

(1) Leaders Launch...

President Ashraf Ghani said.

He was speaking at a ceremony attended by Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, Pakistani Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and India's Minister of State for External Affairs M.J. Akbar.

While the pipeline will allow Turkmenistan to find new consumers in Asia and cut its dependence on Beijing, which buys about 35 billion cubic meters of gas annually. It is also being seen as a central plank in ambitious regional development goals.

"TAPI will lead from a gas pipeline into an energy and communication corridor," Abbasi said, adding that as well as providing energy, the pipeline would underpin development of road, rail and communications networks.

The TAPI project, supported by the United States and the Asian Development Bank, has been touted by Turkmenistan since the 1990s. But the start of work was delayed because of the problem of crossing Afghanistan.

The pipeline will run for hundreds of kilometers (miles) through areas of southern Afghanistan largely controlled by Taliban insurgents fighting the Western-backed government in Kabul but the movement has signaled that it will not hinder the project.

The Taliban issued a statement on Friday, pledging its cooperation with TAPI, which it said would be an important element in building up Afghanistan's economic infrastructure.

"There will be no delay in this important national project," it said in a statement, which blamed the government in Kabul for delays in starting construction.

Ghani, striving to build up Afghanistan's war-shattered economy, has pushed the development of regional transport and energy networks to underpin long-term development and turn Afghanistan into a regional hub instead of a source of instability.

Afghanistan, which suffers from chronic energy shortages, is expected to take 5 billion cubic meters of gas itself, with the rest divided equally between Pakistan and India. In addition, Kabul will earn hundreds of millions of dollars in transit fees. (Reuters)

(2) Enhanced...

districts. Then the pipeline continues its way through BalaBolong and Bakwa districts in Farah and from there it goes to Dilaram district in Nimroz province. From Nimroz, the pipeline goes to Washeer and Nahr-e Saraj districts in Helmand province and continues to Maiwand, Zherai, Arghandab, Daman and Spin Boldak districts in Kandahar. From there, it enters Quetta and Multan in Pakistan.

"As far as it belongs to Afghanistan security forces, they are fully ready to maintain security of this project," President Ashraf Ghani's deputy spokesman Dawa Khan Minapal told TOLNews on Friday.

Analysts said the TAPI project can bring changes in people's lives in Afghanistan and that it will have a positive impact on the country's economy.

"By implementation of this project, poverty will be decreased to some extent. Investment will increase, and industry owners and investors will work here," economic affairs analyst Taj Mohammad Talash said.

"This project will reduce unemployment rate. It will provide a great chance for improvement of agriculture, industries and energy sector," economic affairs analyst Sayed Ghias Saeedi said.

President Ghani on Friday launched work on Afghanistan section of TAPI and meanwhile attended an event on the completion of the project in Turkmenistan. Addressing the event in Turkmenistan, he said Afghanistan reconnects South Asia with Central Asia.

"Afghanistan's policy is the connectivity policy, not separation. South Asia will be connected with the Central Asia through Afghanistan after more than a century of separation," Ghani said. "TAPI is not a project, but an economic corridor."

Taliban in a statement on Friday said the group will help in security of the project if needed, "because the outline of the project was first prepared during the Taliban regime" - 1996 to 2001.

According to the Taliban statement, most areas from which the pipeline passes through are under control of the group. (Tolo news)

(3) Afghan Refugees...

to pressurize the US and Afghanistan. Otherwise, the legal residency rights of the registered refugees are guaranteed in a trilateral agreement earlier signed with Afghanistan and the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Rahimullah Yousafzai, a journalist, author and expert on Afghanistan affairs, told Asia Times. He said that Pakistan could force unregistered refugees to return but no such treatment could be meted out to registered refugees. 1.3 million yet to register, seen as security risk

Some 1.4 million registered refugees currently live in Pakistan, mostly in the Northwest province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa - along with 1.3 million who are not yet formally registered. The military sees them as a security risk and wants them repatriated as soon as possible.

It believes that the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Group has used the refugees to "recruit, morph and melt" into Pakistan.

General Qamar Javed Bajwa, the Pakistan Army's chief of staff, said in an address to a security conference in Munich last week, that sending the Afghan refugees back would help to stem terrorism in the two countries. An official at the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (Safron) told Asia Times that the country's civil and military leaders decided not to extend the PoR cards for Afghan refugees beyond the end of January - to send them back to their country, depending on whether relations deteriorate with the regime in Kabul, or if they face bullying tactics by Washington. He said the Cabinet only renewed these papers for days, not for months and years.

