

(1) Reconstruction ...

and affect security force and popular morale," he said.

Sopko said security is where most of the US reconstruction funding has gone, about 61 percent of the \$113 billion Congress has appropriated since fiscal year 2002, or \$68 billion.

"Security is the essential ingredient for establishing a credible, viable, legitimate government—and for persuading insurgents that they need to negotiate," he said and noted that the Afghan security sector is the setting for many of the instances where SIGAR has documented that something has gone wrong in the mostly US-funded Afghanistan reconstruction effort. As a result of the US military drawdown in Afghanistan, the MOD has lost much of its ability to collect reliable information and data on Afghan security capability and effectiveness.

"We continue to rely on Afghan reporting on unit strengths—a concern because the rolls may contain thousands of "ghost" personnel whose costs we pay and whose absence distorts realistic assessments of Afghan capabilities," Sopko said. (Pajhwok)

(2) TAPI Gas ...

countries' own energy companies, would carry 33 billion cubic metres (bcm) of gas a year.

But current plans route the underground pipeline through one of Afghanistan's most violence-wracked provinces, Helmand, where the Taliban insurgents hold sway.

"I agree ... we're going through some of the toughest territory in Afghanistan," said Sean O'Sullivan, the Central and West Asia director general of the ADB, a transaction adviser for the project.

"The challenge is there. There's no doubt about it, but I am sure it's doable."

He added, "I think if it happens, it will be quite an unprecedented example of regional cooperation, particularly in a region that finds it difficult to cooperate."

The ADB would be able to capitalise on lessons it has learnt from other infrastructure projects in Afghanistan, including building power transmission lines from Uzbekistan to Kabul and a setting up a railway in the north, O'Sullivan said.

Under current timelines, the pipeline could be operational by 2020, he told Reuters in a telephone interview this week.

Key to the TAPI's success would be spreading jobs among Afghan communities, rather than bringing in foreign contractors.

"Usually we in ADB would say, 'Look, it's a \$100-million project,' for example, and we'll break it into two or three contracts and that would attract international bidders," O'Sullivan added.

But for Afghan projects such as TAPI, O'Sullivan said, "We want to split it up into smaller parts that Afghan contractors are capable of doing, and hope to reduce the security risk by doing so."

Turkmenistan, which sits on the world's fourth-largest gas reserves, started building its section of the 1,814-km (1,127-mile) link, designed to ease its dependence on Russia and China, last December, but the three other countries have yet to begin work.

Turkmen state energy firm Turkmenengas is the main shareholder of TAPI Pipeline Company Limited, the joint venture set up to carry out the project. Other investors are Afghan Gas Enterprise, Pakistan's Inter State Gas Systems Ltd and GAIL (India) Ltd. (Reuters)

(3) US-Afghan ...

as part of the agreement between Afghanistan and US, the spokesperson said adding the US delegation for the commission has not yet been finalized. (Pajhwok)

(4) Official Calls...

the opportunity for further economic cooperation between the two neighboring countries.

Mohaqq added that negotiations between Tehran and Kabul will be held soon on six major programs in the fields of commerce, industries and mines, railways, drugs, water and refugees as part of a comprehensive plan.

Stating that there are plenty of investment opportunities in Afghanistan, Mohaqq said that many countries have invested there but

that Iran has a vacant place in this field.

He described terrorism as the enemy of all mankind and said that all countries have the right to fight terrorism in Afghanistan and take steps toward development of economic relations.

The Afghan official stressed the need for creating an economic belt after restoration of the Silk Road and expressed hope that his country would become a connecting point for economic exchanges and transit of goods.

He pointed to the problem of Afghan refugees in Iran and said he expected provision of job opportunities for Afghan immigrants in Iran.

The meeting was attended also by the Afghanistan ambassador to Iran, and a group of provincial entrepreneurs and officials. (IRNA)

(5) Rula Commends...

President Ghani for appointing four women as ministers and two others as governors. Sixty-seven women are part of the parliament. Over the past 18 months, she claimed, Afghanistan had made a lot of progress, especially in terms of infrastructure development. "Afghanistan is not as bad as the press makes it (seem)." (Pajhwok)

(6) Afghan Air...

air force, ground force units, commando units, engineering, surveillance and intelligence sectors, however, this aid is not enough," Dawlat Waziri, a defense ministry spokesman said.

The formation of a strong and capable Afghan air force was one of the key elements of the security agreement between the U.S and Afghanistan.

The ministry of defense says that after sealing the agreement, Washington has provided at least eight Super Tucano and 16 MD-530 aircraft to Afghan forces as Washington prepares to finalize the delivery of 20 more similar aircraft to Afghan forces by the end of the year.

