

(1) NUG Facing ...

KABUL - UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan Nicholas Haysom on Tuesday night said he told the U.N Security Council earlier in the day that Afghanistan was faced with five particular challenges that it had to overcome to simply survive 2016.

Addressing a press conference after his security council briefing, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) chief said Afghanistan was facing a particularly tough time.

He said the first issue government had to deal with was serious economic challenges. This involved "a very low growth off a low base, high unemployment, and with the social consequences that come from that unemployment."

Secondly, the government was facing tough security challenges.

"Even as we speak, the insurgency is really active in all parts of the country -- in Helmand in the south to Baghlan in the north. And although there are hopeful signs that the Afghan National Security Forces are going through a period of adaptation and lesson-learning, no one, either from the member states or from the UN, really assesses the challenges as anything other than daunting," he said.

In addition to that, the Afghan government "faces a difficult situation politically, a fractious and fragmented political elite in Kabul, which it needs to manage, particularly in the interest of developing a greater level of political coherence among the political class and the political elite in Kabul, especially if it's going to generate a sense of confidence in the future and build the morale of the people and the security forces," he added.

Haysom went on to say the government must secure, at important conferences this year, medium-term commitment from the international community to support Afghanistan.

"Medium-term commitment is important because it gives people confidence that the international community is not abandoning them, but it also gives a level of predictability and certainty in regard to facing down its economic and political challenges." The fifth hurdle, he said, was "the capacity to develop a peace process that will have some traction. At the moment, we've seen some encouraging developments -- in particular, the four meetings of what is known as the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, which is US, Pakistan, Afghanistan and China."

"There has been real progress in that group, but we need to bear in mind that the group is a group that is supposed to midwife a peace process. It is not a peace process itself. And in regard to that peace process, we note that at least it appears that the rump of the Taliban has not agreed to participate as yet. And it's critical that they do participate for there to be a sustainable peace," he said.

"And so what I suggested to the Security Council is that those five challenges are the critical tests for survival. Survival is not a low bar, because it means it must overcome each one of those five hurdles. It can't afford to fail on any one, and particularly if it wants to deal with the potential refugee crisis, the flow of immigrants out of Afghanistan."

He said the issue of human rights concerns were also raised. "Notably, attention was drawn to the fact that the impact of the conflict -- the tragic impact of the conflict -- is on the ever-growing number of civilian casualties, which now tops 11,000, reflecting an intensification of the conflict. I like to point out that 11,000 civilian casualties doesn't capture the full tragedy and the drama. One has to bear in mind the survivors, the communities, the colleagues, the family members who have lost loved ones, and parents who have lost children and children who have lost parents, and families that have lost breadwinners."

"So we drew attention to the civilian casualties," he added.

Haysom went on to say: "I would draw attention to our continuing close monitoring of violence against women in Afghanistan, noting that there has been a rise of what are called parallel justice punishments meted out to women, in particular, for what are called moral crimes. And we will continue to monitor and speak out against those."

In the question and answer session with journalists, Haysom was asked what he meant by the issue of the survival of the National Unity Government and if the challenges aren't met, would the government in turn collapse.

Haysom said: "I think what we see is that all five of those areas are quite closely related. The peace will affect -- if there is peace -- the levels of se-

curity, will boost investment and investor confidence, will provide a real relief to the people, which will stabilize the country politically and simultaneously in regard to the economy." He went on to say that "if any one of them -- if the government fails in any one of those -- it will have dramatic consequences on the other four factors, the other four hurdles I mentioned. If, for example, Afghanistan fails to persuade the international community to invest in the medium- to long-term in Afghanistan, it will promote political instability, promote greater loss of faith and political confidence in the country, which will have its impact on the economy. In 2014 -- as recently as 2014 -- the government was unable to pay its civil servants twice."

He said UNAMA is however taking note that survival doesn't mean treading water or standing still. "It means actively engaging to make sure that you do have an economic plan, that you are promoting political stability, that you are holding the ground on the battlefield. What would happen if there was a serious failure in any one those? I think it would have severe political and other consequences throughout the country. I'm not saying that would mean that the country would collapse, but it would certainly deepen the crisis in which Afghanistan finds itself."

