

(1) UN Supports...

efforts to bring the war to an end in the country.

Also today, Presidential Palace spokesman Sidiq Sidiqi said a delegation would be appointed soon for peace talks with Taliban.

US Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad has been in Kabul for the past one week, visiting government and other political figures. (Pajhwok)

(2) Election Workers...

if there was no prioritization.

"We want the international community and the government to clarify their positions on the election and peace and they should provide information about the two issues," he said.

Rashid said local officials, public representatives in Wolesi Jirga or lower house of the Parliament and provincial council members all were interfering in election workers' recruitment process. He asked Independent Election Commission (IEC) officials not to stay quiet about outside interferences in their affairs and share the issue with the government and the Independent Electoral Commission (IECC).

About the Presidential Palace's interference in the appointment of the IEC IT manager, he said, "The IEC has sent three letters to the president about the appointment of the IT manager, but the president did not appoint the person who was introduced by the commission, instead appointed a different person."

However, he did not provide further details about the issue. Rashid also shared details about accreditation charter for the presidential election.

FFFEFA asked the presidential candidates who are currently party of the government to avoid appointing or replacing government workers in the capital and provinces.

The foundation also asked suspension of government officials who interfered in election and stopped government leaders' meetings with members of election commissions. (Pajhwok)

(3) Afghan Government ...

Afghan warring factions to seal a ceasefire agreement for peace.

A former Taliban commander Sayed Akbar Agha said the next round of talks in Doha will determine the future of the peace process in Afghanistan.

"Only the signing of the peace agreement remains. There is a strong possibility that the two sides will sign the agreement in the eighth round of the talks," said Akbar Agha. (Tolo news)

(4) Peace & Moderation ...

of the Peace and Moderation team.

Meanwhile, some other sources claim Atta Mohammad Noor and Yunus Qanuni had parted their ways with the team because of the differences.

But Qader Shah, spokesman for the Peace and Moderation team, spurned such reports as baseless. He vehemently denied that some members had left the team.

He said there was no issue of discord but discussions were underway on matters of national importance.

A key member of the team, Dr. Omar Zakhilwal, wrote in his Facebook page: "Finding one's way to the Presidential Palace means a lot, but not everything. An extra-constitutional deal is what doesn't mean much." (Pajhwok)

(5) GEA Announces ...

via the website, followed by the short-listed of applicants from July 24 to August 23. The on-stage live performances will take place from August 24 to September 24, and the winners will be announced and awarded throughout the final stage, which will run from September 25 until October 25.

The winner of the Quran Recitation competition will receive a prize of SAR5 million (\$1.3 million), while the winner of the Athan competition will receive an award of SAR2 million (\$530,000).

(6) Al-Qaeda ...

collection of foreign fighters, which is Afghanistan. And the terrorist outfit responsible for the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks remains a potent force in Afghanistan. Its "members continue to function routinely as military and religious instructors for the Taliban" the report said.

Still, with respect to Afghanistan, the Daesh's Khorasan arm is clearly strongest in the eastern part of the country. And it has suffered losses in northern Afghanistan during the course of the previous year.

Despite its setbacks, UN member states estimate that the Daesh's Khorasan arm has "between 2,500 and 4,000" men, "including foreign terrorist fighters." The UN member states also indicated that the group continues "to maintain

a robust capability to derive income from the exploitation of local mineral, lumber and talc resources." In addition, criminal activities such as "extortion" and "kidnapping for ransom" are used to procure funds. (Tolo news)

(7) Illegal Mining ...

on July 24, according to local officials.

The Afghan government had full control over the deposits for only two years in the past decade while it has had partial control over the district during this period.

The study has found that assessments have identified four small portions of lapis lazuli in Keran Wa Manjan with an estimated 3,500 tons of the mineral. Experts said Afghanistan's lapis lazuli has a unique quality in compared with the lapis lazuli in other countries, including Chile and Holland.

"Thousands of tons [of Lapis lazuli] were sent out of Afghanistan illegally over the past three years," member of the Natural Resources Monitoring Network, Ibrahim Jaffari, said. "But now, Afghanistan's lapis lazuli even cannot afford the expenses of the warehouses in China."

