

(1) Afghanistan ...

from the United States and other donors.

UNODC estimated that the potential gross value of opiates was 1.565 billion USD - or the equivalent of about 7.4 percent of Afghanistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) - in 2015.

"The latest 2016 UNODC country survey estimates opium cultivation increased 10 percent, to 201,000 hectares, from the previous year," the report said adding that "the southern region, which includes Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Zabul, and Daykundi provinces, accounted for 59 percent of total cultivation. Helmand remained the country's largest poppy-cultivating province, followed by Badghis and Kandahar."

"Deteriorating security conditions, a lack of political will and the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics' ineffective management all contributed to the paltry eradication results in 2016," the report said.

Poppy "cultivation remained near historically high levels compared with the past several decades."

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's "narcotics industry - coupled with rampant corruption and fraud - is a major source of illicit revenue," the report said.

The "opium trade provides about 60 percent of the Taliban's funding."

"Since the collapse of the Taliban government, the opium trade has grown significantly and enabled the funding of insurgency operations. Taliban commanders collect extortion fees for running heroin refineries, growing poppy, and other smuggling schemes," according to the report.

"Powerful drug networks, mainly run by close-knit families and tribes, bankroll the insurgency and launder money. There have been media reports and allegations of corrupt government officials participating in the drug trade," it said.

The Taliban is an Islamic extremist group that ruled Afghanistan until the U.S. military intervention following the Sept. 2001, 11, al Qaeda attack in New York and Washington, D.C. that killed more than 3,000 people. The Taliban allowed al Qaeda to use Afghanistan as its training base for attacks against the U.S. and other western nations.

"Traffickers provide weapons, funding, and material support to the insurgency in exchange for protection, while insurgent leaders traffic drugs to finance their operations," the report said. Afghanistan "remains the world's largest opium producer and exporter - producing an estimated 80 percent of the world's heroin. John Sopko, head of SIGAR, recommended that President Donald Trump establish "a U.S. counternarcotics strategy, now years overdue, to reduce the illicit commerce that provides the Taliban with the bulk of their revenue." (Tolonews)

(2) Graft Hampers ...

Communication Campaign, which began on March 8.

On May 8, the EU third annual Anti-Corruption Conference would take place at the Presidential Palace under the title 'Identifying the Fight against Corruption in Afghanistan'.

President Ashraf Ghani and Mellbin co-host the conference, at which many of the themes of the EU anticorruption campaign would be discussed. (Pajhwok)

(3) Government ...

and repairing projects, import of wheat, electrical projects, security projects, and various other projects.

The National Procurement usually chaired by President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani is considered as one of the key initiatives of the government of national unity to ensure transparency in the award and implementation of the governmental projects.

This comes as the Afghan government has stepped up efforts to counter corruption amid reports the Afghan authorities have made progress in the fight against corruption.

The United Nations in its latest report said last month that the Afghan authorities have made heady in their fight against corruption although enormous changes remains.

The reported titled 'Afghanistan's Fight Against Corruption: The Other Battlefield', states that key

component of Afghanistan's fight against corruption is the dedicated Anti-Corruption Justice Centre (ACJC), with dedicated police and prosecution units, and a new national primary and appeals court, established by Presidential Decree to operate with jurisdiction over the broad range of corruption offences specified in the current penal code, as well as money laundering offences, destruction or selling of cultural and historical relics, crimes against internal and external security, illegal extraction of mines, and land usurpation. (KP)

(4) Afghanistan is ...

establishment of the Afghan affiliate in January 2015 and had been entrenched in the eastern part of the country.

The ISIS presence in Afghanistan had further complicated the country's tourist landscape, with the fighters becoming leaders of the ISIS Khorasan Province, he added.

Poe, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism and Nonproliferation, said: "It is no surprise that Afghanistan is a mess in the war on terror.

"It's crystal clear to me that Pakistan is not on our side. It is time we consider listing Pakistan; one, as a state sponsor of terrorism; two, stop sending them US aid; three, remove and revoke their status as a major non-NATO US ally..."

The Pakistan-based Haqqani Network, he claimed, was directly linked to both Al Qaeda and Taliban. He held the network responsible for more American deaths in the region than any other terrorist group.

In 2011, Admiral Mike Mullen, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the Senate: "The Haqqani Network acts as a veritable arm of Pakistan's inter-services intelligence agency."

Pakistan had apparent ties to about every terrorist group in Afghanistan and openly supported the Afghan Taliban before and after the extremists took control of Kabul in 1996, Poe said.

"We know that Taliban is still based in Pakistan and it came as no surprise that when a U.S. drone strike killed the leader of the Taliban in May 2016, he was in south-western Pakistan.