"Until now we have not reached a level to conduct air operations independently across Afghanistan. Because the air force has not been revived," Sayed Sulaiman Shah, the commander of AAF for Kabul said.

"The expectations of the people of Afghanistan and the Afghan government are not complete, still there are shortages, our air force is not comparable with neighbors," political analyst Nasrullah Stanikzai said.

The Afghan forces conducted up to 20,000 missions during 2015 which shows a 50 percent increase compared to last year.

Currently, dozens of Afghan pilots are being trained in the U.S and in UAE in line with the BSA pact. (Tolnews)

(7) Hindus, Sikhs...

to provide these minority groups with decent living conditions in the province.

"No attention is paid to them but they are oppressed and government does not pay attention to them, nor consider them as Afghans but consider them as Hindu migrants - but they are Afghans. In the education sector separate schools are not built for their children so their children can learn and get access to higher education," said Humaira Rafi a provincial council member.

Meanwhile, Nangarhar local officials said they are trying to address the problems experienced by the Hindus and Sikhs in the province.

"Currently we are also helping them and paying salaries for their teachers in their areas and providing them with books, and providing them security for their special ceremonies and also helping them with cash in order to hold their ceremonies properly and I think at any time efforts have been made to help and aid our Hindu and Sikh brothers," said Attaullah Khogyani the governor's spokesman. Afghan Hindu and Sikhs argue that central government needs to address their problems. (Tolnews)

(8) Russian, Indian ...

discussed the delivery of a 4th MI-35 helicopter by India to Afghanistan and it was agreed the helicopter would be soon handed over to Afghanistan. (Pajhwok)

(9) No Political ...

d their concerns over the merging of AISA with the ministry, but said there should be one single address to issue licenses for investments.

"In my opinion, the government should facilitate the issuing of licenses to investors through a single source with more ease, so as to attract investment. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the activities of AISA, it was an important organization and will remain so," said Mohammad Yunus Mohmand, a trader.

A number of economic experts said AISA was needed.

"I think we should wait to see how this organization will function onward. But, in general we should say that it is an important organization and its presence beside the government institutions is important," said Salim Sarem, an economic expert.

The decision regarding the merging of AISA with the MoCI came recently in a session of the high economic council, while the Chief Executive Officer, Abdullah Abdullah, was present. (Tolnews)

(10) Taliban...

commitments is a mistake and Pakistan's promises are false and waste time," said deputy speaker of the senate Abdullah Qarloq. Meanwhile Pakistani analysts believe that the new stance of the Taliban is a sign that they are not interested in peace talks.

"Taliban are worrying about their disparities and if they go for peace talks the disparities will be increased," said Rahimullah Yousofzai, a Pakistani political analyst. It was hoped that the Afghan delegation and the Taliban would meet in direct face-to-face talks in early March. However, the Taliban refused to join the process - resulting in the current deadlock. (Tolnews)

(11) Uruzgan...

ongoing to reopen them, such as Deh Rawud. Once the roads are open then we have programs for other districts," said Mohammad Nazir Kharotti, the provincial governor.

Meanwhile, the provincial police chief said insurgents came from Zabul and Helmand to fight in Uruzgan.

"Whenever the enemy is defeated in Kandahar or Helmand then they came to Uruzgan and for the past year they tried a lot to increase their activity in the province and conduct attacks on government institutions but they failed because government forces are able to defend government institutions," said Ghulam Sakhi Rokh Lewani, the provincial police chief. (Tolnews)

(12) UN Agencies...

projects in order to ensure transparency and extend more assistance to the development of health, education, agriculture and livestock sectors of Nangarhar.

Zabihullah Zmarai, the provincial council chief, asked the UN officials to ensure that the assistance they had pledged was delivered. Public Health Director Dr. Najibullah Kamawal said dozens of health centres had damaged due to the conflict in Achin, Haska Mena and Kot districts.

Mohammad Asif Shinwari, a spokesman for the provincial education department, said some schools had been damaged due to insecurity in Achin, Kot, Haska Mena, Hesarak and Pachir Agam districts. He said a survey has been launched to know the exact number of damaged schools, but it was not yet completed. (Pajhwok)

(13) For NATO ...

fought without combat support from NATO, has underlined the risks involved in having only 5,500 U.S. soldiers in the country.

Afghan officials say forces lack vital resources including close air support, which the small local air force cannot yet provide at anything like the levels NATO could, as well as expertise in areas like maintenance and logistics.

"Those capabilities are still under development and there is a lot more work needed," Acting Defence Minister Masoom Stanekzai said on a recent visit to the Afghan 215th Corps headquarters at Sorab. "We need international assistance."

FROM DEFENCE TO OFFENCE One of the biggest challenges Chung said he faced was trying

to change the mindset of Afghan soldiers, as NATO pushes them to be more offensive in operations against the Taliban.

