

(1) Eying Intra...

had said in Brussels, US, EU and Nato officials talked about "the meaningful political and social gains" in Afghanistan over the last 18 years, especially for women and children, and agreed that those gains "must be prioritised" in the peace process. (Pajhwok)

(2) 'Fight and Talk...

importance, such as last year's "Al Khan-daq" campaign - named after the Battle of the Trench, fought by the Prophet Mohammad to defend the city of Medina in Islam's early days.

This year, Afghan forces beat the Taliban to naming their offensive, launching a spring operation dubbed "Khaled", an Arabic word for "endless", said the Afghan security source.

"The objective of the operations this year will be to improve intelligence gathering and targeted strikes against the enemy," he said.

The "fight and talk" strategy has been used to describe the Afghan war as far back as the Obama U.S. presidency. One diplomat said Afghanistan's escalation follows a similar path of greater fighting in South Sudan and Colombia ahead of peace settlements for those conflicts. But for a country 17 years into its latest war, the escalation only adds to a sense of discouragement.

Rising violence also comes with the risk that positions will harden, deferring a settlement, rather than creating urgency that could bring the sides together, said the ICG's Smith.

Afghanistan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, asked about the more aggressive strategy, said it simply reflected a need to be ready for every possibility.

"If the government and the Taliban agreed on a ceasefire, then the security defense forces will act accordingly," he told reporters in Kabul.

Pentagon spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Kone Faulkner said in an email that there has been "no change" in U.S. policies and in its partnered fighting with Afghan forces.

TALIBAN GEARING UP

The latest round of recurring peace talks ended in early March with both U.S. and Taliban officials citing progress. The start of the next round has not been announced, but is expected this month.

The negotiations came amid fierce fighting in several corners of Afghanistan, from Kunduz province in the north to Helmand in the south and Badghis in the northwest. Some 100 members of Afghan forces were killed in two attacks in Badghis and Helmand. Thirteen civilians, including 10 children, died in a U.S. air strike in Kunduz and more civilians died in a Helmand stadium attack by the Taliban.

Ninety-four members of the Taliban died in a single battle near Kunduz city, according to NATO's Resolute Support Mission, which is supported by troops from 39 countries to train, advise and assist Afghan forces. Fighting in the province killed two U.S. soldiers a day earlier. The Taliban, meanwhile, met recently to discuss the timing and name of its spring campaign, said a Taliban leader, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"Our focus would be more specifically on targeted operations," the leader said. "Our top priority would be minimizing civilian losses."

Some Taliban leaders had suggested simply continuing ongoing operations and awaiting the outcome of peace talks, he said. But the group decided against further delay once Afghan forces launched its Khaled offensive, he said.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the group would launch its spring offensive in about a month when the weather warms.

One diplomat, whose country supplies soldiers to the Resolute Support mission, said he doubted the Taliban wanted to stop fighting, because it would be difficult to quickly regain the insurgency's fighting capability if its forces dispersed. "The Taliban's leverage is their military activities," a second diplomat said.

Both spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of talks.

Increased fighting also heightens concerns about civilian casualties, after a record 3,804 civilians were killed last year, said Anthony Neal, advocacy manager for the Norwegian Refugee Council in Afghanistan.

More conflict has also forced nearly 4,000 people from their homes in the last three months alone, he said. (Reuters)

(3) Nabi Sinks...

And, when he finished his impressive spell which included 16 dot balls, Nabi had ruled RCB out of the match at 38 for six in eight overs.

Compounding RCB's misery was Kohli's dismissal off seam bowler Sandeep Shar-

ma. The skipper leant into the drive but drilled it straight into the hands of Warner at cover.

This was RCB's third straight loss and SRH's second win in three games. (Tolo news)

(4) Central Bank...

from Afghanistan is expected to be completed latest by third quarter 2019 and will be done as per the regulatory requirements of Afghanistan and in consultation with the central bank of Afghanistan (Da Afghanistan Bank)," the bank's spokesman said.

"HBL's international footprint is important for the bank to service its domestic and international clients even better and this role will only strengthen in 2019." HBL currently has one branch in Kabul. The bank obtained business licence from Afghanistan Investment Support Agency in April 2004, which is valid till July 30, 2020, according to the information available on the HBL's website.

