

(1) Russia Urges...

a fruitful contribution at multi-lateral talks in Moscow in February by joining the international efforts aimed at the launch of a constructive dialogue between the Afghan government and Taliban militants," Putin added. Meanwhile, the Afghan government has said that it is waiting to see if Moscow adopts serious measures against countries sponsoring terrorism. "Our expectations from Russia is to mount new pressure on its new friends in our region to tackle the issue of terror hide-outs which is a common threat for Afghanistan, Russia and all countries in the region," said Khairullah Azad, deputy spokesman for the ministry of foreign affairs (MoFA). It is believed that Russia's growing influence in Afghanistan has also sparked major concerns among European countries. Recently the European Union (EU) envoy to Pakistan expressed concern over the Russian role in Afghanistan and asked China to get involved in the Afghan conflict directly and as a responsible power.

"A greater U.S presence creates more fear for Russia; likewise Russia's growing relations with Afghanistan creates fear for the U.S. Tensions remain in place in this respect, but it depends on the ability of the Afghan government as to how it reduces its vulnerability among these tensions and it is related to how we manage Afghanistan's foreign policy track," said political commentator Abdul Shokor Salangi. Russia has however confirmed its ties with the Taliban.

But, head of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) Masoum Stanekzai has said that Russia's ties with the Taliban were aimed to combat the influence of Daesh in Afghanistan. (Tolonews)

(2) Kabul Calls ...

increase in defence spending instead of development. "the diplomat said; calling for putting economic cooperation ahead of geopolitical rivalries in the region.

There were opportunities for increased connectivity that needed to be exploited, he said, listing three key issues for Afghanistan that need to be added to the agenda of SCO -- connectivity, counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics.

Abdul Qadeer Mutfi, a member of the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies, says the war-torn country has the potential to be a land-linked country. "Afghan trade is strongly affected by regional political complications.

"Afghan trade is dependent on limited means of export. The development of Chabahar port will bring tremendous benefits to underdeveloped areas, he hoped. Chabahar is not an anti CPEC port, Mutfi explained.

Chabahar would reduce the dependence of Indi-Afghan trade on Pakistan and provide India with access to Central Asia, he believed, saying Afghanistan would gain politically sustainable connectivity, as well as access to road networks. (Pajhwok)

(3) China's Belt ...

China in 2013, aims to build a trade and infrastructure network connecting Asia with Europe and Africa along the ancient trade routes.

The senior Afghan diplomat also noted that "the momentum that this initiative has created and the subsequent Memorandum of Understanding on the Belt and Road Initiative signed between foreign ministers of China and Afghanistan last May aimed to promote in areas such as policy coordination, connectivity, and infrastructure development, trade and investment facilitation, financial cooperation and people-to-people contact."

The two neighboring countries have been cooperating under the initiative in a number of projects. In September, the first cargo train from China arrived in a key northern Afghan port city, and in July last year, direct flight between the Afghan capital of Kabul and Urumqi in China's northwestern Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region was resumed.

"Cooperation of the freight train between China and Afghanistan and resumption of direct flights between Kabul and Urumqi are two good examples of practical

progress, which can contribute to trade expansion and business-to-business partnership between the two countries and can further facilitate the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative," Karzai said.

"I would also like to stress the importance of joint research, academic exchange and knowledge sharing, professional training and capacity building between Afghanistan, China and countries along the Belt and Road Initiative in the line with the common priorities," he said.

Among the other Afghan and Chinese officials attending the event, were Afghan Chief Presidential Adviser Mohammad Humayon Qayoumi and Chinese Ambassador to Afghanistan Yao Jing.

"The Belt and Road Initiative has five major roles, to promote policy coordination, facilitate connectivity, promote unimpeded trade and promote financial inauguration and more people-to-people advance in these areas," Qayoumi said.

The seminar also focused on ways to strengthen the connection between the development strategies of Afghanistan and China, enhancing connectivity among the two countries and other regional countries as well as boosting trade and investment cooperation between Afghanistan and China under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, according to Qayoumi.

Ambassador Yao said the Belt and Road Initiative will promote common development and that China is willing to continue enhancing cooperation with all the countries in the region. (Xinhua)

(4) Last Solar ...

aid to 149,000 affected people, including 9,700 internally displaced persons last year, Dindar said. The aid included edible and other essential items.

He added transferring 300 bodies of Afghan security personnel and militants to their families, distribution and collection of around 3,000 messages to prisoner families, providing health services to three million people and donation of 9,000cc blood were among the major services of ARCS in 1395.

