Habiba Sarabi, Chief Executive's Senior Advisor in Women and Youth Affairs; Ms. Nargis Nehan, Presidential Advisor; Chair of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, Dr. Sima Samar; UNAMA's Senior Representative Secretary Nicholas Haysom; NATO Senior Civilian Representative, Ambassador Ismail Aramaz; Canadian Ambassador Deborah Lyons; German Ambassador Marcus Poetzel as well as other key stakeholders within Afghan government institutions, non-government associations and international organizations. (Pajhwok)

(3) Govt. Officials...

interview with Pajhwok Afghan News said former commander of border police, district police chief in Takhar, the ninth police district crime branch chief and some other officials had been tried for their involvement in drug trafficking.

He would not bow to pressures for early who had been punished in drug related cases. "There is no space for government officials to interfere in CJTF affairs," he added.

Afghanistan was the largest poppy producer in the world where 90 percent of the illicit substance is produced.

According to CJTF, more than one tonne of heroin, 500 kilograms of morphine, more than 6.5 tonnes of opium, 500 kilograms of hashish and other kinds of chemical drugs were seized in the ongoing year. (Pajhwok)

(4) Karzai, Modi ...

Earlier, the former president visited India, Australia, Germany and a number of other countries.

During the meeting with Indian prime minister, Karzai thanked Modi for his government continued support to Afghanistan.

Karzai demanded India to extend all possible cooperation in development projects and security institu-

tions so that Afghanistan should be able to defend itself. (Pajhwok)

(5) ISIS Actively...

He says many are pledging allegiance to ISIS, which controls about a third of Syria and Iraq.

"It is absolutely a concern" Campbell says, though his statement contradicts some Afghan officials who have said the group is fighting in a number of regions in Afghanistan.

The ISIS presence in Afghanistan has grown considerably in the past six months, Campbell says. (AP)

(6) Lack of ...

inability to compromise.

"I am quite concerned about reform in the electoral system," Khan said on Friday. "If there is will, both leaders would be able to form the commission within one hour, they could even address the issue while eating dinner or breakfast," he added.

The delay in pursuing electoral reform has caused a crisis for the parliamentary elections originally scheduled for this year, with many commentators doubtful the elections will take place. Election monitoring groups, political leaders and the international community have rejected the possibility of holding the elections without reform first.

In addition to undermining the government's stability and credibility, the deadlock over reform places lawmakers in Parliament in a precarious position. So long as parliamentary elections are put off, MPs face a dilemma in interpreting the Afghan Constitution - some say they would be permitted to remain in office past their term dates, while others say it would be unconstitutional. "It would be better that the parliament continue its job until reforms are implemented in the country's electoral system, and also the commission lack's the financial resources to hold the parliamentary poll," MP Munawwar Shah Bahaduri said on Friday. Indeed, international donors recently announced they would withhold funding for the Afghan election commissions until reforms are put in place. (Tolnews)

(7) Computerized System ...

department, said the new system would connect revenue departments of the country with the Central Bank, adding that it would be activated from today.

He said up till now revenue was being collected manually which led to massive corruption and waste of time. The official said that Ministry of Finance had planned various new programs to bolster the performance of the ministry. (Pajhwok)

(8) Indian Consortium...

also be a reason for the move, sources in the know say the plan never really seemed progressing in the last four years though the Indian companies were initially "very bullish" about the project.

Afghan Iron and Steel Consortium (AFISCO) had got for three high-grade iron ore mines, having an estimated reserve of 1.28 billion tonne. The seven-member consortium, which includes JSW Steel, JSPL, NMDC and RINL, devised the plan to set up in phases a 6.12 million tonne steel plant, an 800 MW power facility, create infrastructure for mine development and necessary infrastructure at a cumulative investment of \$10.8 billion over 11-15 years. This was meant to be the biggest foreign investment proposal by Indian firms.

Hopes gradually turned into apprehensions over security concerns triggered by militant attacks on the Indian consulate in Herat, on a SpiceJet plane at Kabul airport and on a UK embassy car in Kabul. Attempting to reduce the vulnerability of the project in the war-torn country, the investment plan was later pruned by 75% to just \$2.9 billion for a 1.25 mtpa steel plant, 120 MW power plant and for creation of necessary infrastructure.