Questioned on whether he had any concerns about Pakistan's long-standing relationship with the Taliban and how it might affect it being an honest broker, Haysom said: "I think the effectiveness of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group is precisely because Pakistan has had some influence over the Taliban. The question is whether we have confidence that the Pakistanis will use that influence to help support a peace process."

He said the initial indications are that Pakistan has "done not just a lifting but some heavy lifting to try and get a peace process off the ground, and I think they would see themselves as now publicly accountable for the success of that strategy, and have taken that responsibility seriously."

In answer to a question on actually getting the Taliban to the talks tables, given their constant rejections of the process, Haysom said he felt the first step was to encourage Pakistan to exercise as much leverage as it can. "But I think we also need to engage the Taliban. On the one hand, there would certainly be advocates who might want to argue that time is on the side of Taliban, that they should be in no rush to enter into peace talks, that the developments might favor them."

He went on to say: "But I've argued, including with the Taliban, that there is another logic, which is that if they wish to be part of the future government or to govern, they will need international assistance and international legitimacy. And what we've seen is the only way you can obtain that legitimacy is through bona fide participation in a peace process, such as FRELIMO in Mozambique or the FARC now in Colombia."

He said: "It is the only way they can be an acceptable member of the international community. And they have stated that it is their aim to coexist with nations, to essentially be a neutral player in world political events, which is another way of appealing for legitimacy as a potentially responsible government. If they want to demonstrate that, the best way of doing it would be to participate in a peace process."

In conclusion, he said: "Before I ascribe motives and intentions to the Taliban, we should just recognize that there are a number of groups, and really it's a question of trying to work out what views are held by what group. In my own view, there is a group in the Taliban that recognizes that there has to be a political agreement at the end of the day, and I think we have to find a way of persuading the Taliban that this is the only way forward." (ToloneWS)

(2) NATO Sends ...

the train, advise, assist mission is a sign of how important Helmand is both to the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the international coalition," Lawhorn told Reuters.

Helmand has been one of the provinces hardest-hit in the war's intensification in the past year. Afghan troops have been forced to withdraw from several districts.

Although Helmand is historically one of the country's most violent areas and a major opium-growing center, the NATO-led force had not kept a large permanent presence there. (Reuters)

(3) Russia, Tajikistan ...

Haysom said: "I think what we see is that all five of those areas are quite closely related. The peace will affect -- if there is peace -- the levels of se-

50,000 Tajik and 2,000 Russian forces. A number of Afghan MPs meanwhile said Russia has taken the decision after the Afghan government failed to overcome insurgents' threats in northern parts of Afghanistan.

"When Tajikistan, which is near Russia, becomes insecure, then Russia will have to opt to defend itself. We take this operation as good fortune and we ask the two countries [Russia and Tajikistan] to not allow Afghans to travel between the two countries during this time so as to prevent the possible escape of terrorists," said Maryam Kofi, an MP from Takhar. Another MP, Faruq Majroh, said: "Russia has realized that a number of its citizens are involved in the Afghan war and are extremist and dangerous individuals therefore the operations have been launched for several purposes."

Analysts meanwhile said they believe that Russia's concerns over its border security has increased after the fall of Kunduz city to the Taliban last year.

"Our government carries on with both the war and peace talks. The Taliban has not given its nod to the peace appeal from Kabul." (ToloneWS)

(4) NATO Chief...

now in its 15th year. Officials have said that Afghan forces suffered almost 30 percent more deaths and casualties in 2015 than the estimated 5,000 of the year before.

There have been no official figures released on those casualties.

The U.N. mission in Afghanistan says more than 11,000 civilians were killed and wounded last year, many of them women and children caught in the crossfire.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said this week that the extremists from an Islamic State affiliate that had gained a foothold in the east last year, with ambitions to move north toward the Central Asia states, were now "on the run" following military operations.