"The voluntary repatriation program is moving very slow with only 48,000 refugees going back to their country in 2017," he said, adding that UNCHR paid cash assistance of US\$200 to every refugee opted to return voluntarily. The UN assistance was 400\$ per head in 2016 and that had attracted some 400,000 registered and 200,000 unregistered people to return. Yousafzai said: "These are just pressure tactics because the 'pull factor' is nowhere in sight in Afghanistan, to attract a graceful repatriation of millions of Afghan refugees." He said that unless the US and European countries line up funding for schools, housing and livelihoods, the situation in Afghanistan could not be made conducive for a speedy repatriation.

"The refugees will have to pay" The dispute is creating difficulties for the refugees because without valid legal documents they face harassment by security agencies for staying in the country illegally. NADRA officials provide receipts instead of valid PoR cards and security agencies demand legal stay documents from the refugees.

"Security agencies harass people for identification and take us to police stations for interrogation as we don't have legal documents to produce," lamented Abdul Jabbar, a first-generation Afghan refugee who runs a tandoori shop making bread in a densely populated area of Peshawar. He said he paid Rs 9000 (US\$25) to a NADRA official to get a PoR card which expired last year. "I will now have to pay bribes every time I need to get my PoR card renewed, or alternatively I will have to stay at home."

Not all are suffering. Abdullah is a -29-year-old second-generation refugee who makes fabulous earnings in a stylish boutique in the posh University Town area of Peshawar. For him going back to Afghanistan would be a nightmare. "I was born, educated, and self-employed in this country and never went to Afghanistan. It would be very hard for me to reestablish in a violence-plagued region that has little or no opportunities for growth," he remarked.

For these refugees, caught in the middle of a war, support from the Pakistani government seems to be evaporating as the country faces pressure from the US. President Donald Trump has been blaming Pakistan for American military casualties in Afghanistan. As bilateral relations cool between Islamabad and Washington DC, the Afghan refugees trapped on the wrong side of the border look set to pay a heavy price. (AT)

(4) UNAMA Welcomes...

UNAMA will continue dialogue with stakeholders so that the application of the new code does not result in impunity gaps and in particular that there is a robust legal framework in place to protect women from violence, the statement added.

The new Penal Code, which came into force on 14 February, reinforces Afghanistan's compliance with international human rights and criminal justice standards.

It incorporates all mandatory crimes under the United Nations Convention against Corruption, the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crimes (UNTOC) and its three protocols.

It also incorporates the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court covering war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, and establishes command responsibility for those who fail to prevent or punish subordinates who commit these crimes.

"The code expands the definition of the crime of torture in Afghan law to comply with the internationally accepted definition set out in the Convention against Torture."

"It responds to reform needs by codifying the crime of bachabazi, an illegal practice of abusing teenage boys, land usurpation, the submission of incorrect asset declarations by public officials, and criminalizes forced virginity testing, a practice prevalent within law enforcement agencies," read the statement.

Reforming the sanctions regime, the code introduces alternatives to imprisonment, which judges have the discretion to impose when sentencing to terms of imprisonment below five years and if the incarceration is less than three months.

"The new Penal Code also significantly reduces the number of crimes for which the death penalty applies," the statement read. The coming into force of the Penal Code will bring significant positive developments and a real potential to trigger societal transformation, UNAMA stated.

The removal of the chapter penalizing violence against women, however, causes concern with regard to ensure the strongest possible legal protection of women.

Technical amendments to the Code will be essential to ensure that the criminal provisions of the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (the EVAW Law) still apply.

UNAMA notes that the current EVAW law remains in place and continues to provide overall legal protection for women and remains committed to facilitating dialogue on ways to strengthen the criminalization of violence against women.

"UNAMA looks forward to the full implementation of the revised Penal Code, with a view to achieving accountability for those who violate national and international laws," the statement said. Work on amending the Penal Code started six years ago and was signed off in November last year.

The amended version of the Penal Code is in two books, 16 sections and 916 Articles. The first Penal Code was drafted in 1976. (Tolo news)

(5) Afghan Civilians...

of the continuing conflict. Conflict-related violence led to deaths, injuries and displacement.

"Civilian casualties continued to be high; the majority were killed or injured by armed insurgent groups, but a significant minority by pro-government forces."

"The number of people internally displaced by conflict rose to more than 2 million; about 2.6 million Afghan refugees lived outside the country. Gender-based violence against women and girls persisted by state and non-state actors," the report stated.

According to Amnesty International, armed groups are the key reason for the civilian casualty toll in the country and that members of the Hazara minority group and Shi'a continued to face harassment and increased attacks, mainly by armed insurgent groups.

The report states that an increase in public punishments of women by armed groups applying Shari'a law was reported, human rights defenders received threats from both state and non-state actors; and journalists faced violence and censorship. Death sentences continued to be imposed; five people were executed in November. (Tolo news)

(6) All You Need...

Afghanistan to Pakistan and India. At least 816 kilometers of the pipeline will pass through the territory of Afghanistan.