The medical treatment of 1,000 children with Atrial Septal Defects (ASDs) was also part of ARCS activities last year, Dindar recalled.

"For the first time, a polio eradication drive has been launched in unstable parts of the country and the campaign is currently underway in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces within the framework of ARCS healthcare services.

"The campaign will be extended gradually to the whole country," he promised, saying the organization's income had improved. But he stopped short of providing details or figures. (Pajhwok)

(5) Govt. Given ...

of 13 members each will work on testing the e-NIC card system," he said.

According to Mohtat, the BICIA will launch the rollout in Kabul through ten ministries, and five e-NIC centers, as well as at an Afghan embassy outside the country.

He said that 36 particulars of each person will be entered into the data base, of which eight will be printed on the card.

The budget for the initial phase will amount to \$4.2 million USD, which will be covered by the Ministry of Finance, he added.

He stressed that the National Unity Government (NUG) is committed to rolling out this process.

When asked how the system will be rolled out in remote and insecure parts of the country, Mohtat said: "We will have mobile teams in remote areas. We will try to have mobile teams outside of insecure areas so that our people can come and get their e-IDs."

In early March, President Ashraf Ghani approved the amended draft of the Census Law authorizing the printing of the word "Afghan" on the electronic ID cards as the "nationality and ethnicity" of the holder of the card. The long-debated matter was considered a potential hurdle for the electronic rollout.

The amendments to Article Six of the Census Law were recommended by the Second Vice President Mohammad Sarwar Danish last year when he started

presiding over the Laws Committee of Ghani's cabinet.

The issuing of the electronic identity cards is deemed as a major step towards holding transparent and fair elections in the country.

Earlier this month the e-NIC department said the politicization of the word "Afghan" was the reason for the suspension of the identity card rollout process.

The department said at least \$70 million USD has been spent on the process so far. (Tolonews)

(6) Egypt Arrests...

militants and arrested a similar number of suspects over the past few years as part of the country's anti-terrorism war declared by former army chief and current President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi following Morsi's removal. (Xinhua)

(7) Govt. under ...

president to deliver on his promises and introduce these ministers to the Wolesi Jirga as soon as possible," said MP Abdul Qadir Zazai Watandost.

The NUG meanwhile says that steps are being taken to rectify the situation.

"Discussions have been held inside the government about this issue; ministers will be introduced to parliament for a vote of confidence in the near future," CEO Abdullah Abdullah's deputy spokesman Jawed Faisal said. This comes a few days after government announced the appointment of Nargis Nehan as nominee for the position of minister of mines and petroleum (MoMP) - a post that has long been vacant.

At the same time, there is speculation that there could be a cabinet reshuffle in the near future. (Tolonews)

(8) Building a ...

both countries' agreement and without a bilateral agreement, the neighboring country is not allowed to build facilities along the shared border."

Reports indicate that Pakistan started building the fence last Tuesday along the Durand Line. Afghanistan border police reportedly number 20,000 soldiers while it is said Pakistan has deployed more than 150,000 soldiers along its border with Afghanistan. (Tolonews)

(9) Afghanistan ...

to discuss continuing U.S. assistance to the country, according to the speaker of Afghan parliament Abdul Raouf Ibrahim.

A source says Russia, Iran and Pakistan will be discussed.

Another high level Afghan source said the delegation would also discuss the involvement of Russia, Iran, and Pakistan in Afghanistan.

While U.S. officials have long accused Pakistan of providing sanctuaries to the Taliban, they have recently become wary of the growing influence of Russia and Iran in Afghanistan.

John McCain, Chairman of the U.S. Senate's Armed Services Committee, in a hearing of the committee in February, said Iran was "arming and funding" the Taliban and Russia was "meddling in Afghanistan to prop up the Taliban and undermine the United States."

General John Nicholson, the top U.S. military commander in Afghanistan, told the same committee that "there has been an increase in external actors interfering in Afghan attainment of peace and stability," adding that Russian involvement had "become more difficult" and Iran was "directly supporting the Taliban in Western Afghanistan."

Russia is hosting a regional conference on Afghanistan in April in which the U.S. was invited but has declined to attend. Afghanistan is still debating whether to attend according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Increased use of Special Forces Afghanistan's four-year security plan would also double the Afghan Special Forces, upgrading what is now a division of Special Forces to a corps, according to Defense Minister General Abdullah Habibi in his briefing to the Afghan parliament.

The Special Forces have been one of the most successful units of the Afghan security apparatus in its fight against the Taliban.