Analysts, however, dispute that assessment, and also point to the spread in the north by the Taliban and other Islamic militants.

Nevertheless, Stoltenberg was upbeat in his praise for Afghan forces and said NATO efforts would focus on Kunduz in the north and Helmand in the south, where the Taliban are fighting to hold lucrative routes for smuggling men, guns, drugs, alcohol and minerals.

A dire assessment was also expressed by the U.N. mission chief in Afghanistan, Nicholas Haysom, who on Tuesday told the U.N. Security Council that the Afghan government was fighting for its survival amid surging militants.

Unless the government overcame "five distinct hurdles" it would face "severe consequences," Haysom said, listing a contracting economy, intensifying insurgency, fractious political environment as well as desperately needed funding from the international community and the need to demonstrate progress toward a sustainable peace.

"For 2016, survival will be an achievement," Haysom said at the U.N.

Ghani's government is hoping to draw the Taliban into a dialogue aimed at formal peace talks, but a face-to-face meeting between representatives of both sides that had been expected

Meanwhile, violence continues to kill and wound civilians and Afghan security forces. In Kunar province, bordering Pakistan, a woman and three of her children died when a rocket landed on their home in the Ghazi Abad district early Wednesday, the provincial police chief, Faridullah Dehqaan said.

Further south, in Nangarhar province, also bordering Pakistan, an attack by militants loyal to IS left six policemen "killed or wounded," the provincial governor's spokesman Atullah Khogyani said. The attack on their checkpoint took place around 2am Wednesday, he said. (AP)

(5) India Stresses...

of the efforts of the Afghan government was required to deal with the challenges, he insisted.

Akbaruddin stressed the Afghan government's armed opponents could not be allowed to exercise control over any part of the country to preserve the gains of the past decade and a half.

He affirmed India's support to an Afghan-led reconciliation process that respects the red lines drawn by the people of Afghanistan and the international community. (Pajhwok)

(6) It's Important...

Institute of Peace.

"The whole international community and the United States needs to continue to do whatever we can to support women in Afghanistan," she

said in response to a question from Stephen J. Hadley, the former national security advisor, who moderated the session.

"We need to help them build the economy so that people can have jobs, people can make money so that people can become independent," she remarked.

She was heartened that President Obama chose to keep US troops in the country. "I think, we need to keep our troops there. We need to make sure that Afghanistan has the security to build the stability to form their government," Bush said.

The Bush Institute's book, with an introduction by Laura Bush tells the unique stories of 28 women's contributions to Afghanistan as they seek to promote peace and rebuild their country. (Pajhwok)

(7) 65 Land-Grabbers ...

usurped land not exceeding 500 square metres.

A resident of Jalalabad, Habibullah, told Pajhwok Afghan News that no serious action had been taken so far against land-grabbers and powerful usurpers were yet to be arrested. "Seriousness is required in this issue because thousands of acres of land has been usurped in Nangarhar."

Earlier, the provincial council chief and members had also complained the land-grab issue is not seriously taken.

The governor's spokesman, Attaullah Khogyani, said the police chief had arrested a number of persons accused of land-grab, but some of them were released for a lack of evidence.

"The governor yesterday called a meeting to discuss coordination among the relevant organs with regard to the land-grab issue in order to ensure that all land-grabbers are arrested."

Khogyani said the provincial administration had launched efforts at reclaiming usurped land.

Local officials admit thousands of acres of land has been usurped in Nangarhar.

Jalalabad Mayor Hamidullah Afghan told Pajhwok Afghan News that they had launched their investigation into the land-grab issue and had handed over some lists of usurpers to the security organs.

He said a number of townships were partially built on usurped land and the municipality had launched its investigation in this regard. (Pajhwok)

(8) Kabul's Acting...

the lack of attention to building a proper water drainage system and to removing garbage in the city.

Coincidentally, the acting mayor was lauded on Wednesday amid a heavy rain storm that hit the capital, flooding streets.

"The roads are like a sea. My car was turned off here. Others also faced with the same problem," said Farid Ahmad, a Kabul resident.

