

(1) Corruption Still...

government's resolve to combat corruption, there will be repercussions. Hassan said there are worries that whatever progress has been made in fighting corruption is under threat from "the increasingly contentious political" environment in Afghanistan.

"MEC is quite concerned about the ability of the NUG to work together to effectively address issues related to corruption," he said.

The chairman went on to acknowledge numerous political, social, economic and security issues facing the government, but said if the Afghan leadership loses focus on fighting corruption, it will have serious implications for Afghanistan and could undermine efforts to seek continuous financial assistance in future international donors' conferences.

'Massive and systemic problem' Corruption is one of the most serious threats to the U.S.-funded Afghanistan reconstruction effort, John Sopko, the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, or SIGAR, told the U.S. Congress on Wednesday.

The federal oversight agency says the U.S. has spent \$113 billion rebuilding Afghanistan, more than it spent rebuilding Europe after World War II, adjusted for inflation.

"SIGAR and other observers - not least of whom is President Ghani - have consistently reported that corruption remains a massive and systemic problem in Afghanistan. It is troubling, therefore, that the United States continues to operate without a comprehensive overall strategy for coordinating and executing effective measures to reduce the malign influence of corruption in Afghan society," Sopko said in his written statement.

He noted that corruption is a critical issue not only for government effectiveness and legitimacy, but for fiscal sustainability. "Kabul relies heavily on customs receipts for domestic revenue, but corruption severely constricts the actual flow of funds to its treasury, while adding to the risk of "donor fatigue."

The United States Institute for Peace, in its latest report, said the cash-strapped Afghan government's budget revenue increased almost 22 percent in 2015, showing an "extraordinary turnaround" of 30 percent as compared to the 8 percent drop in 2014.

The government-funded institute cited stronger tax collection efforts, corruption crackdowns and new taxes contributed to the "impressive revenue turnaround."

It attributed 56 percent of the increased revenue to better collection efforts, especially in the customs department, which controls trade at the country's border crossings.

"This experience demonstrates that targeted progress can be achieved, even in Afghanistan's challenging political and security environment," the institute said. (VOA)

(2) Rules of ...

backup. He said wounded soldiers had personally shared with him incidents that put them in "compromising positions" in Afghanistan. "It bothers me when I hear that they didn't get the air support that they needed," Frelinghuysen remarked.

In response, Dunford said he had similar stories from wounded troops while touring Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda and the accounts sometimes hinged on confusion. (Pajhwok)

(3) AI Report ...

member of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), also said that there has been widespread violations of human rights over the past year.

Although protection of women's rights was a top priority of the National Unity Government, women in Afghanistan are still living in very bad conditions.

Sonia Aslami, a member of the Afghan Women's Network, said the National Unity Government has pledged to protect women's rights. "The government said this is going to be a good year for women. On the contrary, it was a bad one, because a large number of women were victims of violence," she added.

Aslami said that the government has done nothing so far to punish violators of women's rights.

Amnesty International in the report has also expressed concerns over the increase in activities of terrorist groups, including the Taliban and Daesh. According to report, there has been widespread violation of human rights in 2015, as hundreds of civilians have been killed or wounded, thousands of cases of violence against women have been registered

and other crimes have also considerably increased.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in its recent report blamed the Taliban and other terrorist groups for 70 percent of civilian casualties in 2015. (Tolnews)

(4) Pakistan ...

in March's first week in Islamabad," Pakistan's Foreign Office Spokesman Mohammad Nafees Zakaria said at his weekly media briefing.

The Taliban spokesman has told section of the media that the group's political office and the central leaders are unaware of the talks offer. Hizb-e-Islami's political affairs in-charge Ghairat Baheer says his group is considering the talks offer.

The Pakistani spokesman said it was decided with consensus that the talks under the QCG process will be without pre-conditions.

"All four countries that constitute the QCG have a joint responsibility to move the reconciliation process forward and make a direct dialogue between the Afghan government and various Taliban groups and others possible," Zakaria said.

