

(1) China Supports ...

Afghanistan and Pakistan regarding regional security issues comes just as the NATO coalition withdraws much of its presence from the two countries. Since the founding of the National Unity Government (NUG), China has played a greater role in pressuring Islamabad to get the Taliban to the negotiating table than ever before.

The insurgents have also increased their attacks across the country - with fighting season having been officially launched last week. This is the first time Afghan security forces will face insurgents without the help of foreign troops - who officially handed over security to Afghan national forces at the end of last year. (Tolnews)

(2) MPs Renew ...

more insecure," said Padram. Ghulam Hussain Nasari from central Maidan Wardak said insurgent activities had increased in the north. He also demanded the government repeal the BSA, which he said was not in the interest of Afghanistan. Lawmaker Shukria Paikan Ahmadi said 95 percent of Kunduz province was being controlled by militants and security forces had confined their presence to the provincial capital and district headquarters alone. Sharifi Balkhahi, a lawmaker from Sar-i-Pul province, said severe clashes were underway in six areas of the province between militants and security forces.

He said intelligence reports indicated that the strength of militants had risen from the previous 5,000 to 15,000 now in the province.

He said terrible situations persisted in parts of Jawzjan, Faryab and Balkh provinces, where militants and security forces were locked in fierce gunbattles.

Speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahim backed comments from these lawmakers on the current security situation of the country.

He said the president and other government officials had concentrated much of their attention on security related issues so that people could live in a safe and secure environment. The speaker the situation in northern Afghanistan resembled that of Waziristan tribal region of Pakistan. He said the people of Badakhshan, Takhar, Baghlan and other provinces lived in dangerous conditions.

He said the BSA had been inked after its approval from the lower house and that tomorrow the heads of various commissions would be summoned to brief the house on the process the BSA was approved from the Wolesi Jirga.

Ibrahimi asked the president and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to introduce nominees for the slots of defence minister, attorney general, chief justice and heads of independent organisations. The speaker also urged the government to step up its efforts at appointing new governors in provinces to fill the administrative vacuum. (Pajhwok)

(3) CASA-1000...

and Tajikistan to Pakistan through Afghanistan.

The event held April 24 was attended by the Ministers for Water and Power of all four countries in Istanbul. The CASA-1000 transmission line to Peshawar, as agreed, would be capable of delivering 1300 MW, of which, 300 MW is Afghanistan's share.

However, if Afghanistan didn't need its share, it would be available to Pakistan.

When the project is implemented, more than 1000 kilometers of lines with a capacity of 1,300 megawatts will be connecting all four countries involved.

About 570 kilometers of the lines will cross through Kunduz, Baghlan, Punisher, Parwan, Kabul and Nangarhar provinces.

The cost of project is estimated to be \$1.170 billion including \$208 million IDC & taxes. But the final cost will be determined through a competitive bidding process.

Tender documents are, however, due to be awarded by 18 May 2015. Start of construction is expected in September 2015 and completion by May 2018. (Tolnews)

(4) Afghan Government...

for approval. The Ministry is optimistic that WTO membership would enable Afghanistan to address its transit issues with the neighboring countries and find access to alternative trade routes.

Afghanistan would also enjoy the benefit of a higher tariff of 2.5% on imported products as per the WTO terms and conditions and also tariff concessions from China, India, the United States and the European Union. MoCI Deputy Minister Muzammil

Shenwari said the WTO membership would attract investment as it would provide confidence to local and international investors to invest in Afghanistan.

While the government is on full swing for the membership to happen, a number of industrialists doubt the membership would do any good to Afghanistan.

They have said the government should first work on strengthening domestic industries. (Wadsam)

(5) Budget Problems...

payments to the IMF in-time and the issue had currently been resolved during talks between an Afghan delegation and IMF officials.

He said previously US assistance for most projects would be spent through the USAID, but now the situation had changed and future projections for development projects would take place through the Afghan government.

