

(1) Taliban Likely...

told members of House Armed Services Committee during a hearing that he expected the ANSF to maintain stability and security in Kabul and key urban areas while retaining freedom of movement on major highways.

Stewart said ANSF would remain reliant on coalition enablers for air, intelligence and maintenance support. The ANSF will struggle to effectively fill the void created by the withdrawal of foreign troops, deal with interoperability challenges between the army and police, and address persistent maintenance and logistical issues, he noted.

The Afghan National Army (ANA) was the most proficient security institution in the war-torn country and had shown the capacity to plan and conduct multi-corps operations in high-threat areas, the Pentagon spokesman said.

"However, the ANA will continue to struggle with permanently denying insurgents freedom of movement in rural areas and will remain constrained by its stretched airlift and logistical capacity," he explained.

High attrition also continues to plague the force, which has struggled to keep its numbers near full capacity. The Afghan National Police (ANP) provide sufficient presence and security within urban centers and provincial and district hubs, but remain vulnerable in controlling high-threat, rural areas, he noted.

Gen Vincent Stewart warned the Taliban would be able to conduct attacks in urban areas through at least 2018, two years after the scheduled withdrawal of all US troops.

"The development of ANSF capabilities in 2015 will be critical as the insurgency will again attempt to increase its influence in rural areas, operate in larger formations and continue to test security forces by temporarily seizing a number of vulnerable rural checkpoints," the director predicted. (Pajhwok)

(2) RIC Meeting...

into the region through trade and transport networks.

"It is important for the international community to remain engaged with Afghanistan and fulfill its long-term commitment to civilian and security assistance," the statement added.

The fourth ministerial meeting of the Afghan-led Istanbul Process in Beijing was also highly valued which would contribute facilitating peace and economic prosperity in Afghanistan.

The ministers also agreed on the need for enhanced economic, security cooperation and fighting terrorism. (Pajhwok)

(3) Ulema, ...

supportive of the security forces. Their stout support had been manifested during the Dogram battle, where tribesmen fought against the enemies of Afghanistan.

Col. Wali Mohammad Ahmadzai, commander of the 201st Selab Military Corps, welcomed support pledges from the people. He said with backing of ulema, tribal elders and youth, the armed forces would defend their motherland.

Governor Shuja-ul-Mulk Jalala said Kumar had a 260 kilometre porous border with Pakistan and that was why rebels could easily sneak into the province. He added it was difficult for security forces to stop the movement of insurgent.

At the end of gathering, Qari Rahimullah presented a resolution in support of the armed forces. It was unanimously approved by participants. (Pajhwok)

(4) China Willing ...

saying a final decision, however, would be made by the Afghan government. He reiterated Islamabad's willingness to play the role of a facilitator in the peace process.

Direct negotiations between Kabul and Taliban were the need of the hour, Aziz in told the daily. No doubt, former president Hamid Karzai was reported to be in touch with the Taliban, who were encouraged to open an office in Doha, he recalled.

But the way the Taliban's political bureau was inaugurated in Qatar infuriated the Karzai administration and spawned differences between Kabul and Washington. As a consequence, the initiative fizzled out.

At a time when most of the foreign troops had pulled out of Afghanistan, there was a level playing field for all parties concerned to move forward toward result-oriented talks, he believed.

A new government was in place in Kabul, the advisor pointed out, saying China was ready to promote regional peace – key to development and prosperity. (Pajhwok)

(5) Taliban ...

of insecurity and deteriorated law and order since the presidential and provincial council elections.

Pasoon Shinwari, a resident of the district, said militants did not allow the vaccination campaign in the district and the government should work out a strategy to ensure it.

Muhammad Hanif Gardiwal acknowledged militants had banned the campaign and said efforts were on to kick-off the drive. But the Taliban have not yet commented on the issue. (Pajhwok)

(6) Study Shows ...

they face along the way, the young migrants are said to be driven on by a powerful amalgam of desperation and hope.