Another resident, Basir, said: "We are faced with this situation because of the inattention of the Kabul Municipality and government towards the people."

It comes after the Independent Directorate of Local Governance said this week that will appoint mayors in the next three months. (ToloneWS)

(9) Ghazni, Helmand ...

doesn't pay attention to the issue, the militants will increase their attacks in the province this spring. The MoI will be responsible if the province collapsed," he said.

Another lawmaker from Ghazni, Shah Gul Rizaee said Nawa district had become a major centre of Taliban over the past few years.

He said if government forces did not conduct clearing operations in the district, Ghazni province would fall to the Taliban.

Likewise, another parliamentarian from Helmand, Nasima Niazi, called for stationing more security personnel to Helmand province.

"Out of 13 districts, only four districts are partially in the hands of government, while the rest are controlled by Taliban," she claimed.

Poppy crop has been cultivated in many districts of Helmand, boosting Taliban's financial resources, she added. (Pajhwok)

(10) Nowruz: ...

year nearly 18,000 vehicles passed through the Salang tunnel each day, but their numbers reduced to 7000 a day this time, he said.

Snowfall is ongoing on both sides of the tunnel, but they have taken some measures for the safety of passengers and the safety measures would remain in place till 25th of March, he said.

"The manforce and machineries are deployed in different parts of the road for immediate action in case of avalanches and snowstorms," he said.

The snowfall has been forecasted till

next Sunday, he said, adding if the threat of snowstorm was serious, they would close the Salang Pass for traffic. (Pajhwok)

(11) UNSC Extends...

the increased number of internally displaced persons, and the recruitment and use of children in suicide attacks by the Taliban, Al-Qaida and other extremist groups.

The World Bank expects low economic growth, off a low base, which in turn has resulted in high unemployment, with hundreds of thousands of young people entering the work force each year and finding no jobs. (Pajhwok)

(12) War Has ...

had rejected violence and mutual co-existence was the only road to unity and stability, he remarked.

Musa Fariwar, a university teacher and member of the council, said the key to peace was in the hands of the Afghans and stability could be ensured only when the Afghans appeared on the scene to take charge of the reconciliation effort.

He alleged the government-controlled High Peace Council (HPC) was a project, not a reconciliation process. An amount of \$830 had been invested in the council but no result had been achieved, he regretted.

A day earlier, President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani said that the war in Afghanistan had regional and international aspects, something that made the peace process more complicated. (Pajhwok)

(13) 6 Daesh ...

also suffered casualties, but provided no figure.

However, a security source told Pajhwok that at least six ALP and national police personnel were killed in the attack.

The attack from Daesh militants comes hours after President Ghani told a joint press conference with NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg in Kabul that the Islamic State was on the run in Nangarhar. (Pajhwok)

(14) MoI Spurns...

it held in abeyance jobs of a majority of the NIC department staff due to a lack of budget and the stalled distribution process of the ID cards. Only 50 of the employees remained on their jobs carrying out daily activities, the statement added. (Pajhwok)

(15) 10 Soldiers...

Dehrawood district of the province after security forces launched a military operation a week ago to clear the area of insurgents, District Governor Aminullah Khaliqi said.

There were no civilian casualties during the operation, he said.

However, he said that the operation will continue in the district to clear all insurgents.

He did not provide further details about the operation. (ToloneWS)

(16) Pakistan ...

Saikal. In the last three months alone, at least 56 instances of violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan had been recorded, he said, calling it a breach Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter and UN resolution 2131.

"This jeopardises Afghanistan-Pakistan relations at a time when making peace with Pakistan is essential to making peace with the Taliban," Saikal said.

Banishing the menace of terrorism from Afghanistan, the region and beyond demanded more robust efforts, regionally and globally, by all states, the ambassador believed. (Pajhwok)

(17) Kabul's ...

rain storm that hit the capital, flooding streets. "The roads are like a sea. My car was turned off here. Others also faced with the same problem," said Farid Ahmad, a Kabul resident.