Government's Measures Against Illegal Mining
Global Witness, an international monitoring organization, in a report 2016 accused many individuals in Afghanistan, including tribal elders and political figures, of involvement in illegal extraction of lapis lazuli.

But the report was not taken seriously by the government.

Some of the officials whose names were mentioned in the report were appointed to several government posts in Badakhshan.

"We were somewhat surprised after our report was released. Since our reporter released, commander Malik was made a local police commander in the mining area, although he is not in that position anymore," the head of Global Witness office in Afghanistan, Stephen Carter, told TOLONews this week.

According to the Global Witness report, Mr. Malik, an infamous local commander in Keran Wa Manjan, had a major role in illegal mining in the district.

TOLONews reporter Tamim Hamid tried to contact Mr. Malik, but he could not be reached due to lack of coverage of telecommunication services in the area.

Badakhshan governor Zakaria Sawda is another official whose name was mentioned in the report.

Mr. Sawda rejected his involvement in illegal extraction of lapis lazuli in the province.

"Regarding the lapis lazuli deposits, I want to say that I was involved in legal or illegal extractions," said Zakaria Sawda, Badakhshan governor. "I don't have any armed men here and people in Badakhshan are fully aware of it. The residents of Badakhshan know who are involved in the extraction of lapis lazuli. This is a false allegation and I hope that they stop character assassination."

Statistics by Global Witness show that only in 2014, over 20 tons of lapis lazuli was extracted from Keran Wa Manjan deposits each day.

And during this period, over 7,500 tons of lapis lazuli worth \$125 million was exported illegally outside Afghanistan. The figures also show that from the amount, \$20 million went to the account of illegal armed groups.

But now the Afghan government is apparently prepared to finalize the legal extraction of at least 43 small and big deposits which need \$200 million to 300 million investment.

Recently, a \$15 million contract was signed for the extraction of talc in Shirzad district of the eastern province of Nangarhar, however, the contract later sparked some controversies.

"If you want to say there should be 100-percent security, you will not find it anywhere in the world. But this investment can happen in a way that we want. This will create jobs for the local people and it will lead to stability in the region," said Abdul Qadir Mutfi, a spokesman of Ministry of Mines.

Last year, the Afghan government formed a committee comprising representatives of the ministries of Mines and Defense, the National Directorate of Security and the National Security Council to address the issue of illegal. Monitoring organizations say the committee has not been able to implement its decisions.

"They [the committee] announced to have prevented illegal extraction in at least 570 mineral deposits... Four months have passed since we have asked for a list of the mineral deposits, but we have not received it. Our assessment is that there is the possibility that such a list does not exist," said Naser Taimori, a researcher at Integrity Watch Afghanistan, a Kabul-based monitoring organization.

The government says that it has sufficient evidence about those involved in the smuggling of precious stones.

"The Ministry of Mines has sufficient evidence and information about those involved in illegal mining. Of course, there are people who have been identified and those involved in such activities will be treated legally," President Ghani's spokesman Sediq Sediqqi said. (Tolo news)

(8) More Than Half ...

Hussain Rezaie, a researcher of MEC. Moreover, MEC accuses MoE of the absence of cooperation with its donors saying the situation has caused the developing projects to be implemented repeatedly in some provinces.

In addition, MEC has done research on the project of building 6,000 schools with the value of 157 million dollars which had to begin last year.

The institution's findings show that the estimated cost is suitable for building only 2,700 schools.

"Though the fund exists for building at least these 2,700 schools, the practical work has not been done considerably and only 221 schools are under construction," said Rezaie.

However, the Ministry of Education (MOE) rejects the findings and remarks of MEC in this regard.

"The cooperation between the donors and the Ministry of Education exists. We consider the people's need in the projects which are being implemented in the center and districts of the provinces," said Nooria Nazhat, the Spokesperson to the MoE.

This comes as the MoE has implemented 28 projects out of 113 instructed projects of MEC; however, according to MEC, the process of reformation is slow in this ministry. (ATN)

(9) Ex-ALP ...

and directed his personal secretary Abdul Rahim Zeerak to send Kharoti to India for treatment.

