

(1) Mattis Sees Progress...

the start of the year. More than 2,400 U.S. military personnel have died since the initial invasion of American forces in 2001. Mattis said he has no doubts of the importance of keeping those troops in the region.

"If we leave, with 20-odd of the most dangerous terrorist groups in the world centered in that region, we know what will happen," he said. "Our intelligence is very specific. We will be under attack."

He praised Trump's decision to increase U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan last year, and said that "for the first time in 17 years, the U.N. believes we have hope for peace."

Mattis said the Defense Department is "going to do our level best to drive to a political resolution" and that finding ways to broker a peace deal presents the most realistic path to ending the conflict there.

But he also criticized the Taliban's commitment to that reconciliation, and said it can't be solely a U.S. effort.

"This is going to take regional help. It's going to take UN help," he said.

Trump earlier in the week said he is cautiously optimistic about the potential for an end to the conflict, but added that the situation remains "a little bit too early to say what's going to happen."

Mattis in his speech also praised young military recruits, noting that "they've grown up with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and they choose to serve anyway." (Monitoring Desk)

(2) Troops in Baghlan...

but said the payments had been delayed due to the introduction of electronic system of salary distribution.

"The delay is not intentional, it is a technical issue. The old system was not effective so a new system is being established to ensure the presence and attendance of service-members," he said.

It is worth mentioning that these service-members have been stationed in insecure areas of Baghlan province. (Pajhwok)

(3) IEC Gives Updates...

security of remote areas should be considered," MP Razia Mangal suggested.

"We, especially the election commission, should put all our focus on holding the presidential elections," MP Sayed Ali Akbar Kazimi said.

The Independent Election Commission last week announced the presidential elections timeline. Based on the timeline, presidential elections will be held next year on April 20.

Meanwhile, Ghazni parliamentary elections will be held simultaneously with the presidential elections based on the timeline. (Tolo news)

(4) IEC Probes...

He had informed the commission and the leadership of the commission about his leave. So far, no official has shared the issue with us. Our colleagues continue their efforts to get to the bottom of the issue. We were also informed about the issue through media. So far, no security institution has shared the issue with us to say that any of our employee or official is arrested on charges of taking bribes. The commission's leadership is trying to gather facts about it," Sadat explained.

"We also heard that the acting field operation officer of the independent election commission has been arrested on the spot by the personnel of the National Directorate of Security and that he is in custody. At the same time, there are some reports that some of his colleagues within election commission are trying to save him and release him," said Yusuf Rasheed, CEO of Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan TEFA.

"This is a serious issue for us and for the people of Afghanistan, because all aspects of fraud in the election process should not be ignored," Rasheed said.

TOLONews could get a comment from Niazi and the NDS on this report.

Some election candidates meanwhile raised their concerns over what they describe it as selling of parliament seats by the election commission.

"We praise the NDS for this action. It is a good move. Those who are involved in fraud and bribery must be arrested," said Zalmay Zabuli, member of Meshrano Jirga, the Upper House of Parliament.

Prior to this, Zahir Akbari, the acting head of IEC office for Kabul, had stepped down from his post due to "widespread fraud and corruption allegations". (Tolo news)

(5) 3 Men...

\$8 billion contract to provide food and supplies to US troops in Afghanistan known as the "SPV-A contract."

As part of the bidding process, the defendants allegedly caused Anham to represent that it would build two warehouses in Afghanistan, which Anham would use to provide supplies to US forces.

The indictment alleges that the defendants schemed to defraud the Department of Defense in connection with the SPV-A contract by submitting bids that contained knowingly false estimates of the completion dates for the warehouses and by providing the government with misleading photographs intended to convey that Anham's progress on the warehouses was further along than it actually was.

Specifically, the indictment alleges that, in February of 2012, the defendants and others caused Anham employees to transport construction equipment and materials to the proposed site of one of the warehouse complexes to create the false appearance of an active construction site.

Members of the conspiracy then photographed the site, provided the photographs to the Department of Defense, and then largely deconstructed the staged construction site.

The SPV-A contract also required bidders to certify that they abide by the Iran Sanctions Act, which prohibits US citizens and companies from engaging in commercial activity in Iran.

According to the indictment, the defendants conspired to increase Anham's profits in connection with the SPV-A contract by shipping warehouse building materials to Afghanistan via Iran, instead of using more costly, but legal, routes.

According to the indictment, after learning that the Wall Street Journal was planning to run a story detailing Anham's practice of shipping materials through Iran, Abul Huda Farouki sent an email to a senior Department of Defense official, which falsely

claimed that senior management at Anham had been unaware that the transshipments through Anham had taken place.

In addition to the SPV-A contract, the indictment alleges that the defendants schemed to defraud the Department of Defense with respect to the National Afghan Trucking (NAT) contract, which was a \$984 million contract that required Anham to supply trucking services to the US Military in Afghanistan.

As with the SPV-A contract, the NAT contract required bidders to certify compliance with laws concerning sanctions placed on Iran.

According to the indictment, rather than ship trucks to Afghanistan using legal but relatively expensive routes, the defendants conspired to cut costs by transporting vehicles through Iran.

The indictment alleges that the defendants' conduct violated laws prohibiting fraud, commercial activity with Iran, and international money laundering.

The charges in the indictment are merely allegations and all defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

The case was investigated by HSI Washington, DC and by investigators at SIGAR. Trial Attorneys James Gelber and Danny Nguyen of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section are prosecuting the case. ANHAM FZCO response

In response, ANHAM in a statement said they were extremely disappointed by the Justice Department action, which it said was based on a mistaken reading of both the facts and the law.

