

(1) Rein in ...

officials, including President Ghani. The source revealed Ghani told the ISI chief he could not trust Pakistan until it adopted practical steps to meet Afghanistan's longstanding demands to rein in terrorists on its soil who conducted incursions in the war-torn country.

The president shared with Mukhtar concrete evidence about Kandahar bombing that killed UAE diplomats and a number of Afghans, the attack on the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) and the recent assault on the military base in Balkh province.

According to the official, who did not want to be named, Taliban leader Maulvi Ahmad Kandahari has been training suicide bombers in a military base in Quetta. Pakistan should hand over the Taliban leader to the Afghan government, he said.

The Afghan government also asked for action against the 84 Taliban leaders, whose list has already been provided to Pakistani authorities.

Mukhtar was categorically told that relations between the two countries would not improve until Pakistan handed over the individuals involved in the recent attacks to Afghanistan, the source said.

The official added the president also shared with the ISI chief evidence of Pakistan-based Taliban leaders instructing fighters in Afghanistan over the telephone on how to conduct attacks as part of Operation Mansouri.

Ghani informed the visiting spy-master that the Taliban leaders were living in Quetta, Karachi, Peshawar and North Waziristan Agency, bordering Afghanistan. Facilitated by ISI, they held consultative meetings in Pakistan, he claimed. (Pajhwok)

(2) U.S Envoy ...

are challenged daily by an Afghan media that refuses to remain silent," Llorens said.

He said a vibrant and independent media is the bedrock of every democratic nation, "and we must all work together to protect these institutions. I commend the Government of National Unity for its efforts to better engage with the press. Likewise, the continuing work of the independent Afghan Journalists Safety Committee and other media advocacy groups are critical. While all of us recognize there is always work to be done, continuing engagement on all fronts will ultimately serve the people of Afghanistan."

"So, today let us pause to remember those brave members of the media we lost in the past year while celebrating those who fight daily to uncover truth and tell us the stories we would otherwise never know. I call on every Afghan to stand with the brave men and women of the media and recognize their many contributions to democracy and civil society in Afghanistan," he said.

Afghan CEO Abdullah Abdullah also marked the day and said in a statement that after the collapse of the Taliban regime, the role of media was critical in getting across information of the values of democracy, freedom of speech, governance, the fight against corruption, transparency, accountability and public awareness.

Marking World Press Freedom Day on Wednesday, U.S ambassador to Kabul, Hugo Llorens, said on Wednesday that Afghan journalists fight daily to uncover truths and that the local media today is arguably the most free and vibrant in the region.

He said that in commemorating World Press Freedom Day, it is important to reflect on the critical role of an independent media in nurturing and protecting freedom of expression and democratic principles. "We rely on a free, professional, and responsible press not only to keep us informed, but to shine a light on the hidden darkness of corruption, graft, illegal activity, and to hold our elected leaders accountable," he said.

"Journalists around the world live with the constant threat of violence. Here in Afghanistan, journalists bravely face that reality head on by reporting on the Taliban and other terrorist networks that reject the truth and use fear, intimidation, torture, and murder as their currency. "These cowards' attempts to create false narratives are challenged daily by an Afghan media that refuses to remain silent," Llorens said.

He said a vibrant and independent media is the bedrock of every democratic nation, "and we must all work together to protect these institutions. I commend the Government of National Unity for its efforts to better engage with the press.

Likewise, the continuing work of the independent Afghan Journalists Safety Committee and other media advocacy groups are critical. While all of us recognize there is always work to be done, continuing engagement on all fronts will ultimately serve the people of Afghanistan."

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"In fact, media and democracy is one of the biggest achievements of the people of Afghanistan in the past 16 years and keeping of these achievements and supporting this is the reasonability of the National Unity Government (NUG)," he said in the statement.

Second Vice President Sarwar Danish meanwhile addressed a press conference on Wednesday and said that threats against journalists in the country were ongoing and that government is aware that because of this some journalists are leaving the profession.

He pointed out that freedom of speech in the country had its own enemies and that extremists are threatening journalists.

"In the past years we have made huge achievements in the country (in terms of press freedom)," he said.

He said government is responsible for ensuring freedom of speech and it has taken numerous steps to work with the media.

He pointed out the high number of incidents of violence against journalists in the country and said in the past 10 years there have been over 600 cases of assault and violence against media workers.

He also said that freedom of the press was non-negotiable in terms of peace talks.

Every year, May 3 is a date which celebrates the fundamental principles of press freedom; to evaluate press freedom around the world, to defend the media from attacks on their independence and to pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the exercise of their profession.

In 2016 Afghanistan was ranked the second deadliest country in the world for journalists, after Syria. Ten journalists were killed in the country last year. (Tolonews)

(3) New US P...