He said all the four countries involved in the Quadrilateral reconciliation process share responsibility to approach the Taliban/Afghan factions who are to be invited for the talks. (Xinhua)

(5) Thousands of ...

border agency Frontex recorded over 1.83 million illegal border crossings into the European Union in 2015. About 1.1 million refugees arrived in Germany in 2015. (Agencies)

(6) France Promises ...

during his visit to Nangarhar. He promised that France in addition to other Afghan provinces would grant special scholarships to Nangarhar students and facilitate their studies in his country. He also promised assistance with Nangarhar in other sectors. (Pajhwok)

(7) 700 Militants...

two days ago and the security forces are currently busy to remove Improvised Explosive Device (IED) left by the militants on the roadsides.

This is the third time Gen. Dostum is joining the Afghan forces to clear parts of northern provinces from the militants presence.

Gen. Dostum first joined the Afghan security forces in the frontline in northern Faryab province earlier in the month of August last where he survived at least two assassination plots by the anti-government armed militant groups while he was leading counter-terrorism operations.

Initially his convoy was ambushed by the Taliban in militants in Qaisar district in mid August while another plot to assassinate him was thwarted by the security forces and his special security guards few days later.

At least three suicide bombers were arrested from the vicinity of Gen. Dostum's residence in Qaisar district in connection to the attack plot. (KP)

(8) NSC Green...

complained against insecurity as most parts of the province, including Tala Wa Barfak, Baghlan-i-Markazi, Burka districts and Pul-i-Khumri, the provincial capital, are under serious security threat.

Currently, heavy fighting between security forces and the Taliban is underway in Dand-i-Shahabuddin locality. Earlier, the Taliban had blown up three pylons in the area.

The NSC discussed the overall security situation of the country and noted the major threats posed by the enemy. The meeting also discussed a strategy for countering the insurgent threats in different parts of the country. (Pajhwok)

(9) Al-Qaeda ...

Warning the committee members on such future attacks, he said that the US will "almost certainly remain at least a rhetorically important enemy for most violent extremists in part due to past and ongoing US military, political, and economic engagement overseas. Violent extremists will probably continually plot against US interests overseas."

Previously, Clapper had warned against a political downturn in Afghanistan during 2016, a claim dismissed by Afghan officials.

Clapper, however maintained that al-Qaeda presence in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan has been visibly diminished, yet it aspires to attack the US and its allies.

Referring to the activities of Daesh, Clapper stressed that Daesh's announcement last year on the formation of its Khorasan branch in south Asia rebranded former Afghan Taliban and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan members. "Despite quick early growth in 2015, ISIL's Khorasan

branch will probably remain a low level threat to Afghan stability as well as to US and Western interests in the region in 2016," he said.

"They must be concerned, because these organizations (al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations) are the organization which operate in a limited area. These organizations operate on the basis of particular strategies and they can pose a threat anywhere in the world," former minister of interior Mirza Mohammad Yarmard said.

"If the international community take serious action for the elimination of terrorism roots, there is unanimity of views that we can easily curb terrorism in the region. If there is no firm determination, then terrorism will survive for a long time," political commentator Hadi Miran said.

It seems that Afghanistan and its international partners would travel on new tracks in 2016 in their struggle against terrorism.

According to experts, the US and international community need to focus their concentration on terrorism funding resources, hideouts and bunkers. (Tolnews)

(10) Hakimi, World ...

economic reform agenda, Afghan authorities negotiated a nine-month Staff Monitored Program (SMP) with the IMF in early 2015.

The first review of SMP was completed in late October that assessed benchmarks for the end of June. The second and final review was also done. (Pajhwok)

(11) KP Chief ...

Afghans' return to their homeland was necessary for improvement in the security situation. (Pajhwok)

(12) Transparency ...

foreigners on the Independent Election Complaints Commission (IECC). Also, the panel suggested the reservation of one Wolesi Jirga (lower house) seat for the Hindu minority and identification and shrinking of constituencies.

Other proposals are the distribution of computerised identity cards, 25 percent representation for women on provincial and district councils and invalidation of the current voter cards.