He said the World Bank had pledged delivering the \$800 US assistance to the treasury of Afghanistan in a week's time. He informed the US would provide another \$800 in aid for economic development and eradication of corruption till 2016.

he said currently the Afghanistan annual budget had no problem as a number of donors had pledged spending their assistance through the Afghanistan budget and talks with others donors like Germany and the UK were underway in this regard.

About no payment to contractors last year, the minister said all government departments had been informed last year to prioritize their projects and so far 50 percent payments had been made and the rest would be made in coming few weeks.

Hakimi was appointed as finance minister three months earlier, when he pledged tangible reforms in the ministry by eliminating corruption and mismanagement. (Pajhwok)

(6) Work on ...

World Bank (WB). The initial work included construction of a 3,400-metre wall having 32 metres width and 6 to 11 meters height.

In the second phase, a similar wall on the other side of the river would be constructed, with the river's bed cemented.

In the third phase, power producing generators would be installed, the last stage to complete the project.

Nearly 40,000 acres of land would come under irrigation and 8.5 megawatts of electricity would be generated from the project.

Residents complain that work on the second phase of the dam should complete and work on third phase start last year because people were in dire need of irrigation water and electricity.

Based on contract, the second phase of the construction should complete in late 2014, but work on the phase was still underway, a local elder Haji Baran told Pajhwok Afghan News.

He said construction of the dam was suspended for three months last year due to unknown reasons and currently the process was going on slowly.

Nimroz provincial council head Mohammad Seddiq Chakhansori also criticized the slow-paced work and said the government had not any decisive plan to complete the project on time.

People are optimistic that the dam could be constructed on time because the work on the project was moving very slowly. He demanded the government to take accelerated steps to complete the scheme without further delay.

Most of Nimroz residents are associated with agriculture sector and the completion of the dam would help resolve water shortage issue of the entire province almost.

Mohammad, a farmer from Chahar Burjak area of the district, criticized the government for failing to complete the dam despite it has received millions of dollars from the international community.

Another farmer Toor Gul said four decades ago, the province was popular for its large-scale crops production but now it suffered from serious shortage of irrigation water.

Nimroz is a sand-covered province and its wells' water is salty. The water level in Helmand River passing through the province has also went down.

The estimated population of Zaranj is 300,000 and 90 percent of its people don't have access to potable water.

An official of Nimroz water management office wishing anonymity said that Work on Kamal Khan Dam was moving very slowly.

He said that the company Asia Bana, which has the contract works on the second phase of the dam had poor experience.

But Mohammad Nabi Mohib, direc-

tor water management, said his department faced with lack of funds last year and the Ministry of Finance did not release the amount he needed.

He said 65 percent funds had been released to contractors while 80 percent construction work of the second portion of Kamal Khan Dam had been completed.

According to Mohib, the period of contract was two years starting from 2012, however, the target could not be achieved in the given period due to financial problems and the contract had to be extended for four to six months.

Referring to completion of Kamal Khan Dam and its power generation capacity, the official said that things would set in motion upon the availability of direly needed funds.

On Saturday, Finance Minister Ekil Hakimi during his speech to the lawmaker said Kamal Khan Dam was a project of national importance and the government was striving to complete the vital project at the earliest.

Some years back, reports were circulating that an insurgent group backed by neighbouring Iran wanted to halt work on the projects by staging attacks and spreading insecurity in the area. But successful bidding of the project and start of work proved the claims to be wrong.

Also the residents of Kang district acknowledged Iran had been involved in illegal supply of Hirmand River water into Iranian territory.

Haji Nabi Jan, a resident of the locality, said Iranians have dug eight wells on the bank of the river from Lashkari locality till Sar Shela and established 73 water pumps for water supplying.

He complained about non availability of drinking water in the area by saying the underground water had salty and people bought Iranian mineral water or the residents supplied drinking water from the far-flung areas.

