

(1) 14 Militants...

and surrender to local authorities. According to Mohammad Reza Ghafari, spokesman for Jawzjan provincial government, a 20-member group of IS militants under Mohammad Tahir have given up fighting and handed over their weapons to police in Darzab district over the past 24 hours. Darzab district has been the scene of fierce fighting between IS and Taliban group over the past two weeks, which has left some 300 fighters dead from both sides, officials said. The government forces, according to Afghan officials, would continue to fight IS militants elsewhere in the militancy-plagued Afghanistan. (Xinhua)

(2) 1,000 Fort...

who is part of the division headquarters, added: "Throughout our proud history, one thing that has not changed is the heart and courage of our soldiers." The headquarters would watch US troops as they work with Afghan allies against the Taliban in Afghanistan, where a cease-fire was observed last month for the first time in 18 years. The headquarters, whose deployment has been speculated since September, is set for a nine-month tour overseas. The division headquarters will replace the 101st Airborne Division headquarters as part of a regular rotation of forces to support Operation Freedom's Sentinel, officials said.

"The 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division is well-trained and ready for any mission the Army calls us to do," said Col. Paul Larson, the brigade commander. (Pajhwok)

(3) Afghan, Tajik...

They can solve problems of the two countries if they attend such events," said ShafiqGul, an activist from Pakistan.

"The youths of the two countries can boost the relations between the two countries by cultural and artistic events," said ShaistaLangari, an Afghan activist.

Tajikistan's representatives said peace in Afghanistan is dependent on the will of the Afghan citizens.

They said Tajikistan has made utmost efforts to achieve peace.

"We are here to ensure that peace is achieved in our neighboring country," said AdalatMirza, a journalist from Tajikistan.

"With brining closer the thoughts and capacities of youths from the three countries, we will finally put a step forward towards peace in Afghanistan," said Abdullah Rasuli, an organizer of the event.

Some modeling artists from Afghanistan displayed Afghan dresses at the event.

The next peace festival will be held in Tajikistan and Pakistan, an official of Mediothek Afghanistan, the organizer of the event, said. (Tolo news)

(4) Ghani Assures...

the past 40 years and that right now, people have realized the importance of peace in a three-day ceasefire.

"For the first time in 40 years, we realized the importance of peace during the ceasefire (between government and Taliban). You saw that Afghans accepted each other. The ceasefire was an experience, it also contained risks, but it proved that this great nation is a great nation under Allah's will," Ghani said.

Ghani's remarks come as Alice Wells, the US Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, met with Taliban officials in Qatar this week to discuss ways to lay the groundwork for peace talks. The Wall Street Journal said in a report that the aim of the discussion

was to build on momentum created by the recent three-day ceasefire over Eid al-Fitr.

The Taliban's political office declined to comment, according to the Wall Street Journal report, which also stated that Wells did not respond to an emailed request for comment.

Hours before President Ghani's visit to Badghis, a suicide bombing claimed four lives and wounded few others near civilian houses in the west of Kabul.

Addressing the gathering in Badghis, Ghani said nothing can be achieved by bombings and suicide attacks. The president said reform will be brought to security agencies. "Promotions to brigadier general and major general and other higher ranks are done based on merit. All Afghans are included in this. After this, no one has to remain in one position for 12 years while another promotes quickly due to relationships," said Ghani.

The presidential elections will be held on its scheduled time, Ghani said, adding that no one should have any doubt in this regard.

At least 7,000 families in Qala-e-Naw city, the provincial capital, will benefit from this power, while another 10,000 families in Qades, Muqur and Ab Kamari districts will get the electricity in the near future. (Tolo news)

(5) Afghan Air...

sends the strongest possible message to the enemies of peace that they cannot outlast the international community and especially they cannot outlast the Afghan people and their desire for peace. The international community is also committed to the needs of your people in addition to your security forces," said Nicholson.

According to the defense ministry, the Afghan Air Force conducts over a hundred flights across the country on a daily basis which also involve strikes against insurgents.

"The Afghan air force conducts over a hundred transportation and support missions daily - from the figure, eight to twelve are air strikes which are carried out by these forces," said the defense ministry's spokesman Mohammad Radmanish.

Efforts are underway to expand the structure of Afghan Air Force three fold as it is one of the key elements of supporting ground forces. (Tolo news)

(6) Over \$15 Billion...