HBL is closing operations in Afghanistan to focus on select markets, which meet client requirements. He said the bank will be rightsizing operations in some markets. (Pajhwok)

(5) Afghan Artist Wins...

book designing respectively.

Taraky wrote on his Facebook page: "This weekend, I had the opportunity to attend the Spectrum 26 Artist Award and sit among some of the most talented men and women in the industry."

He thanked all founders of the Spectrum and judges for providing the platform for artists to dream and aspire.

"Thanks to my family in Canada, who cheer for me and root for me through all my ups and downs. They are always at my core, and the people who inspire me."

He also thanked his wife, Rachel and said her support has been endless even through late nights painting, or long tedious trips for workshops and classes. (Pajhwok)

(6) Former Ambassador...

international organizations. This means building civil society and government accountability in fragile states where extremism is taking hold, and hopefully, through such efforts, reducing the number of the disenfranchised who end up drawn to violent groups that embrace terror.

Such work is hard to boil down to sound bites. Success is uncertain, and may be difficult to measure.

"A preventive strategy will not stop every terrorist attack. It will take time to produce results. It will require us to recognize the limits of our influence and work hard to leverage our resources," the report said. "But it offers our best hope."

The task force's findings have some support in Congress, helping to shape bipartisan legislation now pending in the House (where Rep. Adam Smith, D-Bellevue, is a sponsor) and Senate to require the U.S. government to develop a unified, long-term approach to prevention. The legislation calls for the State Department, Defense Department and other federal agencies to forge a 10-year strategy to address the underlying causes of "fragility and violence," then periodically report to Congress on how that effort is progressing.

The bill's supporters included Portland-based Mercy Corps, an international aid group that in recent years has increasingly focused on programs that can reduce conflict. Mercy Corps, with Town Hall, co-hosted Eikenberry's talk.

In northern Nigeria, for example, Mercy Corps brought together often-feuding farmers and herders to talk about their differences but also their common problems. In Somalia, at-risk youth were offered educational opportunities, and enlisted in projects to improve their communities.

During his tenure as ambassador, Eikenberry presided over a buildup of civilian staff at embassy who helped to manage a massive increase in U.S. aid that included projects intended to help build civil society. And he repeatedly ventured out of the heavily fortified Kabul embassy to travel to more than 30 Afghan provinces, visiting prisons as well as the palatial offices of regional leaders.

He thought such travel was important to counteract an Afghan perception that American diplomats were growing more isolated in the sprawling U.S. embassy, and help him figure out what was and was not working.

Eikenberry, in his Seattle talk, cited what he said was a notable success: a U.S.-funded program in Afghanistan that recruited rural women to train as midwives in urban centers. "These women would return to these rural areas and suddenly they were rock

stars because they were keeping women healthy," Eikenberry said, adding that they gained the support of conservative tribal elders who had been reluctant to see them educated elsewhere.

Eikenberry said the valuable work done by these midwives lessened the recruitment appeal, at least in those villages, of a Taliban ideology that called for keeping women in their homes. "You think of building islands of excellence around the country," he said. "At the national level, it can be much harder."

As ambassador, Eikenberry grew increasingly frustrated with, and critical of, of then-Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai.

In November 2009, in diplomatic cables later made public by The New York Times, he wrote that Karzai "continues to shun responsibility for any sovereign burden," and cautioned that the surge of American troops would only boost the dependency of the Afghan government on the United States.

Nearly a decade later, the war in Afghanistan continues, and hopes of U.S. military gains have faded further.

"We had some amazing accomplishments in the country in health care and education," Eikenberry said in an interview before his talk. "But in many different areas, especially in the domain of security, the results have been disappointing. I'm not optimistic that -- if we don't have a peace agreement -- our continued presence will improve conditions." (Tribune News Service)

(7) Questions Raised...

rates among Afghan forces.

Dostum landed in Balkh province, in the north of Afghanistan, from an abroad trip, apparently to Turkey and Uzbekistan, on Friday.

Dostum addressed a gathering of his supporters in Balkh where he said that he will "eliminate" the Taliban from the north within six months if he is given the chance.

Later in the day, he headed to Jawzjan province from Balkh and his convoy faced multiple attacks by the Taliban. Four of his bodyguards were killed in the attacks.

The Presidential Palace did not comment on reasons behind Dostum's absence in cabinet meetings but former deputy speaker of the Afghan parliament, Nazir Ahmad Ahmadzai, said the issue is linked to Dostum's "inability" that he cannot use his authorities predicted for vice president in the Constitution of Afghanistan.