He grumbled Zeerak had not yet answered his phone call. "I came to Kabul three months back and have since been living in a hotel.

However, I have been unable to meet the presidential secretary or any other official so far," he continues.

Khoaroti has met presidential advisor Ziaul Haq Amarkhel 20 days back. Ghani's aide assured him of taking up the issue to relevant officials. But this is yet to happen.

The former commander says he wants the government to send him abroad for treatment, nothing else.

Zeerak explains the president had directed the Paktika governor to share Kharoti's

He promises prompt action will be taken after information about the former ALP official is shared with the Palace. (Pajhwok)

(10) Helmandis Stage ...

executing the Kajaki dam affairs, had started installation work on a new turbine at the dam at a cost of \$19 million. The turbine would produce 100MW electricity after installation. (Pajhwok)

(11) 2 US Paratroopers ...

died from wounds sustained in a combat related incident in the capital of Uruzgan province.

The soldiers' awards and decorations include the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star Medal, the Army Service Ribbon, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal and the Global War on Terror Service Medal.

The two deaths bring the number of U.S. troops killed in action in Afghanistan so far this year to 12. (Pajhwok)

(12) Peshawar ...

had led to a scarcity of animals in the province, they said.

As a result, the petitioners argued, locals were faced with high prices of sacrificial animals. They asked if the Afghan government could stop the export of small animals to Pakistan, why Islamabad could not ban cattle transportation to the neighbouring country. Subsequently, the court issued a stay order stopping the federal government from issuing new permits for the export of cattle to Afghanistan until the end of the three-day festival.

However, the existing cattle export permits will remain valid, ruled the bench, which ordered the federal and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa governments to check the smuggling of sacrificial animals to Afghanistan. (Pajhwok)

(13) US, China End...

in place to ensure Beijing carries out any agreement.

Rhetoric on both sides has hardened, prompting suggestions U.S. and Chinese leaders are settling in for a "war of attrition."

In Washington, Trump accused Beijing of wanting to stall through the 2020

presidential election in hopes of being able to negotiate with a more malleable Democrat. He said that if reelected, he would get "much tougher" with Beijing. "China would love to wait and just hope," Trump told reporters Tuesday. "They'll pray that Trump loses," he said. "And then they'll make a deal with a stiff, somebody that doesn't know what they're doing."

Separately on Twitter, Trump warned that if he wins in 2020, "the deal that they get will be much tougher than what we are negotiating now ... or no deal at all."

Asian stock markets tumbled Wednesday after Trump's comments. The Shanghai Composite Index shed 0.7%, Hong Kong's market benchmark dropped 1.3% and Tokyo lost 0.9%. (AP)

(14) US Wants...

and Finance Minister Olaf Scholz said he is "very skeptical about it," and that the mission puts Germany at risk of being dragged into an even bigger conflict.

Peter Schulze, professor of international relations at the University of Gottingen, told RT it's "very likely that Berlin will not fall into the trap."

There is no plan, there is no strategic objective defined by the United States. Just being there raises the possibility of a risky development.

The US and Iran moved closer to open confrontation last month when Tehran downed an American drone. The situation risked spiraling out of control after US President Donald Trump decided to launch - and then at the last minute call off - massive military strikes in retaliation.

Willy Wimmer, former vice president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, is also worried about the risk of routine patrols escalating into open conflict. The question facing German lawmakers, he told RT, is "whether we participate at the negotiating table in the Middle East or whether we are in the war room together with the Americans and the British."

Further complicating matters is the often contradictory line coming out of the White House on Iran. National Security Advisor John Bolton is a longtime advocate of military action, while Trump appears to be wary of entering an unpopular war while vying for re-election.

"It's not a question of whether we follow Trump or Johnson," Wimmer said. [It's a question] whether we follow Bolton and others, because it is not certain who is in control in Washington, and therefore it is too complicated to participate in war games.

Another factor for German officials to consider is the depleted state of the military. Last year, it was reported that the German Navy is running out of combat-capable warships and had six out of 15 frigates decommissioned. Additionally, German troops face equipment shortages, and as of late 2018, fewer than 20 percent of its Tiger combat helicopters and 30 percent of its Eurofighter jets could fly. (RT)

(15) North Korea...

short-range ballistic missiles. Touted by North Korea as a "new-type tactical guided weapon," the missiles flew for around 430 kilometers before splashing into the Sea of Japan.

