

(1) India, China...

pave the way for a joint Indo-Afghan connectivity project through Afghanistan connecting China with Iran in the future. However, the proposed connectivity project is unlikely to be included in China's Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) owing to India's strong reservations against the mega project that seeks to connect Asia's biggest country with the rest of the continent, Africa and Europe.

Afghans require support in health, education and food security as they are fighting both Taliban and the Islamic State. India has been providing support to Afghanistan in health-care and education for several years. Since last year the country has been supplying wheat to Afghanistan through Iran's Chabahar Port.

India and China could look at a Sino-Indian connectivity project through Afghanistan after the two sides kick-start development projects, said one of the persons cited earlier.

The two countries have twice held bilateral dialogue on the Afghan situation and both are also part of several multilateral fora on Afghanistan. In 2010, India and China had agreed to launch a joint project in Afghanistan, but there was no forward movement. (Agencies)

(2) Foreign Donors...

impact of the money.

Sopko said the mishandling of the ARTF highlighted broader problems with the many billions in foreign reconstruction spending in Afghanistan since 2001, adding the report was a "wake up call" for the international community.

"We exacerbated it (corruption) by pouring too much money, too fast, (into) too small a country and the key is with too little oversight," Sopko told AFP in Kabul.

"We ignored corruption early on. We ignored the corrupt officials we were giving money to, the warlords, the petty bosses who then later grew extremely wealthy."

Such corruption is helping to fuel the protracted conflict, now in its 17th year, by eroding support for the Afghan government and morale among its security forces "who are fighting and dying", Sopko said.

His remarks came as SIGAR's latest quarterly report showed a "sharp decline" in the number of Afghan military personnel, while the Taliban and other insurgent groups have gained increasing control over the population.

The World Bank has conceded that it "agrees with much of the SIGAR report".

- 'Broken tools' -

Sopko also was searing in his criticism of Washington, particularly the State Department, and its failure to adequately support American operations in Afghanistan.

Diplomats, aid workers and soldiers had been given a "box of broken tools" to rebuild the country, he said.

Pressure to spend money too quickly, short-term assignments and restrictions on travel beyond the US embassy in Kabul had hampered reconstruction efforts.

"Our construction programmes, our development programmes are like an assembly line... if you try to slow it down you're the monkey wrench," Sopko said.

Deteriorating security across Afghanistan, particularly in Kabul, has resulted in many foreign embassies and organisations downsizing and tightening restrictions on personnel movements.

That has led to outsourcing of project monitoring, "and they have assumed that would offer

the same amount of accountability that their governments would demand", Sopko said.

"Reconstruction is not risk free... if you want total risk free, don't come here."

The lack of monitoring combined with excessive inflows of cash saw Sopko liken reconstruction spending in Afghanistan, which ranks 177 out of 180 countries in Transparency International's latest corruption perceptions index, to a machine that "can't stop". Its "absorptive capacity", which indicates the amount of money a country can take in before it is wasted, had been exceeded almost every year since 2002.

"We are committing to do more and we (SIGAR) are saying 'Stop, take a deep breath, you don't know how the money has been spent up to now'," he said. (AFP)

(3) President Ghani...

1,018 people were killed and 792 others injured in 173 attacks in April.

Ghani promised election would be held on schedule. In mid-May 2019, he said, all of government figures would cease work.

Article 61 of the constitution says: "The president shall be elected by receiving more than 50 percent of votes cast through free, general, secret and direct voting.

"The presidential term shall expire on the 1st of Jawza of the fifth year after elections. Elections for new president shall be held within thirty to sixty days prior to the end of the presidential term.

"If in the first round none of the candidates gets more than fifty percent of votes, elections for the second round shall be held within two weeks from the date election results are proclaimed.

"In this round, only two candidates who have received the highest number of votes shall participate. In case one of the candidates dies during the first or second round or after elections, but prior to the declaration of results, re-election shall be held according to provisions of the law."

The national unity government (NUG) was installed as a result of an agreement between President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah after months of a deadlock.

Some experts believed future presidential elections may be delayed.

Low turnout at registration centres

The president said until last week 24 percent of women were registered as voters, a low percentage. Earlier, the Independent Election Commission had announced documenting 1.4 million voters.

The process of voter registration kicked off on April 14. "Your presence in this symposium is a clear response to terrorist attacks. Women of this country are discussing peace and stability and are cooperating and coordinating in this way."