Afghanistan Reconstruction, said they had calculated the total amount of waste, fraud and abuse between 2008 and December 2017.

"To do this, we reviewed 766 SIGAR products and investigations completed during the period. That body of work examined approximately \$52.7 billion of the \$126 billion that has been appropriated for Afghanistan reconstruction," he said.

"SIGAR has identified up to \$15.5 billion in waste, fraud, and abuse, and failed whole-of-government reconstruction efforts (or 29 percent of the \$52.7 billion we examined). He said SIGAR's review identified 643 instances of waste, fraud, and abuse valued between \$2.2 billion and \$3.5 billion of the reconstruction dollars examined.

"In addition, SIGAR found \$12 billion spent on two whole-of government reconstruction efforts that appear to have failed and resulted in wasted US taxpayer dollars," he said.

"Specifically, in May 2018, we reported that the \$4.7 billion spent on "stabilization programs" in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2017 was largely unsuccessful in building and reforming government institutions in Afghanistan, and large sums of US stabilization dollars often exacerbated conflicts, enabled corrup-

tion, and bolstered support for insurgents."

He also said the \$7.3 billion spent to stem the Afghan drug trade has done very little to stop the "production and exportation of illicit drugs," and notes that opium production is now "at the highest levels since 2002."

Sopko stated in the letter that SIGAR has reported for years that almost \$7.3 billion spent by the United States in Afghanistan on counter-narcotics programs appears to have done very little to stem the production and exportation of illicit drugs. Sopko said SIGAR would continue to update this information on an annual basis but stated that this letter only contains the results of their review of SIGAR's published products and closed cases.

He stated that their review likely uncovered only a portion of the total waste, fraud, abuse, and failed efforts.

"An examination of reports and investigatory outcomes from other oversight bodies with purview over reconstruction or warfighting dollars spent in Afghanistan may assist decision-makers to better understand outcomes and make more informed decisions about spending and oversight," he said.

SIGAR spent 10 months researching the issue after being asked by three congressmen in September for such a report.

One of the three congressmen who requested the calculation, Rep. Walter Jones, R-N.C., at the time called Afghanistan a "black hole" for taxpayers money. "The American people deserve a better understanding of where their money is going," said Jones. (Tolo news)

(7) US Envoy...

government," a State Department official said.

The State Department declined to comment specifically on the question of talks with the Taliban, but said Wells returned to the US on Tuesday after discussing progress toward an Afghan-led process with Qatari officials.

The United States earlier in the week commended Qatar for its ongoing support for peace in Afghanistan and said Wells had met with the Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defense Affairs Khalid bin Mohamed Al Attiyah.

According to Qatar's The Peninsula daily, the two officials discussed recent progress toward an Afghan-owned, and Afghan-led peace process, and pledged to continue both countries' efforts toward combating terrorism and promoting regional peace and stability.

Wells welcomed the Qatari government's support for the ceasefire last month in Afghanistan, and highlighted the deep appreciation of the United States for the Qatari government's constructive partnership and dedication to Afghanistan, read the report.

After Well's trip to Qatar, the US State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert, tweeted "appreciation for Qatar's constructive partnership, dedication and ongoing support for peace in Afghanistan"

Addressing a press briefing late Monday Nauert confirmed that Wells attended meetings in Qatar and met with Al Attiyah, along with other high-ranking officials.

Nauert said: "I can tell you that our senior bureau official for SCA, Alice Wells, is returning today from Doha, Qatar, and that's where she's been meeting with - she met with the deputy prime minister. She also met with other government officials to talk about their contributions to the situation in Afghanistan.

"Qatar has been an important and valuable partner in that. They have helped with training and equipping, they have helped with supplies,

things of that nature that are obviously needed by coalition partners to help facilitate what is going on right there.

"So Alice is returning. She's had good meetings. And part of the reason she went there was to commend the government for their ongoing support for peace in Afghanistan," said Nauert.

Referring to the recent successful ceasefire over Eid al-Fitr, Nauert said: "I know some folks in the media and around the world have pooh-poohed that ceasefire that lasted a few days, but our view on this, if you can get a ceasefire that lasts a few days, perhaps you could get another one that lasts a little bit longer, and that gives the people of Afghanistan hope."

The US officials made it clear that the Afghan government was fully involved in the effort to jump-start peace talks.

