

(1) Afghan Spy Chief ...

of the city's Intercontinental Hotel. Ties between the United States and Pakistan are brittle after Washington announced plans this month to suspend up to roughly \$2 billion in U.S. security assistance.

U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted that Pakistan had rewarded past U.S. aid with "nothing but lies & deceit". Pakistan, which denies the accusations it allows safe havens for militants, condemned Saturday's attack and accused Washington of betrayal.

Pakistan is widely blamed in Kabul for the attacks and a senior Afghan cleric this week criticized a fatwa against suicide attacks issued by Pakistani religious authorities for not explicitly declaring attacks in Afghanistan haram, or unlawful for Muslims. Pakistan's embassy in Kabul rejected the criticism, saying in a statement the fatwa was a message against violence and terrorism anywhere in the name of Islamic injunctions.

In November, Pakistan handed to Afghanistan 27 people suspected of belonging to the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network, a spokesman for the country's foreign office said on Monday.

A delegation from Islamabad is to visit Afghanistan on Feb. 3, Pakistan's embassy in Kabul said.

"The delegation, led by the foreign secretary, will hold constructive and meaningful discussions with Afghanistan on all issues including counter-terrorism, peace and reconciliation and repatriation of refugees," the embassy said in a statement. (Reuters)

(2) Sayyad Elected...

President Ashraf Ghani in November. The commission was one member short until January 13, when Hafizullah Hashemi was appointed as a new member of the IEC.

The commission is preparing for the upcoming parliamentary and district council elections this year. (Tolonews)

(3) Sigar Report ...

the public. The report stated that SIGAR was not given any justification for the new restrictions.

The SIGAR report stated that the "worrisome development" follows an increase of insurgent control or influence in Afghanistan.

As such, the non-disclosure of information was of particular concern, SIGAR reported.

It also comes after several other measures for gauging the development and strength of Afghanistan's security forces were blocked or restricted in the fall. Among them were casualty and attrition rates.

Sopko said in the report "this quarter, the Department of Defense (DOD) instructed SIGAR not to release to the public data on the number of districts, and the population living in them, controlled or influenced by the Afghan government or by the insurgents, or contested by both.

"SIGAR was informed this quarter that DOD has determined that although the most recent numbers are unclassified, they are not releasable to the public.

"This development is troubling for a number of reasons, not least of which is that this is the first time SIGAR has been specifically instructed not to release information marked "unclassified" to the American taxpayer," Sopko said.

He said: "Historically, the number of districts controlled or influenced by the government has been falling since SIGAR began reporting on it, while the number controlled or influenced by the insurgents has been rising - a fact that should cause even more concern about its disappearance from public disclosure and discussion.

"This worrisome development comes as DOD this quarter, for the first time since 2009, also classified the exact strength figures for most Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), another vital measure of ANDSF reconstruction," he said.

"Meanwhile, for the second consecutive quarter, DOD also classified or otherwise restricted information SIGAR had previously reported including such fundamental metrics of ANDSF performance as casualties, attrition, and most capability assessments," Sopko added.

In addition, Sopko stated that due to heightened interest from both US and Afghan officials in Afghanistan's mining sector, the report contains an essay examining the prospects for mining to help the country become self-reliant.

"Despite Afghanistan's large and well-documented resources, mining revenues in 2016 supplied only 0.3 percent of the country's \$6.5 billion USD national budget. Among other obstacles, plans to develop the country's mineral resources have been stymied

by insecurity, corruption, weak governance, and a lack of infrastructure," he said. (Tolonews)

(4) Modi Calls...

said India is ready to help Afghanistan treat those wounded in recent attacks and "stands with the people of Afghanistan."

In the meantime, Ghani thanked Modi for his support and called "India the real and honest friend of the people of Afghanistan," read the statement.

He also praised Modi for his view of the region and said "the time has come to act to isolate countries that support terrorists." (Tolonews)

(5) Ministry of ...

ministry said a single center will be established to streamline the export process.

"Many facilities have been considered for exports and exporters. One of them is the single center which was recently inaugurated by head of the executive council this week in Kabul. These centers will be established at all customs offices," Alokozay told TOLONews.