He hoped the Afghan women would not go back to the times of oppression, poverty and backwardness. The women were present and their presence was durable, he concluded. (Pajhwok)

(4) MPs Call for...

black-tinted cars and Afghan people should know them. You should not damage everyone's reputation," MP Quadratullah Zaki said.

Barmak had said, "Suicide bombers are transferred through these black-tinted and armored cars. You know to whom these cars belong and chief of the National Directorate of Security also knows it."

Some MPs said if Barmak cannot reveal the names of these people, he should step down from his seat as interior minister.

"The best minister is one who should share issues with the people directly,

when he sees government officials or those above him, interfere in his work," MP Abdul Wadood Paiman said. (Tolo news)

(5) Hizb-E-Islami...

Mohammad Amin Karim. Meanwhile, lawmakers in Afghanistan's Wolesi Jirga (Lower House of Parliament) have stressed the need for close monitoring of activities by the Afghan government of the freed members of Hizb-e-Islami.

"Afghan government should be monitoring those released to see what these individuals are doing. The monitoring process should be authentic and up close," said MP Makhdoom Abdullah Mohammadi.

Also, officials from the High Peace Council (HPC) have rejected the possible involvement of Hizb-e-Islami members in waging war against the government.

"We do not have any samples of those who were released and returned to war," said HPC spokesman Sayed Ehsan Tahiri.

But Hizb-e-Islami officials urge the government to take steps and provide job opportunities to the reconciled members of the group.

"At least a working workshop should be held for them, and initially the government pledged to do so, but it has not delivered on its commitment," added Karim Amin.

This comes at a time when, to date, over 153 members of Hizb-e-Islami have been released from prisons.

Sources have said that from the total figure, 70 constitute top commanders and key members of the Hizb-e-Islami group. (Tolo news)

(6) Logar School...

"Fortunately, the explosion occurred early in the morning and no one was harmed," Arab said, adding the school had been closed for students and teachers. Resident Jamil confirmed the incident, saying the security forces had ringed the school. He said students had not come to school, whose boundary wall has been damaged and windowpanes shattered.

A day earlier, a mosque chosen as a voter registration site in southeastern Khost province came under bomb attack, which killed 17 people and wounded dozens. (Pajhwok)

(7) Police...

He added the explosives attached to the bomber's body went off after police fired at him. The bomber's body was still lying at the site, the social worker continued.

But an eyewitness, who did not want to be named, claimed one civilian was superficially injured in the explosion. (Pajhwok)

(8) NPC Approv...

and building solar system with the capacity to produce 5.5 megawatts of electricity in central Daikundi province.

The meeting approved suggestion of the Independent Commission for Overseeing the Implementation of Constitution (ICOIC) seeking rented buildings for its branches.

Besides NPC officials, observers from SIGAR, Parliamentary Anti-Corruption Caucus (PACC) and NATO's RS mission were present at the meeting. (Pajhwok)

(9) So Far 6,000...

Registration Department (PRD), said some challenges delayed the distribution of Tazkera through mobile teams and the process would be launched today (Monday.) (Pajhwok)

(10) UN Criticizes...

government had acknowledged there were civilian casualties and that President Ashraf Ghani

has established a commission to investigate the events.

It said the governor of Kunduz has also reportedly established a provincial-led investigation. But no findings have been publicly released yet.

The Taliban claimed 59 people were killed and 150 were injured -- mainly children, religious scholars, and elderly men at the religious ceremony.

"UNAMA is not able to confirm the civilian status of each individual killed or injured," the report said, adding that UNAMA was not in a position to determine whether Taliban leaders or fighters were present during the air strikes.

But it said concerns remained about the attack "even if the government had a legitimate military target." (RFERL)

(11) About 2,000...

undocumented Afghan nationals, who were rounded up in the Aegean province of Izmir, have been deported to Afghanistan yesterday.

"Efforts are underway for the management of Afghan returnees from Turkey," Hafizullah Mia Khail, the ministry of refugee's official said.

About 2.5 million people from Afghanistan are living as refugees and Afghans are the second largest group of asylum seekers in the world.

Pakistan hosts nearly 1.4 million, including some second- or third-generation Afghan refugees who have never lived in their home country. (ATN)

(12) Taliban Suffer...

anti-government armed militant groups including Taliban insurgents have not commented regarding the report so far.

This comes as counter-terrorism operations including airstrikes are underway against the Taliban and other militants in various provinces of the country. The operations are being conducted as the militants attempt to expand their insurgency and terrorist activities as part of their spring offensive. (KP)

(13) Taliban Judge...