Earlier, Asadullah Zamir, the newly appointed minister pledged to improve water management system by constructing small dams and building other projects. (Pajhwok)

(7) IS Link into ...

was deeply concerning.

"I fear that these predictions may be coming to reality and that's why it's so important for NATO and Australia to maintain the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. Our work there is not yet done," she told reporters in Brussels.

In her speech to the North Atlantic council in Brussels, Ms Bishop paid tribute to all from NATO and partner nations who served in Afghanistan, especially those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

She said Afghanistan's future now looked brighter, but more work was needed.

Australia still has some 400 defence personnel in Afghanistan in the new Resolute Support Mission, supporting Afghanistan's military and institutions.

Australia is providing funding of \$US300 million (\$A385.8 million) through to 2017.

"When we move towards the end of Resolute Support, Australia looks forward to further discussions on NATO's Enhanced Enduring Partnership with Afghanistan post-2016 to ensure a sustainable path to development and peace," she said. (AAP)

(8) CEO Office...

Abdullah Abdullah and President Ashraf Ghani about the electoral reforms.

Both the leaders, he said, were agreed on introducing reforms to the electoral system.

The government leaders have agreed upon a new person to lead the commission, who would be introduced in the next few days to take charge, he added. However, he did not provide an exact date as to when the new commission would start functioning. A day earlier, Mohammad Yousuf Rashid, head of Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA), said introducing reforms to the election system ahead of the next parliamentary elections were of immense importance. Rashid asked the CEO and the president to work on election reforms as soon as possible. (Pajhwok)

(9) Investigative ...

was a matter of concern. Calling violence against journalists from government officials shocking, the CEO said that security organs were ordered to prevent any violent directed against press.

Investigative journalism was facing downward trend media channels revealed corruption of some government officials, he said, adding that despite access to information law had been approved by the parliament, but some officials yet to fully imple-

ment it.

Amid reports that Taliban spokespersons share information before government, Abdullah acknowledged that Taliban share their information earlier and stressed that government should also make their view point on issues well before time.

"The aim of militants is spreading terror among people. We should not let Taliban to utilize media," he said.

Abdullah said the government has always supported media and pledged to continue the trend in future. (Pajhwok)

(10) Strategic Nawa ...

Geographically Nawa district bordering Pakistan, Zabul and Paktika provinces which is the main entrance point for Taliban. The district is located 150 kilometres southeast of Ghazni City, the provincial capital.

Local officials confirmed militants used Nawa district as a gateway for carrying ammunition to arm militants.

Mosa Khan Akbarzada, the acting governor, told Pajhwok Afghan News security forces completely controlled Gilan and Maqur districts and paved way for access to several other districts.

"Security forces killed 65 militants including 17 foreigners. Four notorious foreign commanders including Tayab, Ilham, Babi and Mohsin are among the slain insurgents," he added.

The security forces seized huge amount of ammunition, several motor bikes and vehicles during the operation.

Assad Ullah Insafi, provincial police chief, said security forces were well equipped and defused 101 mines so far. He added others areas had been identified where mines were planted and had also destroyed arms depots of the rebels.

Ali Ahmed Mubarez, director of National Directorate of Security (NDS), said security forces would control all areas soon and would establish government writ. "I congratulate local people for the successful operation", he added.

A local resident, requesting anonymity, confirmed heavy firefight in the area for the last four days and seeing security forces for the first time in the area.

Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Police (ANP), officials of NDS and Afghan Local Police are taking part in the military operation. Zabih Ullah Mujahid, Taliban spokesman, rejected government claims of controlling Nawa district. (Pajhwok)

(11) Police Saves ...

province, when unknown gunmen took 10 passengers hostage, Laghman Police Chief Dawood Amin said.

He said seven of the hostages were released as a result of police action.

Amin stated that they had received unconfirmed reports suggesting that the three remaining hostages had been able to flee from their kidnapers.

The motive and identity of the kidnapers is still not clear.