"They'd go out to a certain area, and the first thing they'd do is ... build a checkpoint. From that point on, they'd become very stationary," he said, describing how local forces tended to operate.

Chung and his team are among around 500 U.S. troops dispatched to bolster 215th Corps, a reflection of international alarm at how Helmand security had deteriorated early in 2016.

The training, mainly by Afghan officers backed up by U.S. mentors, covers everything from battle tactics to driving, vehicle maintenance, equipment care and bomb disposal.

"At some point, there's going to be an end-date on this," Chung said. "We're here to help them build something that they can sustain and manage."

But U.S. officials acknowledge that the task has been complicated by problems including corruption among some officers that undermined confidence and morale.

"If you don't know someone higher up in the army, all your benefits go to soldiers who know army officials," said Darweza Khan, a 215th Corps soldier serving in Gereshek district.

A spokesman for the "Resolute Support" training mission said earlier this year that several senior officers in the 215th Corps had been replaced for graft that led to soldiers not being adequately looked after and supplies and equipment being stolen.

"MORE TIME WOULD BE GREAT"

Nicholson has declined to comment on troop levels as he prepares his review, but U.S. military spokesman Brigadier General Charles Cleveland said asking for more flexibility, including in use of air power, was among options he was considering.

That would be welcome by the government, which has struggled to contain the insurgency since NATO formally ended combat operations at the end of 2014, leaving only a fraction of an international force that peaked at more than 130,000.

Whether there is appetite for more delays in reducing U.S. forces remains to be seen, particularly in election year.

If the current plan remains, U.S. focus will switch to counterterrorism operations against Islamic State, al Qaeda and other groups, with little capacity for training and advising. Foreign officers involved in the programme remain realistic, given that time is running short.

"This is not an overnight fix," said British Major General Paul Nanson, commandant of the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, which has worked closely with the Afghan army's officer training school near Kabul on building a new generation of army leaders.

"This is a generational change. We've now committed to seeing it through 2016 which is good news. If we haven't got more time, we've got to do the best we can with the time available." (Reuters)

(14)7 Senior ...

to identify the logic behind the 26 million difference.

"After the assessment of documents under the supervision of an authorised prosecutor, we reached the conclusion that some people had committed corruption," he said.

Police then arrested seven officials of the Education Ministry on corruption charges, but there were some officials who were currently not on job and police were trying to arrest them as well, he said.

He identified the detainees as the engineering department head at the Afghanistan Skills Development Project (ASDP), Eng. Parvez Sarwari, a member of the engineering department, Eng. Mohammad Zarif, ASDP procurement specialist Shahpur, procurement manager of the project, Eng. Mohammad Ajmal, the director of teacher training collages at the ministry, Eng. Abdul Haq Rashidi, admin-finance manager, Eng. Abdul Hamid Wahab, and engineering manager at Planning Department of the Education Ministry.

Separately, Ministry of Interior spokesman Seddiq Seddiqqi told a press conference that three Da

Afghanistan Breshina Sherkat employees had been arrested on charges of fleecing costumers and demanding money from people under different pretexes.

The three were caught red-handed accepting 2100 afghanis in bribe from a person, he said, adding the three persons would create technical fault in electricity metre of ordinary people and would explained a so-called lengthy process to fix the problem against money. (Pajhwok)

(15) Afghan Refugees ...

have been found for about 30 percent.

"Those who couldn't be placed yet are joining further projects and we hope that they soon will find apprenticeships and jobs."

In 2015, over 450,000 refugees made their way to Germany alone. However, not all will be granted asylum. (Tolnews)

(16) Drone Strikes ...

with the Taliban. He said the victims used to carry weapons for self-defence because they had disputes over mountains.

But provincial police chief Brig. Gen. Zarawar Zahid said the first drone strike killed nine Taliban fighters and the second another five militants.

Regarding the claim that the slain people were civilians, he said if they were tribal elders, they would have informed the government about their movement to other areas with weapons.

US troops in Afghanistan confirmed they conducted two counter-terrorism strikes in Paktika on Wednesday afternoon. "There is currently no evidence to indicate that civilians suffered casualties in the air raids." (Pajhwok)

(17)6 of a Family...

late in the night with stab wounds. The dead bodies remained inside the house for eight hours, Dr. Faiz said.

The incident comes days after two women and as many men were found dead under mysterious circumstances in central capital Kabul. (Pajhwok)

(18)Gold, Flour...

1,300afs. He sold a 16-kg tin of Momin ghee for 1,100afs, a kilo of black African team for 260afs and the same quantity of Indonesian green tea for 250afs.