The defense minister added the forces would be used to drop into Taliban controlled areas,

denying them the opportunity to plant landmines as they flee.

The plan is also supposed to focus on the training and literacy of Afghan security forces and strengthening intelligence services.

According to the Defense Ministry spokesman, the beefing up of the air force, including not just the aircraft but also radar systems and other parts, would be completed by 2020.

NATO and EU delegations are also expected to visit Kabul in the next few weeks. (VoA)

(10) U.S. Military ...

points out that Russia's ambitions extend well beyond the Middle East:

From Afghanistan to Libya, US Pentagon officials are increasingly concerned by mounting Russian military and diplomatic activity they believed is aimed at undermining the US and NATO.

Some of the actions Moscow is accused of participating in include sending operatives to support an armed faction in Libya and providing political legitimacy - and maybe even supplies - to the Taliban in Afghanistan.

These moves come on top of their overt dispatching of warplanes and ships to target the political opponents of its ally in Syria.

Referring to U.S. Central Command's (CENTCOM) area of responsibility (AOR), which includes 20 countries stretching from Northeast Africa across the Middle East to Central and South Asia, the top American commander in charge of that region said he believes Russia is trying to expand its influence there.

"It is my view that they are trying to increase their influence in this critical part of the globe," CENTCOM Commander Gen. Joseph Votel told the Senate Armed Services Committee this month. (Agencies)

(11) US Marines'...

Marine backup Hayat sounded upbeat about a planned deployment of Marines in Helmand, saying it will boost local efforts to evict the Taliban, which is currently in control of most of the province.

"I am quite sure they will have definitely lots of positives to bring in the frontline and also changing the security situation down in Helmand," Hayat noted. He emphasized that Afghans will continue to lead the security operations, and U.S. Marines will serve in an "advise-and-assist" role.

The Pentagon announced in January it will send a task force of about 300 Marines back to Helmand in the wake of rapid insurgent advances and heavy casualties inflicted on Afghan forces during the 2016 fighting season. U.S. Marines will be returning to an area where they have engaged for years in intense deadly battles with the Taliban. This will be the first deployment since 2014 when the U.S.-led international forces combat forces withdrew from Afghanistan.

Peace talks offered Governor Hayat again urged the insurgents to quit fighting and join the Afghan government-led peace process.

"I think the only solution [to the conflict] in Afghanistan is negotiations. It's the land of jirgas [tribal dispute resolution councils] and it's the land of talks. Any problems, even if they were big or small, can be resolved through negotiations and dialogue," he said.

The Taliban has extended its control of influence across Afghanistan since the withdrawal of U.S.-led international combat forces two years ago, and efforts aimed at encouraging the insurgents to come to the table for peace talks with Kabul have not yet succeeded.

Russia plans to host a multi-nation conference of Afghanistan's immediate and far neighbors on April 14 to try to jump-started peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Representatives of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, India, China and several former Soviet Central Asian states have been invited to the talks in Moscow. The United States also was invited to attend the meeting, but turned down the invitation, questioning Russian objectives and intentions for initiating the process.

A Taliban spokesman said last week it was not in a position to comment, and would not consid-

er whether to attend the Moscow talks until the group received an invitation. (VoA)

(12) Bridging Cultural ...

that incorporated musicians from Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

Musicians from Afghanistan, India and Pakistan, including Pakistan's famous singer Zeb Bangash, and India's Mohammad Muneem, performed traditional songs and many said

that the festival had allowed them to forget their cultural differences.

The festival - Caravanserai - provided the cross-cultural platform for artists, poets, musicians and singers.

Organizers said such festivals would help promote friendship and peace between nations in the region.

One poet and writer, Ghafoor Laiwal, who took part in the festival, said that holding such events revives common values between regional countries which have been damaged after decades of war.

"If we truly believe in a common humanity, then we must work to revive the love and sentiments we lost through political relations," said Laiwal.

Participants at the festival also stressed the need for further development of cultural activities to promote peace and stability in the region.

"We must use art for ethics and strengthening human thought. Such thoughts could help to promote tolerance, love and affection," said Afghan film maker Roya Sadaat. (Tolonews)

(13) ICC...

Afghanistan managed to win the first two matches of the series but Ireland managed to level it after securing victories in the third and fourth match of the series.

However, the Afghan team managed to win the fifth and final match of the series to conclude it in its favor.

Earlier, the Afghan team had whitewashed Ireland during the 3 Twenty20 International matches. (KP)

(14) Afghanistan's ...