Citing delay and uncertainty hovering over the venture, state-run Rashtriya Ispat Nigam, which has 18% stake in the special purpose vehicle, had earlier written to the steel ministry seeking to reduce its stake in the venture to "as low as possible". A company official earlier said, "The company does not want to park up its funds in a far-flung project that is full of uncertainty and already much delayed."

At a January meeting of the inter-ministerial group consisting of representatives of the ministries of external affairs, steel, railways and finance, the consortium members had expressed "apprehensions" on pursuing the project, but it was decided they should stay engaged with it. At the latest meeting on April 22, the group decided to pull the trig-

ger taking a view that the project be dropped.

Sources said the trigger for pulling out from the project altogether was not just the recent attacks in Kabul, but also the critical aspect of the project. The consortium members in a recent meeting expressed concerns on technical feasibility due to absence of road connectivity both for import of plant and machinery and for evacuation of the finished products.

"They expressed apprehensions on the economic viability of the project due to the steep decline in global iron ore and steel prices and the increased cost of production since the time the bid was submitted in September, 2011," a senior government official said.

SAIL and NMDC have 20% and 18% stakes, respectively, in the Afghan venture. Private-sector JSW Steel and JSPL hold 16% each, while erstwhile JSW Ispat and Monnet Ispat have 8% and 4% stakes, respectively. (Pajhwok)

(9) Pak-Afghan...

agencies will share intelligence information based the agreement and jointly fight terrorism in the region. Ajmal Obaid Abidy, spokesman for President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, said both parties and head of agencies from the two countries will sign the agreement once it has been finalized.

Responding to concerns regarding the agreement with ISI, the NDS spokesman Haseeb Sediqi said last week the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with Pakistan is not against the national interests of the country and the agreement was concluded based on previous mutual cooperation between the two nations. (KP)

(10) Bamyan Lawmakers ..

representative of Bamyan in Wolesi Jirga, said security situation in the province would get worse under the leadership of new governor. "People are concerned about the negative behavior of Zahir that is why they oppose him," Shahidani said. Mohammad Tahir Zahir is the resident of Dara-i-Sof Bala district of Samangan province who received his bachelor degree in sociology from Kateb private university.

He had also served as advisor to former second vice-president Mohammad Khalili from 2011 to 2014. Zahir was also served as commander of 34th ground brigade in Bamyan from 2001 to 2004.

He was the spokesperson of P resident Mohammad Ashraf Ghani during his electioneering campaign in 2014. (Pajhwok)

(11) Uruzgan Forces ...

to capture it. Mohammad Nayab, the governor's spokesman, also confirmed severe fighting between security forces and insurgents in the province. (Pajhwok)

(12) US Warns...

attacks, including vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), direct and indirect fire, and suicide bombings.

The same risks also exist in other major cities in Afghanistan, including Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Kandahar, it said.

A strong possibility for hostile acts exists throughout the country at all times, either targeted or random, against both US and other foreign nationals, it added. (Pajhwok)

(13) Soldiers are ...

"In their lives, Specialist Wyatt Martin and Sergeant First Class Ramon Morris travelled different paths," said Obama. "But in December, their paths intersected as the final two Americans to give their lives during our combat mission in Afghanistan."

"Americans gave everything they had - not for glory, not even for gratitude, but for something greater than themselves," said Obama.

"We are the Americans they died to defend," he said. "We have to honor their memory. We have to care for their families, and our veterans who served with them. And as a nation, we have to remain worthy of their sacrifice - forever committed to the country they loved and the freedom they fought for and died for." (Monitoring Desk)

(14) Kunar Elders ...

of this province had great sacrifices for the country and the province should be developed at every aspect. Maulvi Burhanuddin, a religious scholar, said the unity government did not pay any attention to the people of Kunar. (Pajhwok)

(15) Parwan Residents ...

concern over the performance of

provincial council members.

Mohammad Sharif, a resident of Charikar, told Pajhwok Afghan News he still hasn't seen any commendable work to be done by the council.

He said problems of road construction and potable water were immediate needs of the people that they should've addressed.

Najibullah Wahidi, a civil society activist, said during the campaigns the candidates had made pledges to change people's lives in each and every aspect. "But the council still hasn't done something appreciable." For instance, he said, the Hofian Sharif road in the provincial capital and lack of dormitory at Parwan University were among problems that needed to be addressed urgently.

"We are not pleased with the council's work. We don't expect them to work for us from their own pockets, but for development projects they should work hard with government officials," he added.