The ERC has also proposed the number of Independent Election Commission (IEC) members be reduced from nine to seven and the IECC from seven to five.

Wolesi Jirga, however, rejected the presidential decree regarding ERC suggestions. The rejection represents a huge question mark over the entire process.

The house revoked the decree because the election laws already approved by it and endorsed by the president were in force. In line with Article 14 of the law, if there is a need for amendments, the issue should be referred to the Independent Election Commission (IEC).

According to ACSEN, the appointment of new commissioners was an important process. He urged adherence to pure merit in the appointments. The selection committee was asked to ensure professional were appointed to the commission. (Pajhwok)

(13) Kandahar ...

melons and apples constituted fresh fruit exports, according to the official, who said nearly 4,000 tonnes of medicinal herbs - worth \$111,000 - were also sold abroad.

Additionally, 589,000 animal hides were sent abroad, earning livestock owners \$6 million. For the first time, ice creams were exported to hot areas of neighbouring Pakistan, the trade leader explained.

"A Kandahar-based ice cream factory, called Yaaran, sent \$10,000 products to Pakistan this winter," Beena said, adding the exports weighed 9,600 kilograms - a whole new initiative.

The ACCI office-bearer noted a large quantity of fresh fruits - grapes and pomegranates in particular - were smuggled abroad. He estimated the values of smuggled fruits at millions of dollars.

He said 97 percent of the fruits were transported to Pakistan and India. Some of the fruits were also dispatched to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Germany and the United States. Airlifting exports from Afghanistan, a landlocked country with no short land routes to the outside world, was an expensive proposition, he added. Afghan traders will be able to send their products to Europe if cargo flights are made available to them. At recent meetings, he pointed out, Turkish authorities promised to arrange cargo flights to Kandahar and set up a consulate in the southern city. This would help boost exports to European countries, the official hoped.

A delegation of Afghan traders is expected to visit Turkey and hold negotiations with Turkish entrepreneurs on establishing a joint company. Beena is confident the initiative would pave the ground for increasing fruit exports to Europe via Turkey.

He asked the government to persuade Iran and Arab states to give Afghan traders transit facilities. Afghan products have many buyers in the Arab world, but the problem is how to transport the goods there.

Meanwhile, Kandahar businessmen complained that despite promises from the government over the past 14 years, they were had been offered no facilities for airlifting grapes, pomegranates and other fruits to the international market.

Haji Nanai Agha, head of Fresh Fruit Merchants Association, said they send most of their products to Pakistan and India. Businessmen in those countries make a lot of money by exporting the fruit under their own brand names to other nations.

He resented the non-implementation of a recent agreement with Pakistan. Under the deal, the Afghan trucks will be allowed to take exports through Pakistan to the Wagah border. He called for the early enforcement of the accord. (Pajhwok)

(14) US Payments ...

Afghanistan, Gen. John F. Campbell, called it a mistake. Internal military investigations have not been made public.

A joint U.S.-NATO assessment, obtained by The Associated Press, says the AC-130 gunship fired 211 shells at the compound for a half-hour before commanders realized the mistake and halted fire. Contrary to initial claims by Afghan officials, the report says there was no evidence the hospital had been overrun by Taliban gunmen or that there were hostilities there.

A parallel investigation by the U.S. military produced a 3,000-page report that officials say will be made public after it has been redacted. They have not given a firm date for its release.

Guilhem Molinie, MSF's representative in Afghanistan, said the information in the reports has not been shared with the charity. "We are still totally in the dark on what happened on that night in Kunduz," he said.

He said his group has discussed the "sorry money" with the U.S. military, calling the amount of the payments "ridiculous." He said many of the families had lost their sole breadwinner and that the funds would run out soon.

"These amounts are absolutely not compensation for loss of life," he said. As condolence payments, these small amounts are seen as adequate to cover basic costs such as funerals, rather than as compensation, or blood money, for the deaths and injuries caused by the attack.