"While no troop numbers have been set, US officials told me they would envision an increase in both US and NATO forces inside the country."

Washington is also hammering out a plan to eliminate the Afghan branch of the Islamic State (IS), or Daesh, group, which has been active in eastern and central Afghanistan.

According to media reports, the US policy acknowledges the need for an eventual peace deal with the Taliban. However, it suggests stepping up military attacks on militant holdouts to force the group into accepting a workable deal.

The new strategy would not set arbitrary deadlines for the pullout of international forces from Afghanistan. The Trump administration believes setting deadlines also gives rebels a timeline to sustain their activities. (Pajhwok)

(4) MoD Outlines...

were key plans under the new strategy.

According to the MoD, currently the Afghan National Army (ANA) has no control of the country's air space, but a radar system for the Afghan Air Force would help control air space.

"Currently we do not have the technology and radar systems to monitor our air space. We need to have a radar system, anti-aircraft guns, anti-aircraft rockets, surveillance aircraft, bombers, strategic and operative aircrafts," said MoD spokesman Dawlat Waziri.

He said that U.S officials have also announced their backing of the four-year strategy.

"Combat operations need to be tackled by commando units and ground forces must protect the areas or conduct operations around

their areas when needed," said Waziri.

This comes amid the Afghan National Security Forces' (ANSF) ongoing anti-insurgency campaign in at least 17 provinces. At the same time, the commando units are also conducting fifteen operations in several areas.

Afghan Special Forces are also taking part in night raids.

But, it is believed that security threats continue to surge in the country despite commitments by government officials and security institutions to eliminate insurgency. Kunduz was overrun by the Taliban on two occasions in the past two years. But people in the province are still concerned that the Taliban will once again try to occupy the key town.

"How can they (security forces) not retake those areas under the control of opponents, despite them having all the equipment and facilities," asked Amruddin Wali, head of Kunduz provincial council.

"We demand that the central government launch air and ground operations in Kunduz so that Kunduz does not fall to the Taliban for the third time," said Emal, a resident of Kunduz.

But, Kunduz police chief has said that military operations in Kunduz are proving difficult.

"Sometimes the situation is in a manner that we must act very quickly, but sometimes we need to move carefully, despite this operations have not stopped," said Abdul Hamid Hamidi, Kunduz police chief. (Tolonews)

(5) NATO, ...

Trust Fund Board, participants discussed the Fund's achievements in 2016 and 2017 and plans for 2018, a statement from NATO said.

Coordination with the donor community in Afghanistan and the implementation of auditing arrangements also came up for discussion at Monday's meeting.

The participants conferred on the ongoing coordination between the Afghan authorities and the various funding streams, including the Afghan National Army Trust Fund and the Law and Order Trust Fund for the Afghan police.

Budgetary contributions of the Afghan government, bilateral contributions provided, especially the bilateral Afghan Security Forces Fund of the United States, were also discussed.

Possible additional adaptations of the ANA Trust Fund to improve joint training and interoperability of the Afghan security forces in key areas, such as medical support, explosive ordnance disposal and counter-IEDs, also figured at the session. (Pajhwok)

(6) Hekmatyar ...

on Tuesday that full preparations have made for the return of Hekmatyar to Kabul.

This comes as the government on Tuesday released at least 50 prisoners of Hezb-e-Islami from Kabul's main jail, Pul-e-Charkhi prison.

The release of the prisoners concluded a day after Hezb-e-Islami protested against the cancellation of the release of at least 13 key prisoners of the party.

A group of at least 70 prisoners were expected to be released from Pul-e-Charkhi and Bagram prisons on Monday.

Hezb-e-Islami officials said Monday that the names of the 13 prisoners were removed from the list to be freed on Monday with the interference of the Independent Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan. Sources in the presidential palace said Monday that President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani has signed a decree for the release of the first batch of Hezb-e-Islami prisoners, consisting almost 70 people.

The peace agreement between Hezb-e-Islami and the Afghan government was signed in September last year, months after negotiations between the Afghan High Peace Council and the Hezb-e-Islami delegation.

The release of the prisoners of Hezb-e-Islami from the jails was one of the main conditions of the peace agreement between the two sides. (KP)

(7) Air Cargo ...

Acting director for the commercial department of the ministry, Mohammad Qurban Haqjo, said that the launch of these routes will reduce problems, particularly regarding the export of fresh produce.

The ministry said that draft plans for the Kabul-Delhi route and the Kandahar-Amritsar route have been prepared and hopefully the routes will open within two months. "In case our ground routes close for

any reason we will have air corridors. A specific cargo plane will be provided for businessmen and air and ground taxes will be the same," said Haqjo.