Another resident, Basir, said: "We are faced with this situation because of the inattention of the Kabul Municipality and government towards the people. (ToloneWS)

(18) ANSF Kill ...

have killed 10 armed insurgents, an army officer in the province said.

"Units of ANA launched cleanup operations in parts of Asmar and Ghazi Abad districts, Kunar province on Tuesday and so far 10 militants have been killed and three others wounded," Colonel Shirin Agha, told Xinhua.

The army engineering teams also found and defused several roadside bombs and landmines, the official added.

However, he admitted that one army personnel had been killed and two others wounded during the operation which is going on. (Xinhua)

(19) Lashkargah ...

better serve the people. The mayor also acknowledged thousands acres of land had been illegally occupied in Helmand, a process, he said, was still ongoing. (Pajhwok)

(20) Putin, Kerry ...

that the Russian side is coordinating the possible visit.

The U.S. State Department said Tuesday that the purpose of Kerry's trip is to continue to look for ways to move the political process forward in Syria. (Xinhua)

(21) EU-Turkey ...

Ankara's bid to eventually join the 28-nation club is "not on the agenda now".

Europe, divided and desperate to end its biggest refugee influx since World War II, is pinning its hopes on a deal with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. (AFP)

(22) Turkish ...

lawyers in Istanbul, Anadolu said.

The total number of detentions has reached 79 in the aftermath of a car bombing attack in the capital city of Ankara on Sunday, in which 37 people were killed, the agency added.

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack, the third to hit Ankara in less than five months, but the interior ministry announced that it was carried out by a member of PKK. (Xinhua)

(23) Libya's ...

not hand over authority to a government he said did not enjoy the support of Tripoli's parliament, the General National Congress (GNC).

The U.S. and major European powers recognized the unity cabinet as Libya's only legitimate government on Sunday, and are pushing for it to move to Tripoli and start work. (Reuters)

(24) Iran Missiles...

our nation and country," Rouhani said on the sidelines of a cabinet session on Wednesday.

The Iranian president further expressed satisfaction that US "hardliners and hawkish" officials, who unjustly took the Iranian missile test to the UN Security Council (UNSC), failed to achieve their objectives. (PressTV)

(25) Russian Pullout...

groups possible," Igor Korotchenko, editor-in-chief of the Russian magazine National Defence, told Xinhua.

Echoing Korotchenko's opinions, Han Xudong, professor with the National Defence University PLA China, said the move showed that Russia is ready to compromise on the Syria issue, and it obviously has positive influence on the ground.

"Russia launched the military operation for peace in the country, and Moscow will continue pushing forward the peace negotiations," said Wan Chengcai, an expert on Russian foreign policy. (Xinhua)

(26) Putin Urges...

o the banned list by WADA, Putin demanded the Russian sports authorities take the new regulation into account and react appropriately. Calling on the government to improve the efficiency of doping prevention, he said Russia is to toughen penalties for violations of anti-doping rules and punish those violating them. (Xinhua)

(27) Iran Criticizes...

tion rather than the realities on the ground, Jaber Ansari said.

Such approaches not only fail to improve the status of human rights in the world, but also downgrade the issue to the level of political disputes among the countries, he said. (Xinhua)

(28) Lockheed ...

ageable", but did not elaborate. "We will have a gap in the production line because of the fact that there hasn't been another order yet," Carvalho told Reuters in an interview at the company's annual media day.

Lockheed is now funding suppliers to ensure it will be able to build planes for Pakistan and other countries after it wraps up work on 36 F-16 jets ordered by Iraq in 2017. (Agencies)

(29) Greek Gov't ...

However, most opposition parties, as well as Panos Kammenos, defense minister and leader of the junior coalition partners of the right-wing Independent Greeks party, insisted Mouzalas should step down.

"The government has our confidence vote, but not Mouzalas," Kammenos told media. (Xinhua)

(30) U.S., Allies ...

The coalition has carried out an average of 24 air strikes per day since July and has only carried out 11 or fewer air strikes on three or four occasions during that time, according to coalition strike data. (Reuters)