The United States has paid blood money up to \$50,000 per death in some incidents, such as the multiple killing of Afghan civilians by a U.S. soldier in 2013. The amount paid is assessed on a case-by-case basis. The Afghan government of former President Hamid Karzai paid compensation to the family of each person killed due to the conflict of 100,000 afghanis, or about \$1,500 at current exchange rates.

The office of President Ashraf Ghani did not respond to a request for information. But Abdul Wase Basil, spokesman for the governor of Kunduz province, said the provincial government had paid compensation to 400 families who were affected by the violence of the siege of Kunduz city, which last about three weeks after the Sept. 28 Taliban onslaught.

He said the wounded had been paid 20,000 afghanis (\$290) each, and bereaved families 50,000 afghanis.

Zabiullah Khan, 25, lost both his hands and an eye in the bombing of the hospital, where he worked as a nurse. He was the sole supporter of his family of nine.

"I want to know why the American government bombed us, what did we do wrong," he said. "Now we have no money coming in at all. I want the Americans to provide advanced treatment for me abroad."

Anayatullah Hamdard lost his father, who was a doctor. He now represents the families in their dealings with the U.S. military and is hoping they can get legal advice on how to pursue more compensation. "We need someone with knowledge of war crimes to help us," said Hamdard, an agriculture professor at Kunduz University.

Their legal options are limited by the agreements that govern the U.S. military's presence in the country, which give the U.S. the exclusive right to prosecute its service members.

Molinie fears the lack of accountability, for U.S. or Afghan forces, following the Kunduz incident has

encouraged a culture of impunity worldwide. Like other charities operating in war zones, MSF follows a policy of strict neutrality, treating anyone without asking their affiliation. But in recent weeks its facilities have been bombed in both Syria and Yemen.

The U.S. military has offered to rebuild the hospital in Kunduz. But Molinie said the priority was "making sure that the incredible chain of errors, mistakes, technical failures that were said to have happened in Kunduz will not happen again and could not happen again."

"Securing the basic assurance that we can run a hospital on the front line is much more important for us than rebuilding the hospital." (AP)

(15) President Gives...

family during a meeting with the National Federation of Journalists and Media Organisations.

At the meeting, the president had said a fund would be created for journalists losing their lives or sustaining injuries in line duty.

Sources at the journalist federation say work to create the fund has been started and in this regard a procedure containing three chapters and 16 articles has been developed. (Pajhwok)

(16) A Youth on ...

areas of the province. Hussaini, a higher education degree holder, said most children had developed good relationship with him and they recognised him, something he considered a great achievement.

He distributes books to children for three to four days and recollects earlier books which the children had studied.

Hussaini, who loves reading books, does not ask for money from anyone because he is from a well-off family, but if somebody donates money to the cause he immediately buys more books.

Recalling some interesting memories, he said: "One day I was distributing books in a village, a five-year old was crying and asking his mother to get him a book, but she told him that you can't read so you don't need a book."

"As I noticed it, I gave a book to the five-year-old child who became excited because the book contained many pictures."

He said one day he distributed all books he had to a crowd of children in Haidarabad area of Bamyan City, but he was astonished seeing another crowd of children waiting for him.

Hussaini plans to open 15 libraries in different areas of Bamyan City to mentally empower children and this way remove poverty. (Pajhwok)

(17) Daesh 'Training'...

war movies to children to encourage them," said Arabistan, a former Daesh commander.

Zaiton another former Daesh commander said: "They [Daesh fighters] where teaching children how to use weapons and were giving them practical training."

Human rights protection organizations and civil society activists strongly condemned militant groups for using children in wars and say it as a clear violation of human rights. (Tolnews)

(18) Woman Kill ...

fire on the militants in Khwajah Alwan area.

Gen. Nazeri also added that the police forces were immediately deployed to the area following the incident.

The Taliban militants group has not commented regarding the incident so far which comes amid tense security situation in Baghlan province. (KP)

(19) 14 Rebels ...

Turkmen village were cleared as the rebels fled to Bajawri village. However, Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid claimed the fighters had killed dozens of Afghan security personnel and destroyed three tanks and a Ranger pick-up.