The rate of abductions has increased across the country in the past two months - following the kidnapping of 31 bus passengers in Zabul. Security forces have however launched a joint operation in Khak Afghan district in Zabul to secure the release of the Zabul hostages - whose family members have set up protest camps in Kabul. (Tolnews)

(12) Work on...

that Pakistan's President Mamnoon Hussain and Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, during their meeting held on the sidelines of Canakkale battles centenary ceremonies in Istanbul, agreed to step up the project.

The spade work has begun but the two sides have reservations over Afghanistan's security situation, it said, adding that spokesperson for the president said the project was cost-effective and would help enhance cooperation between Pakistan and Turkmenistan.

The president was quoted as saying: "The government attaches high priority to timely completion of the Tapi pipeline." (Pajhwok)

(13) Structures under...

cards to approve the decree.

The decree was referred to Wolesi Jirga last Wednesday for approval, but it was deferred due to a lack of quorum. (Pajhwok)

(14) Afghanistan Stands...

not crush happiness. India stands 111 in the list.

Switzerland is marked as the happiest country in the world where as Iceland, Denmark, Norway and Canada are among the top five happiest countries.

The 2015 World Happiness Report is the third annual report seeking to quantify happiness as a means of influencing government policy. The United Nations published the first study in 2012. (Pajhwok)

(15) Afghanistan to...

of the richest troves of minerals in the world, valued at nearly \$1 trillion, according to U.S. scientists' report from September, 2014.

The aerial surveys determined that Afghanistan may hold 60 million tons of copper, 2.2 billion tons of iron ore, 1.4 million tons of rare earth elements such as lanthanum, cerium and neodymium, and lodes of aluminum, gold, silver, zinc, mercury and lithium. For instance, the Khanneshin carbonatite deposit in Afghanistan's Helmand province is valued at \$89 billion, full as it is with rare earth elements.

The official also provided comments on his country's energy section.

Afghanistan imports 5 to 7 million metric tons of fuel from Caspian Sea littoral countries, Turkmenistan in particular, per year.

"Fuel_ gasoline and gas oil_ is usually bought from Turkmenistan and carried to Amirabad (Neka) port by 5,000-ton ships and then from there to Herat, Afghanistan; and from there to other places in Afghanistan," he stated.

Nonetheless, Farhang said, various oil and gas fields have been discovered in the country which will be tapped in the future. (Trend News Agency)

(16) ACB Working ...

soon introduce our strategic plan for the next three years."

He said the strategic plan was aimed at achieving the Test cricket status and making it to the 2019 World Cup. "These targets are difficult, but no impossible and we will try our best to achieve them," Stanikzai said.

He said achieving the ICC full membership from the current associate membership was his top priority.

But this required a lot of efforts and the national and under-19 sides had to play many international matches and had to perform well, he explained.

A 10-year-plan has been initiated to achieve these targets, he said, adding that the long-term plan prioritised attaining the ICC full membership.

Construction of more international standard playgrounds, arranging training camps for the national team in foreign countries and hiring services of foreign coaches were part of the 10-year-plan, he elaborated.

He said the ACB had identified 40 players for their best performances in matches played at home and abroad.

The players would be divided into three teams to compete against each other for place in the national side when needed, he said.

He said efforts were underway to improve the under-19 national side and a tournament had been launched for the under-18s.

He said the inclusion of Afghanistan in the ICC Future Tours Programme (FTP) was a great achievement as it would help increase the council's annual budget for Afghanistan as well as international tours.

However, a final decision in this regard had not been taken and the ICC next meeting would reveal the list of Afghanistan tours for four years, he said.

Stanikzai also said the ACB was interested in hosting home series in India instead of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

He requested President Ashraf Ghani to discuss the possibility of Afghanistan hosting matches in India during his upcoming visit to India next week.

Afghanistan currently use the Sharjah Cricket Stadium in the UAE to host matches.