This comes ahead of Afghanistan's peak export season of fresh fruit and vegetables, which often runs the risk of losses for exporters especially when commercial crossings into Pakistan are closed.

The Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) meanwhile said commercial problems have not been solved with Pakistan and there are fears that Pakistan will again close commercial routes to Afghan traders.

"Unfortunately the problems are not yet solved with Pakistan and within two months our export season starts and if our relations remain the same with Pakistan, government will have to take action and find alternative routes," said Sayam Pesarlay, spokesman for the ACCI.

Meanwhile the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) said that at the moment there are good markets for Afghanistan's agriculture products inside the country.

"At the moment, the ministry of defense is buying local apples, instead of buying (imported) bananas and tangerines, and Afghanistan's seasonal fruits will be included from now on in the defense ministry's list of purchases," said the minister, Assadullah Zamir. (Tolonews)

(8) MPs Come ...

hundreds of people, but she would not tell a word about them."

He said irresponsible statements from the AIHRC leadership showed the commission did not want peace in Afghanistan.

"We do not allow anyone to prevent peace in the country, transitional justice, if enforced, should be applied to all who are involved in killings," he said.

Mohammad Nazir Ahmadzai, second deputy speaker, said peace was the need of Afghans and no one could create problems for it.

"No one should express things which are against national interests and the country's laws," he said.

Ahmadzai welcomed the return of Hekmatyar and said: "We should not take action that can damage peace in Afghanistan." (Pajhwok)

(9) HIA Asks ...

eastern Laghman province on Saturday from decades of hiding after his party signed a peace deal with the government in September.

The HIA leader addressed gatherings in Laghman and neighbouring Nangarhar province, but his comments about women drew ire.

HIA spokesman Qarib Rahman Saeed said AIHRC chief Samar Samar was herself accused of war crimes and she should respect the peace deal with the HIA and the government.

About women's rights, Saeed said their leader Hekmatyar was committed to women's rights which Islam had given to them.

He said some people had expressed opposition to offering prayer by women in mosque, but in the Afghan culture women went to gudar , a place by riverside from where drinking water can be taken home.

"Afghan women collect firewood from mountains and do other similar works, so they can go to mosque as well," Saeed said, recalling the HIA had set up exclusive schools for girls during the jihad era. He said the HIA had an active women wing.

He said if the HIA reached power, the party would give women more representation in the government. About Hekmatyar's comments about some media outlets, he said, the HIA leader's target was those media organizations which fueled ethnic tension. The HIA spokesman also said they did not need weapons and the party had asked its fighters not to use their guns against the government. He said a joint commission was being created to register the HIA fighters. Recently, Balk governor Atta Mohammad Noor expressed his concern about weapons with the HIA supporters and alleged distribution of more weapons to them by the government. (Pajhwok)

(10) HIA Admits ...

"Against foreigners; yes, we accept this." A reliable source told TOLONews that among the 13 prisoners, Qazi Rahman, a resident of Parwan province; Latifullah, a resident of Khost; and Zabihullah Atal, a resident of Sorkhod district in Nangarhar, were key planners of suicide attacks which had targeted foreign forces. Head of Pul-Charkhi Prison, Tawab Ahmadzai, however,

expressed a different view on the Hizb-e-Islami prisoners.

"There is no one by the name of Hizb-e-Islami in our prison. There might be a number of Hizb-e-Islami inmates in the prison but they had been imprisoned on charges of other crimes," Ahmadzai said.

"A warranty letter is taken from those who were released and if someone lodges claims against them they will appear for questioning," said Ahmad Farzan, head of strategic relations committee of the peace deal with Hizb-e-Islami.

Meanwhile, Juma Gul, a member of Hizb-e-Islami who was imprisoned for three years on charges of "relations with the group" and was released on Tuesday, said he wants to visit his family in Helmand.

"First I will go to Helmand and then I will wait for orders of Mr. Emir (Hizb-e-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar). I will do what he (Hekmatyar) says," Juma Gul said.

This comes after sources from within Hizb-e-Islami said 48 prisoners have so far been released; while reports on Tuesday indicated that the first batch of the group's inmates freed totaled 55. (Tolonews)

(11) Kabul Hosts ...

help address challenges faced by investors.

"We have finalized the National Business Policy and it will be approved within the next few months.

This policy covers all the issues related to business including providing facilities to investors, supporting investors, regulating imports and exports and it will help us on how to run good businesses," said

Mohammad Qurban Haqjo, the acting deputy minister for commerce at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. According to him, \$120 million USD has been invested in more than 800 plastic factories in the country. (Tolonews)

(12) EU, CSO ...

households during 12 months.