The National Export Strategy will guide Afghanistan's efforts to realize the potential of its export sector as an important driver for economic growth. It is a key component of the Trade for Economic Growth and Regional Cooperation, a trade-related support program to Afghanistan funded by the European Union in support of the Ministry of Commerce and Industries.

The National Export Strategy will align with the priorities and development goals established by the Afghan government.

It will have a particular focus on socio-economic growth, private-sector development, investment promotion, investor protection, and economic diversification. The final Strategy will also adhere to the principles and instruments of the New Development Planning System that has been established by the Afghan Government as part of the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF), according to the European Union. Afghan government started work on the strategy in February last year. (Tolonews)

(6) 2017 Was a ...

ICRC workers were killed and two others were abducted on their way to Jawzjan province to distribute livestock.

After eight months of efforts, ICRC managed to release its two kidnapped workers.

Two days after their release, another ICRC staff member was shot dead by a patient in Mazar-i-Sharif, the capital of Balkh province.

Monica Zanarelli said the slain worker served in the orthopedic centre as physiotherapist.

She said in the first phase ICRC had suspended its operations in the north of Afghanistan due to excessive attacks, existence of challenges and exploring ways how to reduce security threats to its workers.

In the second phase, they reduced activities, but continued to assist those affected by violence.

She reaffirmed that in 2018, ICRC would remain committed to serving the people of Afghanistan something it had been doing over the past 30 years.

"We may explore the option to transfer the orthopedic services to other organization who could provide high standard services and ICRC operation in the remaining part of the country would remain as it," said Zanarelli.

She said ICRC cooperation with the Afghan Red Crescent Society would continue and would further strengthen to access disasters affected people in the countryside. (Pajhwok)

(7) Pakistan Recommends ...

for the extension is that it isn't possible humanly to ask over one million people to leave at once," the spokesman, AqdasShaukat, told Reuters.

"Our understanding is that another five months will give the refugees a good time to leave gradually."

The cabinet would decide on the recommendation next week, he said.

Pakistan complains that the large number of refugees are a burden, and says that Islamist militants often hide among them, but humanitarian agencies say Afghanistan could not cope with an influx of repatriated refugees at this time.

It is already struggling to help those refugees who have come back over recent years as well people displaced internally by fighting.

In 2017, fighting forced 360,000 people from their homes, the United Nations said in a recent report, while more than 17,000 people were displaced over the past week, the U.N. Organisation for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Assistance said. On the outskirts of Kabul, refugees

who have come back from Pakistan and internally displaced people eke out a living on a windswept, muddy plain and wait for help.

"We returned from Pakistan and have nothing here," said one woman called Shazia, who came back three years ago. "Our children collect plastic and paper to keep us warm."

Another returnee from Pakistan, EtibarGul, also worried about his children.

"There is no food or clothing," he said. "Our children have nothing to wear in this cold." (Reuters)

(8) Trump Talks ...

against ISIS (Daesh) and al-Qaeda, we continue to have all necessary power to detain terrorists - wherever we chase them down."

"Terrorists who do things like place bombs in civilian hospitals are evil. When possible, we annihilate them. When necessary, we must be able to detain and question them. But we must be clear: Terrorists are not merely criminals. They are unlawful enemy combatants. And when captured overseas, they should be treated like the terrorists they are."

Trump said: "In the past, we have foolishly released hundreds of dangerous terrorists, only to meet them again on the battlefield - including the ISIS (Daesh) leader, al-Baghdadi."

He said the US troops in Afghanistan also have new rules of engagement. "Along with their heroic Afghan partners, our military is no longer undermined by artificial timelines, and we no longer tell our enemies our plans," he said.

Trump did not however mention Pakistan in his speech despite the Trump administration announcing earlier this month that it would withhold \$255 million USD in aid to Pakistan, based on the perception that the country was harboring terrorists.

Under former president George W. Bush, the US military hastily constructed a prison camp on Guantanamo Bay, located on the US naval base on the eastern tip of Cuba, in the months following the US-led invasion of Afghanistan after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

At first, inmates were held in cages and fenced in with razor wire, and conditions for them provoked a global outcry in 2002.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani has said that government will take revenge from insurgents for the recent attacks - which killed close to 150 dead and hundreds more wounded.

"This kind of killing is against Islamic principles and humanity and Afghan culture. Revenge is the order of Allah and we will take revenge," said Ghani on Tuesday.