It said ANHAM saved US taxpayers \$1.4 billion through its contract to provide food to US troops serving in Afghanistan and in preparing for that contract it made good faith efforts to meet aggressive construction timelines in one of the most difficult environments in the world. At no time did ANHAM's former employee or subcontractors cause any loss to the federal government, the statement said, adding the government received exactly what it was promised, a price significantly below that of ANHAM's main competitor.

"In meeting that contract, ANHAM has provided sustenance including fresh fruit and vegetables, frozen, chilled and dry goods and water to feed and support American warfighters in active war zones since 2013".

ANHAM and its related subcontracting companies first self-reported shipments made through Iran in 2013, and have been cooperating with the Justice Department since the onset of its investigation.

This investigation has been pushed by ANHAM's chief competitor, a company that itself pled guilty to defrauding the United States, and which now seeks to profit through false accusations it has made in a civil case against ANHAM." (Pajhwok)

(6) Peikar Assumes...

In a separate decree, President Ghani has approved the appointment of the Independent Land Directorate Mohammad Jawad Peikar as the acting Minister of Urban Development and Land Ministry as per the Clause 11 of the Article 64 of Afghan constitution. (kp)

(7) Afghan Authorities...

of the women's team. "Such alle-

gations are baseless and we will have a thorough investigation," AFF Secretary General Sayed Aghazada told a news conference on Saturday.

Allegations of sexual contact outside marriage can have deadly consequences in Afghanistan. Victims of sexual harassment are often extremely reluctant to come forward for fear that they will be accused of adultery.

A spokesperson at FIFA, the world soccer federation, said it had a "zero tolerance" policy on abuse and was looking into the Afghan case but addressing the issue in a "do no harm way" toward the victims.

"As some aspects of these allegations involve sensitive topics linked to the protection of those involved, we have sought support from relevant parties who willingly offered their support to FIFA," the spokesperson said in an emailed statement.

"Once the facts are established whatever remedial measures needed will be taken." (Reuters)

(8) NATO FMs to Discuss...

commitment to continue on the path to reform, including the promotion of human rights, good governance, and combat corruption.

"We also expect Ministers to reiterate our support to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process and to exchange views with their Afghan counterpart in this regard, following the recently held Geneva Conference on Afghanistan." NATO official said. (Pajhwok)

(9) MPs Urge Civilians...

crimes that taken place in Helmand are ignored, UNAMA has confirmed that civilians were killed but we are silent,"

He asked other lawmakers to have a clear stance about the civilian casualties.

Habiba Sadat, a representative from Helmand province, condemned civilian casualties and asked the government to stop blindfolded bombardments and not allow foreign forces to spark public anger.

Razia Sadat Mangal, a lawmaker from Paktia province, said that Afghan and foreign forces should be careful about civilian lives when launching operations.

A number of other members of the house had similar views and demanded precision during operations.

Amir Khan Yar, second deputy speaker of the Wolesi Jirga who was chairing the meeting, said that civilian casualties caused by any side were unacceptable.

He said that inflicting casualties to civilians was against war and international norms and warring sides should be very cautious in their operations. (Pajhwok)

(10) Taliban Abducts...

This comes after the Taliban on Tuesday abducted at least 25 passengers who were travelling from Balkhab district of Sar-e-Pul province to Mazar-e-Sharif, the capital of northern Balkh province.

The passengers were on their way to Mazar-e-Sharif City, the capital of Balkh.

No clue is so far available about the fate of the 25 hostages, Rahimi said. (Tolo news)

(11) Security Forces...

"As you are aware, government has started arresting irresponsible armed commanders... People welcome the move but if people like these commanders, they should operate within the struc-

ture of the Afghan government," said Fawadullah, a Kunduz resident.

"Illegal armed forces should be arrested by government. People will support this move," said Hakim Hassas, a Kunduz resident.

Shortly after he was arrested, commander Naweed, said he is "not guilty" and that he has committed no crime.

"I was a commander in Khanabad district of Kunduz for 16 years and day and night I was in the service of the people and there was no bullying and blackmailing and people were happy with me," Naweed said.

Addressing a press conference in Kabul, President Ghani's deputy spokesman Shahussain Murtazawi said "illegal armed commanders should be arrested and that they should operate within the structure of the security forces if they are willing to serve their country". (Tolo news)

(12) Hundreds Killed...

of Ghazni in the last week of November that left at least 35 civilians killed. Thousands more were forced to flee their homes and take refuge in relatively safer parts of the country.

The third resulted in mass civilian casualties in a U.S. air raid in restive Helmand province late November which killed 23 civilians.

Some 649 civilians casualties have been recorded this year from January to September, according to the UN mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

The Afghan forces continue to face the brunt of war after taking over nationwide security responsibilities from NATO forces in 2015.

In a rare admission, President Ashraf Ghani confirmed more than 28,500 Afghan troops have been killed since taking over security responsibilities from the much better trained and equipped NATO forces.

He revealed this otherwise well-guarded death toll while making a point about the sacrifices of the Afghans in a speech at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington via video-link from Kabul last month.

In Farah province bordering Iran, more than 70 troops were killed in multiple assaults over the month.

The Afghan and U.S. officials have long been blaming Iran for fuelling insurgency in Farah, a claim rejected by Tehran.

This was followed by a deadly assault on the ethnic Shia-Hazara minority villages in Ghazni in late November that left 50 troops dead.

Another 26 soldiers were killed in a suicide attack inside an Afghan army mosque on Nov. 23.

On average 60 rebels were killed on daily basis in November during ground operations, the Defense Ministry said on its website.

Attacks on foreign troops continued during the month.

Three U.S. servicemen were killed and three others wounded on Nov. 27 when an improvised explosive device detonated near Ghazni city. One American contractor was also wounded.

This year 12 U.S. soldiers and four other coalition members lost their lives in attacks, said Maj. Bariki Mallya, spokesman of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission. (AA)