The US and Afghan officials warn that official negotiations, if they ever happen, could be months away, and that those efforts, like previous attempts, could collapse, according to the Wall Street Journal.

But US officials said they had seen a serious, new interest from the Taliban in peace talks. (Tolo news)

(8) Relations with...

Apart from Sherpao, Mahmood Khan Achakzai, AsfandyarWali Khan, Maulana Fazlur Rahman and several other veteran Pakhtun leaders failed to find their way to the parliament. (Pajhwok)

(9) IECC's...

of GulbuddinHekmatyar-led Hizbe-Islami group.

Meanwhile, a number of legal experts have said that the action against these candidates, based on the majority votes of members of the IECC, is illegal.

"This commission should help in identifying the individuals, but the decision making is related to the election commission to determine the fate of candidates based on credible evidence," said legal expert Abdul SubhanMisbah.

The IECC is expected to disqualify candidates who are involved in security issues, coordinated crimes, drug smuggling, and misuse of public and private assets.

The IECC is scheduled to wrap up its assessment of the complaints filed against the candidates by August 2.

IECC last week said a committee has been tasked to investigate reports of links between some candidates and illegal armed groups.

The committee will be led by the head of the IECC Abdul Aziz Aryayee, and members of the commission will be from the Ministry of Interior (MoI), Ministry of Defense (MoD), National Directorate of Security (NDS) and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), said Ali Reza Rouhani, the IECC's spokesman.

IECC chief Abdul Aziz Aryayee said the commission has so far received over 200 complaints relating to candidates having ties with armed groups. They said the names of candidates proven to have these links will be dropped from the election list within a week. (Tolo news)

PNG Gears Up Security Support Services for APEC Meeting

SYDNEY - Papua New Guinea has geared up its land, sea and air security support services for hosting the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in November, defense authorities said on Friday.

"It is a tremendous undertaking and a giant lead for us and therefore at this stage with a number of months to go, it is important

that we (PNG Defense Force) understand our capabilities right now and test them accordingly," PNG Defence Force chief of force preparations Colonel SialeDiro told local media.

The deployment of a dedicated special forces is already being tested to help police and other agencies provide safety and security for the international event, the Papua New Guinea Post-Courier newspaper quoted Diro as saying.

The main force element consists of infantry and other supporting elements "that can bring our military capability to the fore when and where it is required", he said.

Defense forces also rolled out a major exercise earlier this week covering the various locations planned for APEC events in the capital Port Moresby as part of a comprehensive security package, the newspaper quoted Police Commissioner GariBaki as saying on Friday.

The exercise will help ensure that defense and security elements involved in the meeting are up to the mark, said Baki. (Xinhua)

Venezuela Lawmaker Who Decried Health Crisis Flees, Denouncing Threats

CARACAS - Opposition lawmaker and oncologist Jose Manuel Olivares, who led protests over Venezuela's crumbling health sector, said he has fled the crisis-stricken country after his family received threats that they would be persecuted unless he quit politics.

Olivares joins the growing ranks of opposition activists who have been forced into exile, arrested, or barred from politics during leftist President Nicolas Maduro's crackdown on dissent.

In a letter tweeted late on Thursday, Olivares said he was forced to leave Venezuela because his mother, brother and wife, who gave birth to their son a few months ago, had been threatened.

"My brother had already received threats last year, and was even locked up in the (intelligence agency) SEBIN for several months.

Now, as of a few weeks ago, my wife, mother, and my brother received threats once again. They were warned that they would be persecuted and accused if I did not step away from politics and protests in the health sector," Olivares wrote, without describing the nature of the threats.

Local media had reported that an arrest warrant had been issued for his wife, a lawyer who used to work at an insurance company, for allegedly participating in the purchase of cars of "illegal origin."

The lawmaker, who represented the coastal state of Vargas, was at the forefront of protests decrying medicine shortages, crumbling health infrastructure, and a mass emigration of doctors. He also helped organize research into the state of hospitals after the Health Ministry stopped publishing key data on disease and infant mortality.

"Maduro's government thinks that with this persecution they hurt me or weaken me, but it is the complete opposite," Olivares wrote. "They are the ones exposing themselves, because of their evil and cowardice as they persecute my family and newborn son, as well as because of the fear they have of people protesting and demanding their rights."

Olivares did not immediately respond to requests for information about his whereabouts. (Reuters)