North Korea ended a two-year pause in missile tests in May, with a series of short-range launches. While some US military hawks have sounded the alarm over those missiles, US President Donald Trump brushed them off as "some small weapons" that may bother some of his "people," but not him.

Trump's denuclearization talks with North Korea remain in limbo, with Pyongyang refusing to give up its nuclear program before Washington lifts its economic sanctions and the US insisting that a "complete and irreversible" denuclearization must come first. (RT)

(16) Britain Seeks ...

Hormuz and combat Iranian aggression". In reality, there is still no agreement on any joint mission in the Strait of Hormuz.

France has refused to join any US mission out of concern it would associate Paris with Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" against Iran. Britain is caught in the middle, calling for a European-led initiative but saying it will need American military support to succeed.

Germany appeared unmoved by the US pressure and refused to commit to sending naval assets. "The German government has taken note of this, but not promised to make any contribution," a German official said. The foreign ministry later said the US had provided details to allies on its concept for securing maritime traffic in the Persian Gulf region. The ministry said it hadn't promised

any contribution but was "in close consultation with France and Great Britain."

It gave no details of the U.S. plan, but said "priority must be given to a de-escalation of tensions and diplomatic efforts." (The Telegraph)

(17) China Warns...

China opposes interference by countries outside the region.

"We think non-regional countries should not deliberately amplify such differences or disputes left from the past," said Wang, responding to a question on the involvement of U.S. and other non-Asian countries in the discussions.

"Non-regional countries should also not make use of these differences to sow distrust between China and ASEAN countries."

China recently said U.S. criticism of its role in the South China Sea, including comments by Pompeo, were "slandrous".

Wang said China is in discussions to expand and "institutionalize" joint military drills with ASEAN countries in the region following two previous exercises.

The South China Sea was a key topic for ASEAN foreign ministers.

"Concerns were expressed by some ministers on the land reclamations, activities and serious incidents in the area," they said in a final communique.

The reference to "serious incidents" was stronger than that in the communique after their meeting last year, pointing to the extent to which tension over the region has risen.

China claims large parts of the South China Sea through which roughly \$3.4 trillion in shipping passes each year. Countries including Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam contest the territorial claims.

China has unnerved the region and angered the United States by installing military equipment and other facilities on artificial islands it has made by reclaiming land and building up reefs and shoals. (Reuters)

(18) Israeli Settlers...

carrying out "massive illegal construction in these areas with the clear goal of establishing a terrorist state in the heart of the country."

According to Israeli media reports, the unusual move could be the result of US pressure, as President Donald Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner is due to visit Israel in the coming days as part of a Middle East trip to discuss his 'deal of the century' peace plan.

"If it's true that this is an American demand, then we expect our government to say loud and clear - enough!" Gush Etzion Regional Council boss Shlomo Neeman said. He called on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to "stop the delusional demands of our great friend [Trump] who, if he is a friend, would understand."

Israel controls security and land management in Area C of the West Bank, which is home to up to 300,000 Palestinians and 325,500 Israeli settlers. Palestinian construction is rarely approved by Israel, which blocks development by designating 60 percent of Area C as state land, national parks, or land for settlements, and by restricting Palestinian construction on the remaining land. (RT)

(19) More Than...

allowed to go out in the hours from midnight to 6 a.m. Their sentencing is scheduled for Sept. 25. It was not clear when the others charged will appear in court.

They were detained after clashes with police at an unauthorized protest in the western part of Hong Kong island on Sunday, when police repeatedly fired tear gas and rubber bullets to drive back protesters blocking the streets with road signs and umbrellas. Police issued warnings prior to using the tear gas, but protesters stood their ground and threw eggs at the officers.

The large demonstrations started last month as a movement against now-suspended extradition legislation, and have since grown to encompass broader demands around greater democracy and government accountability. (AP)

(20) Iran Says...

maritime security talks on Tuesday with the UAE in an apparent bid to calm tensions in the Gulf, though a Gulf Arab official described the discussions as routine and technical.