"The laundry list of evidence of Pakistan's support for terrorist goes on and on. We remember that when Al Qaeda leader and America's most wanted terrorist Osama bin Laden was killed, he was found in Pakistan," he said. (Pajhwok)

(5) Calls for...

be served; the release of these (13) inmates cannot help us to implement justice, because we have experienced such issues in the past."

Sediqi said government is working on a list of 488 prisoners sent by Hizb-e-Islami.

He said it is impossible to release all the inmates in one day.

Meanwhile, the commission overseeing the implementation of the peace accord between the Afghan government and Hizb-e-Islami confirmed the release of 55 prisoners of Hizb-e-Islami on Tuesday.

Another 13 inmates are also expected to be released in the near future once the assessments of their cases have wrapped up, the commission's spokesman Ahmad Farzan said.

"We strongly value the reservations of Hizb-e-Islami of Afghanistan. The first group will be released on the basis of a presidential decree, but it will not be the last group; more inmates of the group are expected to be freed soon," Farzan said.

Hizb-e-Islami has not shared its priorities about the release of 13 inmates with government but it is expected that all Hizb-e-Islami prisoners would be released group by group on the basis of the presidential order.

A source told TOLONews on condition of anonymity that the 13 controversial inmates of Hizb-e-Islami had been involved in militant attacks.

Based on criminal law, the president is authorized to issue a decree on the release of inmates, but questions have been raised as to whether the head of government is allowed to issue decrees on the release of all criminals.

"Those individuals who have committed crimes such as murder or are involved in terror activities,

are not supposed to benefit from amnesty," said legal expert Ainuddin Bahaduri.

This comes after Hizb-e-Islami claimed government backtracked on its position after coming under pressure from the international community and the human rights commission.

The group's reconciled leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar appeared in public in Nangarhar and Laghman provinces this past weekend and addressed supporters publically for the first time in 20 years.

However, in the past, Hizb-e-Islami officials said the release of all inmates was a precondition for the arrival of their leader in Kabul. (Tolonews)

(6) Congressional...

to safety faster and more effectively and today is a major step forward in support of that effort.

"We are going to continue fighting to keep this program alive, no matter the hurdle. This is the bare minimum we can do for those who risked their lives, and the lives of their families, to help our country."

Kininger also welcomed the move. "I'm glad to see the increased number of visas included in the budget -- a good step in the right direction to show our support for those allies who have risked their lives to advance the cause of freedom and protect the United States."

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, who spearheaded the effort, said: "This is potentially a life-saving development. Allowing this programme to lapse would send the message to our allies in Afghanistan that the United States has abandoned them."

The programme is effectively stalled right now, with the State Department looking to Congress to authorise enough visas to keep it going. The additional 2,500 visas will allow the State Department to resume screening applicants. (Pajhwok)

(7) Afghan Media ...

has managed to hold its place in world press freedom rankings even as fighting takes a heavy toll on journalists."

The UN envoy said Afghanistan's media professionals, women and men, are to be commended and celebrated for their courage and determination. "Be assured that the UN and international community are immensely grateful for your work," he said.

Mr Yamamoto went on to note that progress has been made in Afghanistan even as there has been an erosion of media freedoms in some traditional democracies. "In the region," he said, "Afghanistan stands out as a leader in openness and creativity."

The Afghan public now has access to an estimated 70 TV stations and 175 radio stations, as well as a vibrant and growing social media scene. However, the UN official noted, the challenges of working in a conflict zone are "immense," as reporters put themselves at great risk.

"Journalists under attack in conflict zones can only perform effectively if they have adequate access and adequate protection," he stressed. "This need inspired the UN to formulate its 'Plan of Action: the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity' in 2012 to uphold the fundamental right of freedom of expression by working toward the creation of a free and safe environment for journalists."

The UN envoy went on to note that the opponents of democracy, gender equality and free expression are ever-present, and so a reporter or writer must stand guard and remain vigilant. "The past solar year was one of the most violent years for journalists and media staff in the last two decades," he said, citing one Afghan media organization that described the increase in violence against journalists as "staggering."

Most attacks against journalists in Afghanistan occur on the front lines of combat, but assaults have also taken place in Kabul and in other major cities in the country. "It is appropriate to acknowledge each and every case that hampers the work and livelihood of Afghanistan's brave press corps," said Mr. Yamamoto. "It is also right to expect political representatives to defend the victims of intimidation and violence, and implement laws that have been put in place for this purpose."