Abdul Hadi, a fuel station worker in Kabul, sold a liter of petrol for 41afs and the same quantity of diesel for 34afs, the same prices as of last week's.

Mohammad Sharif, a liquefied gas seller in Taimani locality, said gas prices remained unchanged during the week and was sold at 40 afs per kg.

Mohammad Fawad, a jeweler, said the price of one gram of Arabian gold increased from 2,300 afs to 2,250afs and the same quantity of Russian gold decreased from 1,900 to 1,850 afs.

Moneychanger Ahmad Shah said one US dollar was bought at 68.35 afs and the exchange rate of 1,000 Pakistani Rupee stood at 643 afs. Last week's exchange value of the dollar stood at 68.55afs and 1,000 Pakistani rupees at 648afs. (Pajhwok)

(19)Afghan Issued ...

Yousofy told journalists he never wanted to return to his country, where he received threats from Taliban insurgents. His two-month journey to Greece had cost him around \$6,500.

Now that he has been granted a five-day visa, the young man can apply for asylum for himself, his spouse and their two-year-old daughter. (Pajhwok)

(20)UN Chief ...

passing not only essential security-based counter-terrorism measures but also systematic preventive steps to address the underlying conditions that drive individuals to radicalize and join violent extremist groups."

"We must take united action in order to save succeeding generations. We need to act quickly to restore a legacy of hope and promise to our youth," Ban said. (Xinhua)

(21)Refugee ...

a series of measures to reduce refugee numbers.

The recent closure of the Balkan route has also resulted in a significant decline in the number of refu-

gees coming to Germany. (Xinhua)

(22)Implementation ...

migrants back to Turkey was halted when migrants rushed to invoke asylum in big numbers to avoid deportation.

Turkish lawmaker Tacettin Bayir from Izmir where the migrants are being received is concerned that the migrant traffic may hurt the local economy that was already hit by decline in tourism industry. (Xinhua)

(23)IS 'Spreading...

some of the 700 delegates -- among them around 30 ministers and deputy ministers -- Ban urged a radical rethink of ways to counter the threat from IS and other groups.

"Evidence shows that security and military responses alone cannot defeat this scourge," he said, stressing that heavy-handed responses have sometimes "proven to be counter-productive" and can "end up further fuelling violent extremism".

In January, Ban launched a global action plan, asking countries to come up with national plans to address the problem.

Ban's plan encompasses 79 recommendations, from boosting education to promoting human rights to counter the recruitment drives of groups like IS and Boko Haram which prey on disaffected youth. (AFP)

(24)Kerry Urges...

quotas instituted after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003 to amass wealth and influence.

U.S. officials fear the political unrest may harm Iraq's efforts to retake territory it has lost to Islamic State militants, notably its second city of Mosul, seized when parts of the Iraqi army collapsed in 2014.

Kerry told reporters that decisions about the reshuffle were for the Iraqis to decide but said he had indicated to Abadi that it was important to have political stability in Iraq so that military operations are not affected.

"I want to reiterate the support of President Obama, Vice President Biden, myself as secretary, and the entire administration (in) the United States for Prime Minister Abadi, who has demonstrated critical leadership in the face of enormous security, economic and political challenges," Kerry told reporters at the U.S. Embassy inside Baghdad's fortified Green Zone. (Reuters)

(25)Jihadi Group ...

Maksud has been a stage for intense battles recently between the Kurdish People Protection Units (YPG) and several jihadi groups, including Jaish al-Islam.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the days-long heavy battles in that district have killed and wounded over 130 people.

Both the Kurds and the jihadi groups are fighting for the full control of the district due to its strategic importance in Aleppo. (Xinhua)

(26)Syrian Forces ...

retaliatory military campaign. Both the Nusra Front and the Islamic State (IS) groups were designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations and were excluded from a truce that has been in place since Feb. 27 this year.

Meanwhile, the oppositional Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said on Friday that the Syrian and Russian warplanes carried out a total of 60 airstrikes against the aforementioned areas in Aleppo countryside, amid battles between the Syrian army backed by the Lebanese Hezbollah and rebel groups backed by the Nusra Front.

On April 4, SANA said the Syrian army had foiled a wide scale offensive by the Nusra Front rebels in Aleppo countryside. It said the Syrian army clashed with a group of the Nusra Front, which attempted to attack military bases in the countryside of Aleppo. (Xinhua)

(27)Tajikistan ...

meeting, Finance Minister Abdusalom Qurboniyon revealed that over the first quarter of this year the national budget had received 3.4 billion somoni, which was 93.5 percent of the budget's revenue part target for January-March, 2016.

Prime Minister Qohir Rasoulzoda reported on preparations for celebration of the 25th anniversary of Tajikistan's Independence. (Agencies)