The pipeline passes through Herat, Farah, Nimroz, Helmand and Kandahar provinces of Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, the TAPI pipeline will be constructed alongside the Kandahar-Herat Highway in western Afghanistan, and then via Quetta and Multan in Pakistan.

The final destination of the pipeline will be the Indian town of Fazilka, near its border with Pakistan.

The project will cost 22.5\$ billion USD. The project will be completed by 2019, according to President Ashraf Ghani's Office.

The project is implemented by the TAPI Limited Company - a group of firms from Afghanistan and Turkmenistan including Afghan Gas Enterprise, Turkmen Gas State Company, and two private companies from Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's Share From TAPI Afghanistan is expected to earn more than 400\$ million USD in transit duties annually from the project.

According to President Ghani's Office, the project will create thousands of job opportunities for Afghans.

Afghanistan will annually get 500 million cubic meters of gas from the project in the first ten years. The amount will increase to one billion cubic meters of gas in the following ten years and 1.5 billion cubic meters of gas in the third 10 years after the completion of the project.

Other Projects Included In TAPI The TAPI project was recently changed into a collective of other projects which will be implemented alongside this key initiative for Afghanistan.

The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan 500 kilovolts Line (TAP500)- will transfer Turkmenistan's electricity to Pakistan through Afghanistan.

According to President Ghani's Office, Afghanistan is expected to earn 110\$ million USD annually from the TAP project. (Tolo news)

(7) Afghanistan Unveils...

unclear is whether these recruits would come from existing militia forces, and if so, how the [Afghan] ministry would ensure that they would be held accountable," noted Gossman told VOA.

The New York-based watchdog has been closely monitoring and documenting past allegations of rights violations against Afghan militias.

"Oversight mechanisms" go unexplained Gossman notes that Afghan authorities have not explained what kind of "oversight mechanisms" will be put in place to hold members of the new militia force responsible in instances of abuses against civilian population. Allegations against ALP members included sexual abuse of boys.

"What lessons has the Defense Ministry learned from the problems with the ALP? No one has really answered these questions," she added.

Afghan officials maintain, however, that by placing the new militia force under the

army's control will help prevent the abuse and misuse of authority.

Thursday's announcement comes amid fierce clashes between Afghan security forces and Taliban insurgents across the country, with both sides claiming to have inflicted heavy casualties on their opponents.

The Taliban controls or contests about 44 percent of the Afghan territory and insurgents continue to stage deadly attacks against government forces.

Under U.S. President Donald Trump's new Afghan war strategy, American forces have stepped up airstrikes against insurgent targets, hoping the battlefield pressure will push the Taliban to the negotiating table for talks with the Afghan government to end the conflict.

The insurgent group has vowed to resist the pressure, though, and to intensify battlefield attacks in the coming spring fighting. The Afghan conflict killed and wounded more than 10,000 civilians while pro-government forces reportedly lost about 10,000 personnel in 2017. (VoA)

(8) Dostum Makes...

are some issues which should be resolved," he said.

Enayatullah, the head of Dostum's office, said the international community and the people of Afghanistan want Dostum to return to the country but according to him, the president and a certain group are preventing this from happening.

"Unfortunately, some circles inside the ARG (Presidential Palace) are still showing resistance and no doubt their reasons are rooted in personnel hate and their personal interests," he said.

The Presidential Palace would not comment on the return of Dostum.

"I will not respond to repeated questions because this question which is asked at every conference," President Ashraf Ghani's spokesman Shahussain Murtazawi said.

A university lecturer however said without a court order, the Afghan government cannot ban any citizens from leaving the country or returning home.

"I think it is against the law to prevent the travel or the return of any Afghan citizen without a court order, whether it involves a government (official) or an ordinary person," Qasim Wahidi, a university lecturer said.

Asif Seddiqi, the second deputy speaker of Meshrano Jirga, the Upper House of Parliament, claimed that Dostum misused his authorities when he was in Afghanistan. "The first vice president of Afghanistan himself has stood against the system, has warned the system... These issues are serious matters of concern," he said.

Dostum left the country six months ago and went to Turkey, apparently for medical treatment. This was after he was charged with sexually abusing former Jawzjan governor and one of his former aides, Ahmad Eshchi. (Tolo news)

(9) Afghanistan...

Ghani said. "TAPI is not a project, but an economic corridor."

He thanked Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and his team for

"TAPI project means that Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India and other countries in the region have reached a joint economic cooperation which affects welfare of the region," he said.

"We laid not only the foundation of a project, but also a vision to eradicate poverty and bring prosperity together." He said the TAPI pipeline project has changed into an economic corridor as it contains a railway and power project.

The TAPI Project The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) project will transport gas from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India via a 1,814km pipeline.