"He (Dostum) is the first vice president and he should know his responsibilities and if he acts and makes suggestions in the light of these authorities, they will be implemented. This will not be possible if he remains as vice president and if he wants to act like a commander," Ahmadzai said.

"His (Dostum's) absence as one of the fundamental part of the system could leave a negative impact on government's activities," said Rohullah Sakhizad, a legal expert.

Meanwhile, Bashir Ahmad Tahyanj, spokesman for the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan led by Dostum, said the first vice president is holding consultations with representatives of the people over the upcoming meetings on Afghan peace in Qatar and Uzbekistan.

"The people of Afghanistan are on eve of great events including the peace process, Qatar meeting and Samarkand meeting and he (Dostum) is holding consultations with the people about it," Tahyanj said. (Pajhwok)

(8) 'Billions Worth...

Samkanai, who took his office as governor of Paktika four months ago, did not name any specific official who according to him were involved in the case.

"They entered the PRT base and looted it. Based on my information, they even looted locked containers full of computers, weapons, and even Humvees and Pickup vehicles had existed at the base," Samkanai said.

Paktika Police Chief Gen. Ghulam Sakhi Rogh Lewanai, meanwhile, admitted that military equipment is missing.

"I have shared the issue with the Ministry of Interior and the issue was also discussed in the provincial administration session and was also discussed in the coordination council that old equipment is on the verge of destruction, so let's use the equipment for strengthening our strongholds instead of being destroyed by dust," said Lewanai.

One Paktika resident, who is familiar with the base, said there is a need for clarification on the issue by local officials.

"In the end of 2013 and 2014, American forces left the base and handed

equipment worth nearly \$8 billion to the Afghan government but after their withdrawal from the base, most of the equipment were looted and this all happened under the administration of former governor Mohibullah Samim and other high-ranking officials," Paktika resident Yaqub Manzoor claimed.

"According to fresh information, equipment worth \$1 billion still exist at the base and the rest of are either broken, looted or stolen. There is also some information that some Humvees have been sent and sold to Pakistan as iron parts," said Yaqub Manzoor a resident. (Tolo news)

(9) 'MSF leaves Kabul...

good quality health services to area people and most residents of the eastern part of Kabul would visit the hospital for being pleased with hospital's services.

He said it surprised people that the MSF handed over its activities to the Ministry of Public Health but continued its services in Dashti Barchi locality of Kabul city. He said: "We wish the MSF should not have made such a decision and continued its services in the Ahmad Shah Baba hospital."

Hazrat Wali Ahmadzai, another resident of Ahmad Shah Baba area, highly appreciated MSF services in the past and demanded the organization continue its services in the area.

"As per my information, a diagnostic machine worth \$80,000 had gone missing from the hospital thus the MSF decided to stop its activities in the hospital. He said the TB diagnostic machine went missing last year.

Waheedullah Mayar, MoFH's spokesman, was unaware about the missing of the diagnostic machine from the Ahmad Shah Baba hospital and said MSF officials had not informed them about it as yet. However, he appreciated MSF services in the hospital. (Pajhwok)

(10) 3 Polio Cases in...

infected children's families showed a strong opposition to giving polio vaccine to their children.

He said whenever volunteers visited their homes for administering polio drops, the children's families threatened them.

He said most of the infected children happened to be sons or relatives of local Taliban commanders.

He said efforts were underway to facilitate every polio vaccination drive in all areas of the province. He said around 1,600 volunteers had so far administered anti-polio drops to 200,000 children in the province. (Pajhwok)

(11) Canada Marks...

and military officials who shared solemn words of remembrance.

Canada's Chief of the Defence Staff, General Jonathan Vance, said the country is still trying to learn how best to care for those who were wounded -- physically and emotionally -- during the war in Afghanistan.

"We cannot ever forget that warfare takes its toll and always will," he said. "This war took a physical toll on the dead and wounded and took a mental toll on many people left behind that may not appear wounded, but they are."

Stephane Lauzon, parliamentary secretary to Veterans Affairs Minister Lawrence MacAulay, also acknowledged the toll the conflict continues to have for many.

A total of 158 Canadian Armed Forces and seven Canadian civilians were killed in the conflict and more than 40,000 Canadians in uniform served in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014.