Stanikzai also said international standard cricket stadiums were being constructed in Khost, Kandahar and Kunduz provinces and similar grounds would be built in northern provinces. (Pajhwok)

(17) 104 Taliban ...

for destructive activities in Laghman and Kandahar provinces".

The Taliban suffered heavy casualties in Farah, Helmand, Badghis and Kunduz provinces, according to the statement.

The MoI, however, did not comment on whether any security force members were injured during the operations.

This comes after officials from the Ministry of Defence (MoD) said on Friday that Afghan military forces are engaged in 14 operations around the country, and have clashed with insurgents in nine provinces.

The counter-insurgency clearing operations are being conducted in Helmand, Ghazni, Paktika, Nangarhar, Kunar, Herat, Faryab, Kunduz and

other parts of the country, MoD spokesman Dawlat Waziri said.

The military operations launched against insurgents have resulted in increased militant attacks across the country with insurgents frequently targeting the security forces. (Tolnews)

(18) 16 Militants

Hameed said they were trying to bring under government control the Khak-i-Afghan district, where insurgents had been in control over the past eight years. (Pajhwok)

(19) 13 Dead, Scores...

details, the official said as many as 210 traffic accidents took place last year on northern highway/ He said that increasing number of vehicles on highway was another reason for surge in accidents.

According to Parwani, around 4,000 heavy and small vehicles were plying on northern highway on daily basis. In addition, he said majority of the drivers did not properly pursue or know about traffic rules.

Abdul Hamid, 25, a driver, said the road is small with too many vehicles, which caused accidents. (Pajhwok)

(20) Pajhwok Turns ...

outlets leaders, civil society activists, high-ranking government officials and Kabul-based foreign diplomats celebrated Pajhwok Afghan News's 11th birthday at the agency's main office.

Speaking on the occasion, Pajhwok Director Danish Karokhel thanked all workers for enduring hardships and dangers during the 11 years. He said every Afghan knew the agency because it reflected their problems in an impartial manner. (Pajhwok)

(21) 100 Students ...

year 32,000 students graduated from government and 8,000 from private universities.

He said exploring jobs for such a huge number was always difficult but the ministry was in coordination with government institutions to find job opportunities for newly graduates.

Currently, 200,000 students were getting higher education in 32 government and 82 private universities across the country.

Abdul Qadir, a graduate of law faculty, expressed satisfaction by saying that he had completed his four years higher education in restive Nimroz province.

He said the institute had provided them with every facility and they were satisfied with quality education. (Pajhwok)

(22) Civilians among ...

four militants were killed and two others wounded during a security operation in the Nerkh district last night, the gubernatorial spokesman said.

Also on Friday night, he said, a clash between fighters loyal to the Taliban and the Hezb-i-Islami Afghanistan left two armed men dead and as many injured in the Nerkh district's Hayat area. (Pajhwok)

(23) 20 Rebels Dead,...

clash between security forces and militants on Friday night.

He, however, did not give exact figure into militants casualties but warned security forces be prepared for further attacks. (Pajhwok)

(24) UN Envoy...

While de Mistura said all parties in Syria were being invited to the new talks, he ruled out the Islamic State group, whose rise over the past year in parts of Syria has complicated the conflict.

"They are on the list of terrorists," he said, adding that he was sure the extremist group wouldn't want to participate anyway.

De Mistura, the third U.N. special envoy on Syria, has turned to this new approach after his previous idea for local cease-fires, starting in the city of Aleppo, had little success. He insisted Friday, though, that the idea is still on the table. (AP)

(25) US Seeks ...

constitutionality of the military deal, called Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, signed last year between Manila and Washington. It may decide later this year.

"If we formalize (now) and they start putting up structures and it's not constitutional, they will have to destroy those structures," Catapang said late on Friday, adding the list was finalised in October during a Mutual Defence Board meeting.

Four of the locations are on the main island of Luzon, where U.S. and Filipino soldiers usually hold exercises, two on the central Cebu island, and two more on the western island of Palawan, near the disputed Spratly. (Reuters)