In Afghanistan, the TAPI pipeline will be constructed alongside the Kandahar-Herat Highway in western Afghanistan, and then via Quetta and Multan in Pakistan.

TAPI will however, transport gas from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India via a 1,814km pipeline.

A ground-breaking ceremony is meanwhile expected to be held in Herat on Friday as construction on the Afghanistan section gets underway.

The final destination of the pipeline will be the Indian town of Fazilka, near its border with Pakistan.

Afghanistan is expected to earn 500\$ million USD in transit duties annually from the project.

The pipeline will be 1,814 kilometers long and will have the capacity of transferring 33 billion cubic meters of gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India through Herat, Farah, Helmand and Nimroz provinces of Afghanistan. (Tolo news)

(10) Saudi Prince...

terrorism.

"Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman announced his full support to the peace process in Afghanistan and called on all parties involved to fully support this process," said NSC spokesman Qader Shah.

This comes ahead of the Kabul Process peace meeting at the end of the month, which government will use to define its future policy for peace.

"At the (last) Kabul Process meeting the

world decided that the peace process must be an Afghan-owned process, however we welcome all countries who are willing to cooperate with us on this issue," Ghani's spokesman Shahussain Murtazawi said. "After this, regional and ultra-regional countries will forge cooperation in a sense that they will provide technical cooperation to an Afghan-led peace process. We did not have this in the past," said HPC spokesman Ehsanullah Tahiri.

"Allah will bring to justice if someone kills an innocent human being, this is a great treason and has no Islamic justification," said religious scholar Mawlawi Noor Padshahzada. (Tolo news)

(11) Kandahar Egg...

manages food, eggs production and other activities by machineries, he said.

Azam added his farm produced 10,000 eggs a day and the eggs were offered to the market after packaging process.

"Other chicken farms in Kandahar are not very advanced and they have the capacity for only 6,000 chickens and can produce 5,000 eggs a day", he said.

"Egg farm machinery is better because it simplifies management of chicken feeding and eggs production", he said.

His investment in Kandahar was aimed at modernizing eggs producing process and preventing the import of low quality eggs from abroad.

Kandahar agriculture officials say that there are 13 egg farms in the province and the recently activated one is advanced and equipped with machineries.

Eng. Mohammad Ullah Noori, livestock promotion head at the provincial agriculture department, said that building egg farms in Kandahar began in 2010. He said farms in Kandahar had been invested more than 44 million afghanis.

"These farms produce 115,000 eggs a day and they meet 40 percent of Kandahar people's need while some are exported to other provinces as well", he said.

Noori said that the remaining 60 percent of eggs were imported from Pakistan and Iran as 200,000 eggs were daily sold in Kandahar province.

He said 360,000 eggs were imported from Pakistan and Iran per day and sold in Kandahar, Helmand and some other provinces. (Pajhwok)

(12) Contract Signed...

work of 336 apartments in six blocks will be completed based on the new Memorandum of Understanding signed between the three government institutions.

The Ministry of Finance of Afghanistan will fund the construction work of the project, the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing said.

According to the ministry, the construction work of the project was put on hold since a long time ago and it is expected that the work will be completed over a period of one year once the funds have been received. (KP)

(13) Samangan Traffic...

truck which resulted in the killing of drivers of both vehicles and injured their conductors.

The injured had been evacuated to the hospital and said the accident happened due to the careless driving of both drivers. DrMaqbul Azizi, a doctor at the emergency wade of the hospital, said the injured were in serious condition and shifted to Mazar-i-Sharif for more treatment. (Pajhwok)

(14) EU Urged to Ban...

"To truly protect children," Winter said, "the EU and its Member States should redirect resources from detention centres to non-custodial, human-rights-based solutions."

A number of promising practices already exist in Europe and elsewhere, which allow for effective migration management while guaranteeing the protection of the best interests of the child. These include providing children and their families with community-based placement; access to services in a protective environment, on a non-discriminatory basis, with child-friendly, clear information and support; and the appointment of guardians at the point of arrival or upon first identification of the unaccompanied child.

The Committee welcomed ongoing EU initiatives to support the development of such measures, and urged that they be strengthened and coupled with the adoption of laws and policies prohibiting child immigration detention. (Pajhwok)

(15) Taliban Promise...

regional project whose groundwork was initiated during the Islamic Emirate's rule." However, the statement claimed, the project had faced delays due to America's military presence in the region. The launch of work on the Afghan section of the pipeline was happy news for all Afghans, it added.

"In areas under its control, the Islamic Emirate announces full cooperation on implementation of the project and associated dimensions of the pipeline draw attention to the principle of the Emirate," the rebel movement added.

Under the Afghan government, holding a global record of corruption and embezzlement, no game-changing economic development scheme has been carried out so far and that was why the TAPI pipeline was also marred by massive graft, the Taliban alleged. (Pajhwok)