The architects of the study emphasized that their research focused on economic migrants who were utilizing illegal migrant networks to get abroad. "Our research basically covers those young migrants who seek asylum in European countries because of poverty and unemployment and tolerate major difficulties along the way, but our aim isn't those that transfer their capital from the country because of security and political issues, because migrants in this category mostly prefer to settle in gulf states like United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and other countries," said Mir Ahmad Joyenda, the head of the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit.

According to officials from the UN Refugee Agency, Afghan migrants face major challenges when they arrive in destination countries, such as the language barrier, lack educational opportunities, poor working conditions and other critical issues. They said recommendations would be sent to the Afghan government regarding new training and education programs.

In 2013, 3,595 Afghan children filed migration applications for European nations, while in 2012 that figure was around 5,700. The UN has said that migrants requested asylum in more than 44 different European countries. (Tolnews)

(7) Iran, Afghanistan ...

the hope that through unity and brotherhood existing between the border guards of the two countries the enemies would be defeated in near future.

The Iranian commander, for his part, said that both Tehran and Kabul are resolved to secure joint border in a bid to pave the ground for glorifying of their trade interactions.

Iran is one of the most important donors of Afghanistan, which has kept its promises to help to the reconstruction of the war-ravaged country.

Iran has built several roads, power transmission lines, border stations and many other infrastructure projects to better link the two nations.

Iran has also contributed more than \$50mln annually to Afghan anti-narcotics efforts during the last five years.

Tehran has repeatedly called for a withdrawal of the US-led foreign troops from Afghanistan, stressing that establishment of peace and security in the war-ravaged country is possible only through cooperation among the regional states. (FNA)

(8) Ashton Carter...

escalation between our countries. The U.S. Government should continue to use all instruments of national power, including diplomatic, informational, military, and economic, to prevent and respond to these intrusions."

On Iraq, he was asked, "What does the end state President Obama has declared to be the objective of our operations – 'ultimately destroy ISIL' – look like in your opinion?" He answered: "I believe that ISIL must no longer be a threat to Iraq, the region, the United States, and our partners."

On Russia, he was asked what he would do about this problem: "Russian tactics in eastern Ukraine have been called 'hybrid' and combine hard power with soft power, including elements such as lethal security assistance to separatists, the use of special forces, extensive information operations, withholding energy supplies and economic pressure." He answered: "Through the European Reassurance Initiative and the NATO Readiness Action Plan, the United States is supporting our Allies and partners in Eastern Europe with training activities, rotational presence, and capacity-building programs. These efforts focus on making our Allies and partners more resistant to asymmetric threats; demonstrating U.S. resolve to support European and global security; and deterring Russian aggression. If confirmed, I would seek opportunities to support and work with our Allies and partners in creating more activities, training, and exchanges that build their

resistance to asymmetric, or hybrid, methods of coercion." (Agencies)

(9) Residents Irked...

The ongoing situation is unacceptable to the people."

Earlier, Roohullah said, people did not have confidence in the commission's integrity and thought of it as an outsider. But the panel had won public trust due to its consistent stance on legal issues. He claimed.

The commission has volunteers in various districts to report people's grievances. Roohullah added last year alone they registered 134 cases of violence against women. Murder cases against women have risen in 2015.

"The reasons for violence are poverty, drug addiction and ignorance of laws and rights" The AIHRC regional head urged the government take cases of violence against women seriously. (Pajhwok)

(10) Ghani Warns...

crime branch chief.

During a visit to the area, the president consoled with the bereaved families and prayed for the swift recovery of the 39 individuals wounded in the suicide bombing.

While underlining the need for stability across the country, the president said in a statement from the Presidential Palace that his administration was working on strengthening the security forces to better protect the people.

He urged the masses to swing behind their security forces and said stability would remain a pipedream without active cooperation from the people.

The president offered fateha for the 201st corps soldiers, who were martyred in the assault.

He lauded the soldiers who laid their lives to protect their motherland and directed the Ministry of Defence to extend all-out cooperation to the bereaved families. He said the injured service members should be provided with best medical facilities.

He said each soldier killed in the line of duty would be given an award. Every soldier, he stressed, should know their problems would be resolved on a priority basis.