The ALCS is one of the only nationwide and comparable over time source of data in Afghanistan

and it also provides data for monitoring of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy indicators, as well the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in the past and now the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicators. The mid-term report already presents 10 SDG indicators and the final report will produce 22 SDG indicators.

During the event Prof. Hasibullah Mowahed, Deputy President General of CSO, stated that: "after advancing on the challenge of producing relevant and reliable statistical data, of which the ALCS is one of the best example as it is the first source of data for the government on living conditions, the next challenge is to work on the capacities of all actors to better analyse these data for SDG monitoring and to increase the use of available data for better and more relevant policies and plans". In addition, CSO also calls to advance towards an even larger cooperation between CSO and Line Ministries.

The data produced in the ALCS survey will assist the Government policy makers and other stakeholders like the international development partners to grasp the overall population conditions in a variety of areas, spanning from poverty, health, agriculture, labour, education and many more.

The final ALCS report is foreseen to be published by the end of 2017. (PR)

(13) Rising Divorce...

Affairs Department.

She blamed the increase in divorce cases to foreign TV dramas played on local television channels, drug addiction and poverty.

Kakar, who talked exclusively with Pajhwok Afghan News, said the Women's Affairs Department had launched public awareness campaign for reducing divorce cases in Ghazni. "Divorce is allowed in Islam, but there is emphasis unnecessary on its prevention," said the official. Sheikh Haidari, an Islamic scholar in Ghazni, said: "Many families refer to us for divorce, but we advise them separation." (Pajhwok)

(14) Dushanbe ...

The parties discussed matters related to the organization of the forum. The event will be held in late July as part of the international expo and fair Tajikistan 2017. The forum will aim to establish business ties in industry, healthcare, agriculture and food.

Oleg Ivanov and Sharif Said also reviewed the state and prospects of the economic relations between Belarus and Tajikistan. Special attention was paid to the organization of meetings

of the business circles of the two countries, including the meeting that will take place in Minsk from 17 to 19 May on the sidelines of the 11th meeting of the intergovernmental commission for trade and economic cooperation and the business cooperation council. (BelTA)

(15) President, ...

to the victims and their families of this cowardly and dastardly attack against innocent civilians. This barbarity and depravity of this attack only reminds all Americans of why we are in this fight and strengthens our dedication and solidarity with our Afghan allies. I want to reaffirm to the noble Afghan people our commitment to stand with you and work together towards a brighter and more peaceful future."

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg condemning the attack said that "The fight against terrorism continues. My thoughts are with all those affected."

A press release issued by the Pakistani Embassy in Kabul stated that the Government of Pakistan strongly condemns the suicide attack in Kabul that led to the loss of precious lives. Pakistan conveys its deepest sympathies to the bereaved families who lost their loved ones and prayers for the speedy recovery of the injured.

It further added that the Terrorism is a common challenge and, therefore, warrants a cooperative approach. (PR)

(16) Mass Arrival...

Farhad added. Meanwhile, Zabihullah Kakar, a member of Balkh Provincial Council questioned the sudden arrival of at least 1,000 people in the province.

"There was almost 1,000 people. One of the reasons which police took quick action in this respect was that these people wanted to enter the province at once. The arrival of at least 1,000 people from other provinces is questionable," he added. (Tolonews)

(17) 27 Insurgents...

after the September 11, 2001 attack on the United States.

For years they were engaged in often heavy fighting in the volatile province, however the new deployment of about 300 Marines will form part of Resolute Support's train, advise and assist mission. (Tolonews)

(18) ACB Bans...

statement, the three players have been given two days to submit logical objections to the decision. Earlier, Tarakai hit Farid Malik with the bat and broke his nose.

Similarly, Alam negatively reacted to the umpire's decision during Million Cup, the ACB statement said. It is the first time ACB has banned players on disciplinary grounds. (Pajhwok)

(19) Senior AI...

province of Baluchistan. More than 3,450 people have been killed in 416 drone strikes in Pakistan since 2004, local media reports said. According to international think tanks and human rights groups - including Amnesty International and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism - 70 percent of drone victims were unarmed civilians. (Tolonews)

(20) 20 Townships...

ratified by the parliament. Balkh officials said land was not used fairly as the policy was not implemented in letter and spirit. Mazari believed many land-related problems would be resolved once the policy was properly implemented. (Pajhwok)

(21) Taliban's...

According to the report, the Anti-Government Elements continued to target civilians intentionally and deploy indiscriminate tactics in areas with a civilian presence - in clear violation of their obligations under international humanitarian law. UNAMA documented attacks targeting civilian government employees, tribal elders, Muslim Shi'a mosques, humanitarian de-miners, NGO workers and civilians perceived to be government supporters. (KP)

(22) Taliban Militant ...

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