"They cannot and will not be forgotten, nor can the thousands who left with physical and psychological injuries. For those who returned home with injury and for those who continue to struggle with those injuries, we will continue to improve our support and services for you," Lauzon said.

"Whether the injury be physical or mental, we will be there for you."

Cenerini said she feels humbled by the sacrifices of so many families who lost loved ones and is grateful to have their lives honoured at the National War Memorial -- a physical place where she says remembering them is profound.

Her son's courage brings her strength, she said, even when it comes with deep sadness.

"That's the most important story, that when Thomas could have said no, he didn't. He said yes. And I think that's all that really matters," she said. (Agencies)

(12) Panic as 2...

initial treatment at the district clinic, but they were referred to the provincial civil hospital in Charkiar, the provincial capital, and Kabul for anti-rabies vaccination. Saifullah Baidar, the district's adminis-

trative chief, told Pajhwok they had been informed about the incident and had appointed a team eliminate the rabid dogs in the area as soon as possible. (Pajhwok)

(13) Treaty's End...

to cut their deployed strategic nuclear warheads to no more than 1,550, the lowest level in decades, and limit delivery systems - land- and submarine-based missiles and nuclear-capable bombers. It also includes extensive transparency measures requiring each side to allow the other to carry out 10 inspections of strategic nuclear bases each year; give 48 hours notice before new missiles covered by the treaty leave their factories; and provide notifications before ballistic missile launches.

Both sides must also exchange data declaring their deployed strategic nuclear warheads, delivery vehicles and launchers, as well as breakdowns of how many of each are located at individual bases. (Reuters)

(14) Q&A: What's in...

answers regarding the process of picking an era name:

WHAT IS THE ERA NAME?

The era name, or "gengo," is a 1,400-year-old Japanese tradition tied to emperors' reigns to showcase their power. The names change when a new emperor takes the throne. It becomes an emperor's official posthumous name -- Akihito's father, Hirohito, is now named after his era, "Showa."

Originally a Chinese tradition, the era name is made of two Chinese characters taken from classic Chinese literature. Japan adopted the system in 645 and has since had 247 eras, including Akihito's 1989-2019 "Heisei," which means "achieving peace." Showa is the longest era, at 64 years. Akihito's Heisei is the first decided by the government under the postwar constitution, in which the emperor is stripped of political power and had no say over the choice.

Still, the government, with its highly secretive and sensitive handling of the process, is underscoring that "the emperor has power in an invisible, subtle way," said Hirohito Suzuki, a Toyo University sociologist.

HOW WIDELY IS THE ERA NAME USED?

The era name is only for domestic use. Although its use is not compulsory, Japanese government offices and businesses still widely use the system in official documents, coins, calendars and for other paperwork. Middle-age to elderly people often use "gengo" to identify their generations, while younger people prefer the Western calendar over the era name as conversions are cumbersome in a highly globalized and digitalized society.

Popularity of era names has dropped to less than half over the past four decades since the late 1970s. Though impractical, the era name is considered Japan's traditional culture and is expected to continue despite persistent calls by some to abolish it.

WHO DECIDES THE ERA NAME AND HOW?

The procedures to change the era name is based on a 1979 law, with the government picking a team of experts on classical literature in Chinese to find and nominate several names each for top officials to review. It is a complicated process that must meet certain criteria -- easy to read and write but not commonly or previously used. Japanese media have been scrambling to get scoops out. The names of the scholars and their nominations have been and will be classified for decades.

On Monday, Abe's government chose the name drawn from Japan's oldest poetry book, "Manyoshu" from the 7th century, breaking with Japan's 1,400-year-old tradition -- a step seen reflecting Abe's attempt to bolster national pride that he says was weakened by war-guilt campaigns during U.S. occupation after Japan's World War II defeat.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE ERA NAME CHANGES?

A change of an era name causes a major hassle for government offices and businesses, which have to revise computer systems and software. It also leads to printing new train tickets, stamps, coins, receipts and calendars. The new era name was announced a month ahead of the start of Naruhito's reign to allow for time to adjust.

Because of a festive mood surrounding the upcoming era change, the event is also creating businesses for both the outgoing and the incoming eras. The abdication and succession events that come in the middle of the annual "golden week" expand the holidays to 10 days, bolstering tourism and other consumer spending. (Fox News)