Hashmatullah, another resident, said the council was still new and needed more time to get things done. He added the council's members have already started joint work with authorities to resolve electricity problem of the province.

Hashmatullah was of the opinion that people should not expect big work in less time from the council. "If there are facilities for them and they won't work then that would be their negligence."

Shams-ul-Haq Shaikhani, provincial council secretary, said they regained the right to oversight and evaluation of local departments which was a big achievement. He said the council was committed to thoroughly evaluate the performance of local departments.

He added the provincial council is in contact with local officials and have regular meetings with them. Shaikhani added they have also established committees to evaluate the performance of security, reconstruction and other officials.

Shaikhani said electricity sub-station project in Jabal Seraj district was halted but after efforts by provincial council members and in coordination with local officials the project was reactivated. (Pajhwok)

(16) AUAF Confers ...

as international universities including AUAF," he remarked, adding that these youth would be a guarantee for a better tomorrow.

He also expressed gratitude to those countries that helped Afghanistan education sector, saying: "our achievements without doubt belong to us, but they wouldn't have been possible without the support of international community."

Former president expressed gratitude to the American people for their assistance in improving higher education, health sector, road construction and economic development.

Karzai said he was in favor of better relations with the US if they were cooperating and proving useful in Afghanistan's unity and strength.

Quoting former American President John F. Kennedy, Karzai said, "In one of his historical speeches John F. Kennedy told his people not to ask what America has done to you, but to ask what you have done to America."

"I'm repeating his words here to the youth of our country not to ask What Afghanistan has done to you, but to ask what you have done to our dear Afghanistan that has so warmly embraced us," he concluded. (Pajhwok)

(17) Consultative ...

outcome and could bring about transparency in electoral matters. He said the authorities concerned should take practical steps to resolve problems concerning elections.

He said the civil society had some proposals which needed to be jointly enforced by the IEC, government departments and the people.

Asafkhel called for issuance of electronic identity cards and reforms in the electoral system and suggested that previously issued voter cards should be declared void and four constituencies created in each province.

Civil society activist Anar Gul, who had participated in consultative meetings with IEC officials, said the government and other parties should not cut deals on elections besides paying attention to the mentioned problems for the sake of a transparent ballot. He recalled the first round of presidential election had been transparent somewhat, but every candidate committed and initiated acts that questioned the runoff vote's transparency.

He said efforts should be made to ensure that the future elections were transparent in order to protect peo-

ple's rights and prevent any political deadlock.

Paktia provincial council member Dr. Allah Mir Zazai said held the IEC and the government responsible for failing to hold elections as per people's wish and the relevant law.

He said the government's and the IEC's mistakes and weaknesses had eroded people's trust in elections and people would not easily partake in polls until they were given a strong guarantee.

Zazai said if the previous mistakes were repeated in the upcoming parliamentary elections, powerful and illegible people would find their way to the lower house and they would create problems for the government.

Wadan Afghanistan political party member in Paktia, Syed Rahman Nilazi, told Pajhwok Afghan News the people had lost faith in the elections for three reasons.

He mentioned the three reasons as illegal activities of candidates and their supporters, accepting bribes by IEC officials in return for succeeding candidates and cutting deal on people's votes.

He said civil society groups could do much to resolve such issues by working independently.

Widespread fraud allegations marred both rounds of the presidential election, sparking a months-long political impasse.

President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah in their unity government deal have agreed to implement electoral reforms.

Months after the unity government's inauguration, an electoral reforms commission was formed, but the panel is yet to start its job. (Pajhwok)

(18) Spiraling Faryab...

state-run weekly and two other papers that are being published irregularly while outlets have faced closure.

Mohammad Kazem Amini, editor-in-chief of "Maimana" newspaper, said they started first publication 13 years ago with the aim of reflecting social, cultural and environmental issues.

He told Pajhwok Afghan News his paper was published in the last eight years 40 times with his own finance, but was closed down by local officials.

"In the last one year because of a satirical poem titled "message to powerful" they summoned me to attorney general office twice and even there was an attempt on my life, thinking the piece was an insult to local officials," he remarked.

He added in the last 14 years mass communication means should have been extended to every corner and village of the province, but in contrary it was reduced and their activities were limited.

Regarding the cooperation of information and culture department with local media, he said: "Ministry of information and culture is a symbolic department. They themselves need help how they can help the media."