The Taliban group has not commented regarding the distribution of the letter by Mawlavi Hakim so far.

This is not the first time such letters are being circulated from the Taliban leaders' addresses but the group has in the past has rejected such moves as a propaganda aimed at disrupting the activities of the fighters of the group. (KP)

(14) Afghan Prisons...

country as he was speaking with the lawmakers.

Meanwhile, the interior minister Wais Ahmad Barmak said specific countries are supporting terrorist groups in Afghanistan. He emphasized that those countries which are supporting terrorists are trying to face Afghanistan with challenges in order to show the world that "Afghanistan is a failed state". (ATN)

Iran's Jahanbakhsh Becomes 1st Asian Ever to Win Dutch League Golden Boot

TEHRAN - Iranian international soccer player Alireza Jahanbakhsh finished as the top scorer in the Dutch Eredivisie with 21 goals.

Starting Sunday's final round of the 2017-18 campaign on 18 goals, one more than PSV Eindhoven's Hirving Lozano and Bjorn Maars Johnsen of ADO Den Haag, it took Jahanbakhsh just 13 minutes to break the deadlock against PEC Zwolle.

The 24-year-old doubled his side's tally seven minutes after the restart and, following further goals by Fredrik Midtsjo and Wout Weghorst (2), completed his hat-trick in the 88th minute to seal a 6-0 win.

With Lozano failing to hit the target in a 0-0 draw with Groningen, Johnsen emerged as Jahanbakhsh's main competitor and the Norwegian did net two goals in a 3-2 triumph over Roda JC. Nonetheless, his valiant challenge ultimately came up short as Jahanbakhsh finished two goals above him to seal the Golden Boot.

Jahanbakhsh becomes the first Asian ever to finish as the highest-scoring player in an Eredivisie campaign. (Xinhua)

Pakistan Minister Said to be Stable after Shooting

LAHORE, Pakistan — Pakistan's interior minister underwent two surgeries and was in stable condition Monday after being shot the previous day by a gunman whose motive remains unclear, officials said.

The chief physician at the Lahore hospital where Ahsan Iqbal is being treated said the bullet fractured his right arm, then ricocheted and lodged in his abdomen. Dr. Mohammad Ameer said surgeons opted not to remove the bullet as that would have entailed a more dangerous procedure.

The gunman, who police identified as Abid Hussain, shot Iqbal as the minister was returning to his car after meeting with constituents, and was immediately arrested. It's not clear what motivated the attack, but the gunman has been linked to a group of religious hard-liners who rallied in Islamabad earlier this year.

The Labaiki Ya Rasoolallah group blocked a main intersection linking the capital with the nearby city of Rawalpindi for 20 days to protest the omission of religious language from a parliamentary bill. The protesters agreed to disperse in return for the resignation of the law minister.

Pakistan's political and military leadership condemned the attack on the interior minister, as did the U.S. Embassy. Authorities have launched an investigation into the attack and any possible security lapses. (AP)

Iran Says New Sanctions Would Not Stifle Its Oil Industry

ANKARA - The Iranian oil industry will continue to develop even if the United States pulls out of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, and Tehran would see the accord as operational as long as it can sell oil, the Oil Ministry website quoted senior officials as saying on Monday.

U.S. President Donald Trump has threatened to pull out of the Iran deal by not extending sanctions waivers when they expire on May 12 unless European signatories of the accord fix what he calls its "flaws".

"They cannot stop Iran. Our oil industry's development will continue even if new sanctions are imposed on Iran," SHANA quoted Gholamreza Manouchehri, deputy head of the National Iranian Oil Company, as saying.

Sanctions imposed on Iran in early 2012 by the United States and European Union over its nuclear program cut Iran's crude exports from a peak of 2.5 million barrels per day (bpd) before the sanctions to a little more than 1 million bpd.

But Iran re-emerged as a major oil exporter in January 2016 when international sanctions were suspended in return for curbs on Iran's nuclear program.

Deputy oil minister Amirhossein Zamaninia also said that Iran considered the deal alive "if we can continue to sell our oil and its products", even if the United States pulls out.

"Also, we should be able to maintain Iran's oil market, receive our oil money and secure foreign investment in our oil industry," he added.

Iran says it aims to raise its crude oil production capacity to 4.7 million bpd within the next four years, though exports might be disrupted if Trump refuses to renew Iran's sanctions waivers next week. (Reuters)