Addressing the 201st military corps, Ghani said: "I am here to listen to your problems and provide a tangible solution. You are the sons of the soil and fighting for the defence of Afghanistan. The people of Afghanistan and I respect the uniforms you are clad in." (Pajhwok)

(11) Accusations of Police

company were detained by police for half hour without any cause.

Mr. Qaderi believes the harassment of his delegation was an act of conspiracy against his company to give it a disadvantage in the bidding process.

His allegations come just a day after President Ashraf Ghani announced that the MoD fuel contracts would be cancelled in light of concerns that the recipients of them were improperly chosen and the terms of the agreements structured through corruption. The move has been welcomed by lawmakers in Parliament and independent analysts alike.

Mr. Qaderi has accused the Defense Ministry of involvement in a conspiracy to exclude his company from the bid. "They made a pretense that the number plate of the car was a fake one despite our colleagues insistences that the vehicles and the drivers would remain in custody and that they had important documents with them," Mahmoud Qaderi said. "We came for bidding and the police wouldn't accept it."

However, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) has defended the police and rejected the accusations of corruption. "Our information indicates that the police stopped a vehicle because of its lack of legal documents and the car didn't even have a license plate," MoI spokesman Sediq Sediqi said. "It is the duty of the police to stop illegal vehicles and transfer them to police stations to assess the documents." Meanwhile, the head of Afghan reconstruction services, Abdul Wakil Hanifi, expressed satisfaction with the cancellation of the fuel contracts. "It was good that the contract was cancelled, it would be better to put up for bidding again, because there were some doubts about it," Abdul Wakil Hanifi told TOLONews.

The price of oil in the contracts in question was set at around 60 AFG. Ajmal Rahmani, Fahim Hashimi, Ismail Ghazanfer and Abdul Wase Faqiri were among the winners of the USD 900 million worth contracts. (Tolnews)

(12) President ...

of employees and medical practitioners of the hospital over mismanagement and offering poor health services.

However, the president in his latest

visit to the hospital lauded the performance of doctors and management. He announced "to award best services award to the hospital official."

He expressed satisfaction following working out a five year plan for the development of the hospital. He said a commission would be formed to ensure the implementation of the plan.

The president urged international community to help train medical staff of the hospital and provide them with scholarships. (Pajhwok)

(13) Iran Ready...

expected increase in the export of energy will be brought about by the development of the country's giant offshore South Pars gas field phases. Last year, Iran and Iraq inked a gas supply deal where Tehran would supply gas to two Iraqi power plants. The first gas pipeline between Iran and Iraq has been already been completed.

Iran commenced pre-startup tests on the pipeline. After the end of cleaning and calibration pigging, 97 kilometers (Iran's section) of the pipeline will become operational. The 97-kilometer pipeline, 48 inches in diameter, would be linked to Iran's gas trunklines (IGATs) to deliver natural gas from Iran to Iraq.

Gas supplies are expected to start in May this year.

Iran has also opened a \$1.5 billion tender for the construction of a second pipeline to carry natural gas to Iraq, state owned Shana News said Sunday. (Agencies)

(14) EU Envoy's ...

and the existing practices."

In reaction to the remarks, the IEC said the statement was in contradiction to all diplomatic norms and parlance and amounted to obvious intervention in the election affairs of Afghanistan.

The statement acknowledged EU cooperation with the IEC and said it had observed and supported all elections technically and financially during the last decade. But the envoy's statement ignored the independency and impartiality of the IEC, the panel added.

Under Article 156 of the Constitution, IEC has been established to administer and supervise elections. Any change in the organisation necessitates observing provisions of the effective laws in the country.

"The IEC asks diplomatic missions and political groups of the country not to damage the electoral entities and the electoral process by making such statements. There are political purposes behind actions," the commission concluded. (Pajhwok)

(15) Business ...

Chakhansori said, Iranian officials will reduce restrictions on Afghan trucks transporting goods from that country.

On the other hand, some traders in Nimroz staged a protest, asking the authorities to help clear their trucks stranded on the Iran border.

One of the protestors, Mohammad Nazir, said: "Our trucks have been stopped on both sides of the border; we have invested thousands of dollars and ask the government to help solve our problem." (Pajhwok)

(16) Pakistan Urged...