Sayed Zainuddin Abedi, editor-in-chief of Tolo-i-Shams that got published irregularly in the province, said because of lack of funds he could not continue with the work.

He noted in the last 14 years, the government and international community invested in all sector except media in the province. He said if the officials had paid attention to the print media, it could prove highly useful to reform the society, social justice and changing public opinion. He warned the remaining papers would also have no choice but to close down if the government did not assist them.

Waisuddin Samel, Rah-i-Sabz paper editor-in-chief, said he had been active in the past five years but faced many challenges including lack of professional writers.

Sayed Abdul Rashid Mansuri, director information and culture department, acknowledged the existing challenges, saying problem of security, lack of financial means, lack of professional cadre and donors had added up to their challenges.

Mohammad Kazim Amini, however, said director of information and culture had been appointed since last six months and did not have proper understanding of the system. He added that Faryab had hundreds of professional cadre and adept writers. The information and culture director said in the beginning some people were eager to start newspapers and publications, but when the donors stopped funding the outlets faced shut down.

Ahmad Firoz, a student at Faryab University, said media activities in the province over the last decade was appreciable but said the print media's condition was a matter of concern. "The papers do not get

printed on regular basis for economic and security reasons."

Abdul Ahad Elbek, provincial council member, said the digital media had boomed in the province and was a major reason for decline of print media. He added television, radio, and social media had attracted people's attention.

He urged government to address the financial and security issues of the press in the province. "There is no governor or district chief here. Everything is being taken care by acting officials. How we can address the problem of media in such a situation."

The information and culture department officials made it clear they did not have financial means to assist private media. He said they have shared the issue with officials in Kabul to attract international donors for media's support.

The only television channel in the province is the state-run source of communication that has five hours broadcasting daily.

Ariana, Arzo and Ayena are other private channels that could be accessed in the province.

Around eight radio stations also air programmes in the province, out of which Radio Qoyash had been actively airing programmes for women.

Information and culture director said the radios also faced the same challenge like the print media. "These radios are run by youth and only air songs and entertainment programmes. They don't have educational programmes."

Based on official figures, currently 35 television networks, 62 radio channels are active in Kabul, while 54 television networks and 160 radio channels are active in provinces. (Pajhwok)

(19)28 Rebels Army (ANA) soldiers and an Afghan Local Police (ALP) member were also killed in the showdown.

The source added that two more policemen were killed in a roadside bombing in Maghiz area of Qalat City, the provincial capital this morning.

Taliban spokesman Qari Yousuf Ahmadi claimed killing 11 security forces in Arghandab clashes. He confirmed the death of three rebels and injuries to six others.

Elsewhere, one person dead and two others wounded when a petty issue developed into an armed clash between two groups in central Parwan province, an official said Saturday. (Pajhwok)

(20) Nimroz Elders...

Maulvi Ubaidullah, a religious scholar, said individuals who came from abroad worked as governor did not perform well because they had little knowledge about ground realities.

Earlier, reports said some acting governors would be reappointed as governors in some provinces. (Pajhwok)

(21) Militancy...

yet to arrest anyone in this regard. Meanwhile, Zabihullah Mujahid who claims to speak for the Taliban outfit, in contact with media claimed of responsibility, insisting a Taliban loyalist penetrated into police rank had conducted the attack and after killing four police rejoined the armed outfit. Moreover, the Ministry of Interior in a statement released here on Saturday reported killing 54 armed insurgents over the past 24 hours. (Xinhua)

(22) Islamic State...

Abdulkarim, the head of the Antiquities and Museums Department in Damascus, told The Associated Press that militants entered the museum in the town's center Friday afternoon, locked the doors and left behind their own guards. He said that the artifacts earlier had been moved away to safety. (AP)

(23) Iranian Aid...

"The ship carries 2,500 ton of humanitarian aid and that includes mainly rice and wheat flour, as well as medicine, water, tents and blankets." (AFP)

(24) Central Asia...

oil and gas exporters—Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—should see growth decline to 3.5 percent in 2015 from 5.5 percent last year, the IMF report says. (TCA)

(25) Freedom of ...

tion of independent television and radio broadcasters, to develop their active citizenship, the creation of conditions of freedom of speech in the country on the basis of further development of competition in the creation and dissemination of high quality media-production. (PR)