Ghani's statement on avenging the deaths apparently includes the execution of terrorists in the custody of the Afghan government.

"The issue of execution is on the table, undoubtedly, our security forces will also take revenge for our people against the terrorists," said Jawed Faisal, deputy CEO spokesman.

"The law must be implemented and those who committed bad deeds must be served severe punishments," said military analyst Mia GulWasiq.

It is believed that the cases of over 600 terrorists, including those on death row, are on the president's desk at the moment.

Sources in the presidential palace has confirmed that government is planning to execute a number of insurgents in its custody. However these sources are not giving details about the exact numbers. (Tolonews)

(9) Ghani Refuses ...

not provide further details. This comes after Kabul was hit by a spate of deadly attacks in the past 10 days - which killed nearly 150 people and wounded hundreds more.

After the recent attacks in Afghanistan, US President Donald Trump told visiting members of the UN Security Council the United States would no longer talk with the Taliban.

Trump railed against a series of "atrocities" in Afghanistan and said as a result the US would not engage in any future talks with the Taliban as the administration seeks to end a stalemate in America's longest war.

"Innocent people are being killed left and right. Bombing, in the middle of children, in the middle of families, bombing, killing all over Afghanistan," Trump said. "So we don't want to talk with the Taliban. There may be a time but it's going to be a long time."

Trump's remarks at a diplomatic luncheon marked a shift in tone on Afghanistan, the New York Times reported Tuesday.

Several attempts to hold peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban have failed.

In the meantime, Ghani's spokesman Shahhussain Murtazawi has said that "The Taliban has practically crossed the red line and today the Afghan government considers it its obligation to use all available resources and means against the terrorist groups."

But, the Afghan High Peace Council (HPC) says that a diplomatic settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan must be sought.

"Peace cannot be achieved by escalating the war," the HPC deputy head Nadir Naeem said. "I hope the Afghan government's leadership will protect its freedom and keep open the window for peace."

In response to Trump's comments, Taliban in a statement claimed that the remarks by the US president show that the Afghan government does not have the authority to engage in peace talks and instead it takes dictation from Washington regarding the issue.

Taliban claimed that the responsibility of bloodshed in Afghanistan is now lying on the shoulders of the US. (Tolonews)

(10) Daikundi Almond ...

officials say despite lack of attention, the provincial agriculture, irrigation and livestock department and local farmers celebrate the almond flower festival every year.

Daikundi has a proper climate for growing almond. The almond produced in this province has national and international reputation. (Pajhwok)

(11) US Airstrike ...

A clearing operation against the Taliban is underway in Andar district and some other parts of Ghazni province since a week. (Pajhwok)

(12) Snow Blocks...

avalanche incidents in Raghistan district and in Pas Pul area of Kohistan district on Monday, Dehqan said.

Eng. AbdurRaoufSayedi, provincial public works director, said the Faizabad-Takhar highway was temporarily closed due to heavy snowfall last night. "Our clearing team is dispatched to the area to spray salt on the iced part of the road and this highway will be reopened until 2pm today," he said.

He said Agharda Pass to border districts had also been buried under around three to four meters of thick snow but efforts were underway to reopen the pass.

Snow clearing process is currently underway on Fiazabad-Baharak road and the Shahr-i-Buzurg road, he concluded. (Pajhwok)

(13) Study Finds ...

with the Taliban in the wake of deadly terrorist attacks in Kabul, which claimed lives of hundreds of people.

The Taliban group operating in Afghanistan was accused by the US of providing a sanctuary to al-Qaeda and its leader Osama Bin Laden, who were blamed for the 9/11 attacks. The subsequent US-led coalition's invasion in Afghanistan led to the Taliban being driven from power in the country. (Sputnik)

(14) Analyst Lists Three...

behind China's willingness to support Afghanistan.

"First and foremost, China seeks to protect itself from the threat emanating from terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan," he said.

Also, China is concerned about the current US presence in Afghanistan and the goals that Washington wants to accomplish in the region, according to him.

Additionally, Bezhan recalled that a major global economic player, China pursues economic goals when it comes to its cooperation with Afghanistan.