Toan diverting the ball after it was parried by Azizi.

In the meantime, the Afghan team managed to level the result within almost six minutes after Hasan Amin hit a goal during the 70th minute of the second half.

The Afghan squad for the game included Owais Azizi, Hasan Amin, Sharif Mohammad, Kanishka Tahir, Benyamin Najam, Milad Intizar, Abasin Ali Khel, Milad Salim, Farshad Noor, Omid Popalzai, and Zubai Amiri.

Afghan team is expected to face Cambodia during the second game of the series on 13th June.

Afghanistan is appearing in the AFC Asian Cup 2019 Qualifiers under the leadership of the new coach with the Afghan team securing first win against Singapore in a friendly match organized last week. (KP)

(15) Sangin's...

district centre. Why the district was abandoned to Taliban?" he asked.

"I do not comprehend the government's objective. Why those having links with the Taliban are not arrested? We have been losing one district after another," Jan regretted.

An Afghan National Army (ANA) soldier from Sangin, Janan, said they had protected the district in the face of numerous problems. He believed abandoning the district so meekly was an unwise act.

"Whenever I think of my friends, who laid down their lives defending the district in front of my eyes, I feel deeply hurt," the soldier remarked, stressing respect for his fallen colleagues.

However, the governor's spokesman, Omar Zwak, said Sangin district was not left intentionally to the Taliban.

"The district centre has been shifted from the main area to a safe place to prevent the loss of soldiers and clashes that threaten civilians," he said, adding a clearing operation would be launched soon in Sangin.

On Monday, Defence Minister Lt. Gen. Abdullah Khan Habibi said the district had not fallen to the Taliban. "We have just tactically repositioned our forces to

prevent casualties," he said.

On the other hand, a resident of Sangin district, who wished to go unnamed, said Afghan forces had no plan to recapture the district. "If the Afghan forces really had any plan, why have they destroyed all their facilities?"

The Taliban control six of the 13 districts of Helmand, bordering Pakistan. The province has been in the throes of a relentless urgency over the past 16 years. (Pajhwok)

(16) EU to Unveil...

for now, nothing has changed: until the United Kingdom leaves the European Union, EU law will continue to apply to - and within - the UK," he said.

Coinciding with Tusk's statement to the press, the European Council issued a statement voicing its "regret" to the Britain's notification letter to leave the bloc.

"We regret that the United Kingdom will leave the European Union, but we are ready for the process that we now will have to follow," said the statement. (Xinhua)

(17) Indonesia, France...

Widodo told a press conference after his meeting with Hollande. "Indonesia and France will boost partnership in two new fields, maritime and creative economy," he added. (Xinhua)

(18) Turkey's EU...

referendum, they would not accept us into the European Union? If they decided that, they would make our decision much easier," President Erdogan said during a weekend rally.

"We will put this EU-Turkey business on the table because Turkey is no one's whipping boy," he said, suggesting that Ankara could reconsider its relationship with Brussels, saying frankly that a second referendum maybe in the works to let Turks decide if they want to continue the unending accession talks.

The review would also include a landmark refugee deal inked in 2015 but economic and trade ties will not change. (Xinhua)

(19) Merkel Pledges...

British government will also approach the talks in this spirit." She added that British Prime Minister Theresa May had assured her it would in a phone conversation Tuesday.

Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa says that Britain, Portugal's oldest ally through the Windsor Treaty of 1386, "will continue to be a European country, a fundamental pillar of peace and security on the Old Continent, and a cultural and economic reference for Europe and Europeans." (AP)

(20) China, EU

fossil fuels to clean energy such as wind and solar power is underway with benefits ranging from less air pollution to more jobs.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang, whose government cooperated closely with former U.S. President Barack Obama's administration on climate change, said all countries should "move with the times".

"No matter how other countries' policies on climate change, as a responsible large developing country China's resolve, aims and policy moves in dealing with climate change will not change," he said. (Reuters)

(21) 14th ASEAN...

at elevating ASEAN-Russia Dialogue Partnership to a strategic level in the future.

At the meeting, representatives from ASEAN and Russia also discussed preparations for the upcoming ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference (PMC) +1 Session with the Russian Federation to be held in August 2017 in the Philippines, and also exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest and concern.

Lao PDR recently assumed its three-year term of Country Coordinator for ASEAN-Russia Dialogue Relations which will continue until August 2018, according to KPL. (Xinhua)

(22) Russia, Iran...

(AEOI) signed a memorandum of understanding on transport of nuclear materials following the meeting between the two leaders. (Xinhua)