He confirmed the loss of only two militants and wounding of five others, saying the Taliban were just one kilometer from the district centre. (Pajhwok)

(20) Afghan Female ...

"Some people believe women are meant only to stay at home, and all they can do is cook food and do housework," her teammate added. "They say a bicycle can destroy a girl's future. People say a lot of things. If we listened to them we would never leave our houses."

The team's nomination came about after 118 Italian MPs signed a petition to have the Afghan Women's Cycling Team included. (Agencies)

(21) Signed Lionel ...

player by UNICEF workers, his father Arif Ahmadi told CNN. Arif said it was "one of the happiest

moments" of the five-year-old's life. His son's only regret, he said, was that Messi - who scored twice for Barcelona as they beat Arsenal in the Champions League in London on Tuesday - was not able to have been there.

But Arif said Murtaza, unfazed by that, had been wearing one of the shirts and playing with the football ever since the gifts arrived. (Asia-Plus)

(22) 1 Civilian

Civil Hospital. Area resident Abdullah said the men were on their way to a livestock market in Kaga Bazaar, which was organised every Friday. (Pajhwok)

(23) Insurgents Put...

ANA spokesman in Faryab Mohammad Zahir Zahir said it was not yet clear who the victims were. The troops did not travel in public transport buses, he explained. (Pajhwok)

(24) Airstrikes....

Douma. Another witness, who lives in the Abassyin district, also spoke of the heavy shelling sounds and the cloud of dust that covered parts of that area.

The Observatory, which relies on a network of activists on ground, said the aerial bombing was not only confined to the capital, as strikes have been reported Friday in the countryside of the central provinces of Homs and Hama, as well as the northern countryside of the coastal province of Latakia. (Xinhua)

(25) Iran Navy ...

that an Indian navy fleet will dock at the southern Iranian port city of Bandar Abbas, the capital of Hormozgan Province, in April or May. (PressTV)

(26) Int'l Efforts ...

to methods that involve sealing off their borders with razor-wire fences to prevent refugees from crossing into the continent. In a breakthrough move in November last year, EU countries agreed to donate some 3.3 billion U.S. dollars to Turkey to help keep more than 2.5 million Syrian refugees within its borders. (Xinhua)

(27) Former Austrian ...

Austria, the last stop for refugees to Germany, has been criticized for its decision to cap the number of refugees coming to the country. Busek noted the Austrian government's proposal to send 100 troops to the Macedonian border with Greece would have little effect to stem the influx of refugees. (Xinhua)

(28) Cambodia Slams...

Thursday that the U.S. key priority is to see Cambodia develop into a strong democracy that respects human rights and supports a thriving civil society. "We urge the Cambodian government to continue to create a more just society and improve its commitment to democracy and human rights," she was quoted as saying by the newspaper. (Xinhua)

(29) Refugee, Migrants ...

people have died while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe.

Most fatalities, or 321 deaths, have been observed on the eastern Mediterranean passage separating Turkey and Greece.

The remaining 97 deaths have been recorded on the central Mediterranean route linking North Africa with Italy. (Xinhua)

(30) UN Chief...

"The parties must know that responsibility does not end with the signing of an agreement. In many ways, it begins with the signing of agreement. And it must begin now," he added.

The UN chief who was on his fourth visit to the world's youngest nation said South Sudanese have suffered decades of bloody civil war, yet over the last two years the nightmare has returned with vengeance killings, rape, children forced to become soldiers, massive human rights violations and epic corruption. (Xinhua)

(31) Palestinian ...

Boulos, al-Qeeq's attorney, confirmed to Xinhua on Friday that a deal was reached.

According to the deal reached with Israeli authorities, al-Qeeq will be released on May 21, a month earlier than scheduled. Until that time he will continue to be hospitalized at the Emek medical center in Afula, situated in northern Israel. His family members will be allowed to visit him in hospital. (Xinhua)

(32) UN Resolution ...

He said the Chinese side has proposed parallel tracks, which involve denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the replacement of the Korean armistice with a peace agreement. (Xinhua)