A free press perpetuates freedoms in other spheres of life, said the SRSG. "This should give us all hope and confidence," he said. "Although an increase of female participation in the public workforce remains slow, a recent survey suggests that the number of women working in the media has actually increased."

Thanks to international support and national determination, he said, the Afghan press corps now is setting a new standard for other professions.

In closing, the UN envoy said that without freedom of the press, an informed, active and engaged citizenry is impossible. "With freedom of expression," he said, "many things become possible: good governance; poverty reduction; access to justice; and a culture of human rights that will benefit all Afghans, both today and tomorrow."

World Press Freedom Day, marked every year on 3 May, is an occasion to celebrate the fundamental principles of press freedom and pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the exercise of their profession. (PR)

(8) Obama Placed ...

trade has largely failed to prevent the country from continuing to be the world's top producer of the illegal drugs.

"Despite a U.S. investment of 8.5\$ billion to counter Afghanistan's illicit narcotics economy, the country remains the world's largest opium producer and exporter - producing an estimated %80 of the world's heroin," notes John Sopko, the chief of SIGAR.

According to a list of suggestions for U.S. lawmakers and President Donald Trump's administration found in the report, Inspector General (IG) Sopko advises: Establish a counternarcotics strategy: A new U.S. government strategy to fight the narcotics trade in Afghanistan has been on hold for more than two years, and will need coordination with the host-country strategy approved by the Afghan parliament. Meanwhile, Afghanistan remains the world's leading producer of opium, and Resolute Support and U.S. forces commander General John W. Nicholson Jr. estimates that the Taliban receive %60 of their funding from the opium trade.

Former President Barack Obama "postponed" approval of the strategy "until the new administration endorses the new strategy," later adds Sopko. The SIGAR report primarily covers the first quarter of the Trump administration - January 1 thru March 31. Under Obama's watch, eradication efforts dropped dramatically - by more than 90 percent in 2016. Inspector General (IG) Sopko learned from the United Nations that "poppy eradication results in 2016 were the lowest this decade at 355 hectares [about 1 square mile] - a %91 decrease from 2015." The U.S. has only been able to interdict less than one percent of the opium that has been produced in Afghanistan since fiscal year 2008 (October 2007, 1, thru September 2008, 30), reports the IG, noting: SIGAR has long tracked DOD [Department of Defense] and DEA reporting on the results of interdiction operations in Afghanistan... from 2008 through March 3, 2017, 22 interdiction operations have resulted in the seizure of 449,470 kg of opium. However, this result was less than %1 of Afghanistan's opium production. According to the December 2016 Opium Survey by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Afghanistan's potential opium production was approximately 4,800 metric tons (or 4.8 million kg) in 2016 alone.

The strongest and deadliest jihadist group in Afghanistan, the Taliban, is now able to generate most of its funding for terrorist activities from the illegal opium trade, Gen. John Nicholson, the top commander of American and NATO forces, told reporters last December.

Citing the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), SIGAR explains: [A] symbiotic relationship exists between the insurgency and narcotics trafficking. Traffickers provide weapons, funding, and material support to the insurgency in exchange for protection, while insurgent leaders traffic drugs to finance their operations. Production and trafficking of illicit narcotics flourish in areas where

Afghan state institutions are weak, although trafficking is not limited to insurgent-controlled areas. The narcotics trade also undermines governance and rule of law throughout Afghanistan.

Some experts, including Ioannis Koskinas of the New America think-tank, have argued that the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) branch in Afghanistan, made up of disgruntled Afghan and Pakistani Taliban fighters, may also be involved in the opium trade.

The estimated production and cultivation area in Nangarhar province, considered ISIS's primary stronghold in Afghanistan, has increased since the terrorist group established a presence there at the beginning of 2015.

SIGAR also points out that U.S. taxpayer-funded projects to boost irrigation for Afghan farmers have facilitated "more opium-poppy cultivation and boost revenues for insurgents."

Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) said last week that the United States government has been able to eradicate Afghanistan's opium crops for more than 20 years but has refused to do so.

Referring to America's refusal to destroy the opium poppies after the 11/9 attacks that prompted the U.S. to invade Afghanistan, the GOP congressman said, "The excuse was always 'Oh we think they might be too close to a mosque.'"

While U.S. interdiction and eradication efforts have nearly disappeared, the opium poppy cultivation area and estimated production reached record levels in 776 - 2016 square miles and 4.8 million kilograms, respectively.

Cultivation area and estimated production has skyrocketed more than -25fold since the U.S. invaded Afghanistan near the end of 2001. (Agencies)

(9) Hekmatyar's ...

chosen for the appearance of Hekmatyar and our response was successful despite a shortage of resources," Naeemi remarked.