Kamawal presented his department's annual report to the Governor's House.

He said construction work on the kidney hospital had finished and Pakistan had promised buying equipment worth six million Pakistani rupees for the hospital, something yet to be done.

He hoped Pakistan would buy and deliver all the needed equipment for the hospital in the near future.

Dr. Kamawal said government budget appeared to be insufficient to run the hospital and suggested the facility should be semi-privatised.

"We have sent copies of a letter having the signature of the deputy governor to all relevant departments to semi-privatise the hospital in order to provide quality and cheap services to the people."

Press counselor at the Pakistani Embassy in Kabul, Akhtar Munir, confirmed Pakistan had promised delivering equipment to the kidney hospital and said the required machinery would be handed over soon to Nangarhar officials.

Speaking at the governor's house in Jalalabad, the director said mother-child mortality rate had declined in Nangarhar. He added 1400 among 100,000 mothers would die in 2002 and the number had decreased to 327. (Pajhwok)

(17) Oil Contract...

the project. He said contract for extracting oil from three blocks of Amu River basin was not transparent and in contrast with the country's mining

law. "Delivery of three oil blocks of this basin is questionable and a matter of concern. The contract is inked in haste without keeping scientific principles in mind."

According to Ghyasee, the ministry has given privileges of 40 percent to the companies as compared to 10 to 20 percent in other countries.

Former mines and petroleum minister, Ibrahim Adel, while voicing similar reservations said 80 percent revenues go to the government and 20 percent to the contractor company.

A mining sector analyst, Eng. Habibullah Sharifi, says the agreement is not in favor of Afghanistan in the current situation. "The revenue goes to the government are very less comparing to other countries," he noted. A Wolesi Jirga member, Abass Ibrahim Zada, urged the president and chief executive to take action in this regard, saying that the contract had been inked owing to meddling of influential figures.

Neft Kam Refinery chief, Zmarai Kamgar, says they are purchasing the crude oil, extracting from Amu River basin from Watan Group corp. in Dubai.

But Acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum, Abdul Jalil Jamrani, insisted this contract was based on international standards and in larger interests of Afghanistan. "The inking of this agreement provides more help to the government as compared to other contracts."

Jamrani added: "We have four sources of revenues in this project: Gaining of 15 percent in royalty from extracted oil, 65 percent profit of the project goes to government, charging tax on profit of the contractor firm in accordance with our tax law."

If they calculate mentioned figures, it increases share of Afghanistan to 80 percent and benefit the company upto 20 to 25 percent revenues.

He acknowledged the company failed to abide by terms of the contract, prompting them to impose fines on it. Each year, Jamrani asserted, they inked contract with a foreign company to monitor their performance and report accordingly.

Challenges before this project: Security challenges:

Presently, 350 security personnel are providing security for Amu River Basin. However, some officials express concern about security at this field.

Eng. Mohammad Hussain Jawad, Amu River basin team member, said: "Before 2014 presidential elections, we exploit crude oil but security problems left the process halted until today."

Earlier, he added: "The companies extracted daily 300 tonnes of crude oil while now the production process has been stopped that inflict financial losses on the company daily."

On other hand, Mohammad Hashim, a resident of Sar-i-Pul province, who leaves at a 10 kilometres distance from the site, says most of the people are jobless and the company only hired a handful of individuals in disregard with its previous commitment.

Administrative problems:

An engineer who works for the firm wishing anonymity said that neighboring Uzbekistan refused to allow them to refine crude oil there.

It was direly needed to transfer crude oil for refinery purposes abroad, he said, adding that there was no contract with the neighboring country in this regard. However, he said negotiations were underway to resolve the problem.

Jamrani said: "Our refinery system has lack in proper capacities, and the crude oil owing to high density should be refined in large refineries with mega capacities."

Afghanistan has transit problems with Uzbekistan, he said, asking the Ministry of Commerce and Industries to help resolve the problem.

Musafir Qoqandi, spokesperson of the Commerce and Industries' Ministry, said refining responsibility of crude oil was up to the relevant ministry and they have nothing to do with the issue.