"Long-standing relations between immediate neighbors Afghanistan and China also add to Beijing's drive to back Kabul," he concluded. (Sputnik)

(15) IECC in Trouble...

behind removal of the five IECC officers.

However, HumairaHaqmal, IECC deputy head, had said the commission head sacked the IECC officers based on personal grudges and discrimination.

An official of the complaints commission told Pajhwok Afghan News after the five officials were sacked, the Presidential Palace asked the Attorney General Office and the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCS) to provide their own views on the issue under the country's laws.

The president had sent a document to the two organizations with a statement that read: "This letter to the (AGO and IARCS) should be shared with the IECC and the IECC head should invite the sacked workers and refer them to the attorneys with legal reasons proving their crimes, no person or institute could violate the election law." Wali Khan Shabgir, who is responsible

for enforcing the president's orders, has asked the IECC to follow the president's orders and share their performance report with the Presidential Palace on November 28, 2017.

However, a day after sending the letter to IECC, Shabgir sent another letter, asking the commission to ignore the president's orders and wait until the president's next directives.

HumairaHaqmal, deputy IECC head, later sent a letter to the Presidential Palace, accusing Second Vice-President Sarwar Danish of interfering in the commission's affairs regarding the removal of the five officers.

The letter sent to the Presidential Palace on January 23, says: "One of the friends of the second vice-president is nominated for IECC secretary slot. The second vice-president has cut a deal with the commission head on appointing Nasir Ahmad Mahmudi as secretary of the commission."

Pajhwok tried to contact the Presidential Palace for comment in this regard, but failed. (Pajhwok)

(16) Commissioners ...

including Baidar, Hashemi, Wasima Badghesi, Mazullah Dawlati and Abdul Qader Quraishi have formed a separate bloc.

"This team has appointed Rafiullah Baidar as IEC head and negotiations for deputy head and secretary are underway."

However, Abdul BadaySayad, IEC spokesman, told Pajhwok Afghan News that discussions were underway inconclusive on IEC head appointment and other leadership members.

On the other hand, Hashemi said they had to postpone a planned internal voting on Tuesday to elect the commission head due to absence of one member.

"We six members of the commission are discussing to find a way which is acceptable to all, we hope we will reach an agreement until the end of the day," Hashemi concluded. (Pajhwok)

Cracks Appear in Newly-Built Sar-I-Pul Hospital

KABUL - The 100-bed hospital's building in northern Sar-i-Pul province, a 250 million afghanis project, has started appearing cracks and other infrastructural failures due to its substandard construction, Pajhwok Afghan News has learnt.

According to the Public Health Ministry, construction work on the hospital in Sar-i-Pul City, the provincial capital, kicked off back in 2009 and completed in 2016 at a cost of 250 million afghanis by 'New Jan Construction Company.' Documents of the government-funded project, provided by Eng. Abdul ZahoorSahak, in-charge of Public Health Ministry's infrastructure and buildings, show the building was handed over to the health ministry's delegation upon completion despite low quality construction work.

Dr. Mohammad RustamRajabi, head of the Sar-i-Pul hospital, said the building was not a standard one as cracks and other problems had surfaced in the structure only one year after its construction.

He said lifts in the building were out of order, plaster on walls had fallen to the ground, its painting had gone and the warm water system was not working. He said lower parts of the hospital building's walls had become wet and the building tilted down disorderly.

He added plastic had been used instead of mosaic in the floor of the building and now the plastic had separated from the floor, allowing water to penetrate the basin.

Dr. Rajabi said insects easily entered the hospital building because the flour had been constructed leveled with the ground amid absence of exhaust fans and an inactive irrigation system for the hospital greenery.

But the health ministry's infrastructures head said that the floor of the hospital was made of linoleum which was anti-bacteria while mosaic was not effective. Responsibility of the construction company

Sahak said: "We wrote a formal letter to the New Jan Company regarding construction problems in the building such as the repair of plaster, lifts, water system and others. If the company fails to address these problems, then they will be dealt with in line with the procurement laws and the repairs would be carried out from the company's \$500 money guarantee."

Meanwhile, Dr. NoorulHaqJalis, director of Sar-i-Pul public health, said the New Jan Company should have handed over the building after one year of its construction and repaired defects in the construction work. However, the company did not take action despite it was several times requested by the governor's house and the public health department, he said. (Pajhwok)