He added there were some concerns but the entire programme was conducted successfully amid tight security. All agencies played an active role in keeping the security situation under control. Aerial and ground patrols were conducted in some areas.

The governor said some time back heavy clashes took place in Alishang district, where militants launched heavy attacks on security posts. Gunbattles were also reported in some villages of Alingar.

"The enemy converted civilian homes and mosques into bunkers and tried to overrun security posts," he said, adding at least 69 militants were killed, including commanders Atal Umari, Kafir Shakan and Khyber Sangar. More security bases will be set up in the areas to protect Mehtarlam and highways. (Pajhwok)

(10) Pakistani,...

2014 to help address mutual concerns, but news of the deal was leaked to Afghan media prematurely, preventing the cooperation from taking root, according to Pakistani officials.

The Taliban has announced its so-called "spring offensive" in Afghanistan. The Afghan government claims sanctuaries on Pakistani soil have enabled the insurgents to prolong the conflict in the country.

Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah reiterated Monday the Islamist insurgency announced and planned its "spring offensive in a neighboring country", though he did not name Pakistan

Pakistani authorities reject the charges and say they are making all possible efforts to strengthen security along a 2,600 kilometer border with Afghanistan to prevent terrorist infiltration in both directions. On Tuesday, the Pakistan military said it repelled an attack on two security outposts by militants from across the border in Afghanistan. It said three assailants were killed and several were wounded while others were forced to retreat. (VoA)

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(11) Afghan...

University of China and asked the university to offer master and doctoral degree scholarships to Afghan students.

Ahmadzai said the journalists also met Afghan Ambassador to China Janan Mosazai, who was urged to seek comprehensive support from the neighbouring country for Afghanistan. (Pajhwok)

(12) Empowering ...

for their nations. This will require the collective efforts of individuals, corporations, governments, and nonprofits willing to invest in STEM education and infrastructure.

Because they share FIRST Global's vision for creating a truly global and prosperous community through science and robotics, nations like Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan are among the countries that will be participating in the 2017 FIRST Global Challenge. (PR)

(13) Security Forces,...

not put an exact figure on the insurgent fatalities in the gunbattle, which was also confirmed by residents of the locality. Tahir Khan, an inhabitant, said a rocket fired by security forces struck a house in Noorkhel area, killing four people, including children and women. Maj. Gen. Sher Aziz Kamawal, police commander in the northern zone of the country, claimed seven Taliban were killed and six others wounded in Charsyan area.

The Taliban also confirmed clashing with security forces, but in a different location. The group's spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the firefight occurred in the Akbarbagh area. (Pajhwok)

(14) NGOs Conduct...

calling the event a step toward peace building in the country.

Won Bae, vice-manager of HWPL, said: "We hope to send these 100 pairs of sneakers donated by HWPL members not just for relief support but for giving a message that all ethnicities can get united to make peace through such a cooperative project." (Pajhwok)

(15) Taliban Insurgents

last week when Daesh claimed responsibility for the assassination of a senior Afghan Taliban commander in the north-west of Pakistan. The United States and its allies launched a military operation in Afghanistan in 2001 following the 11/9 terror attacks. The mission in Afghanistan ended on December 2014, 28. On January 2015, 1, NATO announced its new mission in the country, called Resolute Support, to train and assist Afghan security forces.

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(16) Mother who ...

spokesman, Attaullah Khogyani. Amanullah Kotwal, a tribal elder from Kot district, said the role of media, particularly Pajhwok, was vital in earning the woman the accolades. People would have ignored her if Pajhwok and other media outlets had not covered the issue, he believed. (Pajhwok)

(17) Taliban Torch ...

He said the Taliban did not create problems for welfare projects.

He said the private company should take license from the Taliban's procurement commission before launching any project.

The road's reconstruction launched around 10 days ago and would take one year to complete. (Pajhwok)

(18) Turkey's Ruling...

being affiliated with a political party on the grounds of the impartiality of the president.

The constitutional amendment that was approved by the April 16 referendum paves the way for the president to retain membership of a party. (Xinhua)

(19) US Issues ...

was issued last November after French authorities foiled a terror attack plot ahead of the winter holiday season. The old travel alert expired this February. (Xinhua)

(20) Brexit Threatens...

must not distract the government from delivering essential climate change policies. The committee has warned that any interval between Britain leaving the Euratom and entering into secure alternative arrangements would severely inhibit nuclear trade and research and threaten power supplies. The report says: "The government argues that the UK must leave Euratom as a result of the triggering of Article 50, but the report states that legal opinion is divided." (Xinhua)