"Our two demands of hiring residents of the area and carrying out refinery process in the field by the contractor companies cannot be met so far," he complained. He warned people would take action against the companies if they failed to materialize their previous pledges. (Pajhwok)

(18) 86 Rebels...

high school and university students to voice their support for Afghan security forces after they assumed full security responsibility from foreign counterparts on January 1.

Weesa said some areas in Imam Sahib District of Kunduz, Qaisar and Amar districts of Faryab and Saripul, Baghlan and Jawzjan provinces were somehow under threat from insurgents.

In order to do away with the threat,

the military official said they had launched a joint major operation codenamed "Fatah" in nine Northern provinces since the start of this Afghan calendar month (Jan 20-21).

He said reports indicated 62 militants had been killed in Kunduz and about 100 injured. Another 16 rebels were killed in Faryab, where 28 others were injured, he said. In Saripul, he said, eight militants were killed and 14 wounded.

To a question about the new emerging threat from the Islamic State, the military official confirmed the Iraq and Syria-based group was trying to find a foothold in Afghanistan.

"We accord no value to the names of enemy. It has no impact on us if today we are fighting those dressed in white and tomorrow those in black. Everyone who is Afghanistan enemy, we aim our guns at them."

Weesa said the troops had so far not encountered any group claiming allegiance to the IS during the ongoing operation in the north. (Pajhwok)

(19) Spy Agency ...

red from them in the 17th police district, said the statement. "The detainees have confessed to being trained on making roadside mines and suicide vests by Maulvi Roohullah, a Taliban commander."

The statement said the pair was planning to carry out attacks on security personnel in the Pul-i-Charkhi area in 9th police district of Kabul. (Pajhwok)

(20) 8 Insurgents ...

.Lt. Col. Mohammad Rasool Zazai, spokesman for the 215th Maiwand Military Corps, confirmed the security forces had conducted operation in Sangin district. Four militants were killed in the clash, he said, adding but security forces remained unhurt during the hours' long clash.

In Maidan Wardak, three Taliban were detained while smuggling drugs and explosives, Attaullah Khogyani, the governor's spokesman, said. One of the detained men was a former policeman, who has joined Taliban's ranks. (Pajhwok)

(21) Number of ...

increased."

He said they lacked funds to assist all street children and confirmed the number of such children was increasing with each passing day. This Afghan year, Qarizada said ACTED (the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development), a Paris-based non-governmental organisation founded

In his recent speech to the Wolesi Jirga, President Ghani said currently 1.7 million children were enrolled in schools and urged Afghans living abroad to support at least one Afghan child to go school instead of work. (Pajhwok)

(22) Japanese... the company has previously supplied gas turbines and other core equipment. MHPS will also provide technical training to Uzbekenergo's engineers in both Uzbekistan and Japan. The Japanese company will hold technical seminars periodically to make Uzbekenergo familiar with the latest technologies and share information relating to operation and maintenance of gas turbine combined cycle (GTCC) power generation plants. (ICA)

(23) Jordan Executes... which comprises of several Arab forces, including Jordan. Both of the previous two victims captured by the IS in Syria were Japanese nationals. After the execution of a Japanese contractor, the IS briefly proposed to exchange the Jordanian pilot and a Japanese freelance reporter with the woman fighter, who was jailed by the Jordanian authorities for her role in a 2005 attack that killed 60 in Amman. (Xinhua)

(24) Uzbekistan's ...

Uzbekistan 'Milly Tiklanish' has made its choice. At the plenum, it was decided to nominate Akmal Saidov, a member of the faction of 'Milly Tiklanish' in the lower house of the parliament as a candidate for President. A Saidov's candidacy will be approved by the Congress party on February. These days, political parties of the country have actively started to collect signatures in support of the nominated candidates – each must collect at least five percent of the total number of voters in the country (more than 1 million signatures), representing at least eight administrative-territorial formations. In one of the administrative-territorial entities (Republic of Karakalpakstan, regions, Tashkent) a political party cannot collect more than eight percent of the signatures of the total. Also in this case, the voters have the right to sign once in support of only one candidate. (PR)