

(1) Afghanistan...

behind China's calls for bilateral talks on the issue.

The Foreign Ministry said Afghanistan's Chief Executive made the statement in a meeting with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in Beijing that also touched on security cooperation along their border in China's volatile western region of Xinjiang. (Tolnews)

(2) Congressional ...

goal of defeating the terrorist group." The House Armed Services Committee said this while passing the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for 2017. The parliamentary panel is scheduled to take up the act for a vote later this week.

Mark Thornberry, the committee chairman, said politically-motivated troop caps and a lack of transparency about force levels and force requirements in Iraq and Syria were emboldening the enemy.

The lawmaker believed such moves were demoralising allies, hampering public support for the international mission and ultimately impeding victory over ISIS.

An insufficient presence in Iraq and Syria had increased the danger posed by ISIS, as terrorists were able to leave areas under pressure to establish cells in other locations around the world such as Afghanistan, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, and Indonesia, Thornberry concluded. (Pajhwok)

(3) Final Draft...

agreement was ready for signatures. Three days ago, the HIA delegation head, Eng. Mohammad Amin Karim, told Pajhwok Afghan News their talks with the government had been finalised and the peace agreement might be signed by both parties within two months.

He had said they were concerned about some groups struggling to sabotage the peace talks.

Key components of the agreement are lifting sanctions on the HIA and removing names of HIA members from UN and US blacklists, the release of HIA prisoners and allowing the party to openly commence its political activities and resolving the issue of Afghan refugees.

Meanwhile, the US foreign secretary on Monday declared they supported the peace talks between the Afghan government and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar-led HIA party and would help in lifting sanctions on the party. (Pajhwok)

(4) Stage Set ...

to take charge of the dam. Earlier, 10 officials of the ministry had been dispatched to India to be trained on how to run affairs of the water reservoir, a statement from Ministry of Energy and Water said.

Osmani said 27 more officials would be provided special training on dam management to responsibility for the project form Indians and the executing company.

Salma Dam is located in the Chesh-ti-Sharif locality of Kohistani district, 160km east of Herat City, the provincial capital.

The dam was constructed by an Indian company with the help 700 workers, including 250 Indians. Before the 1978 coup, India planned to build the dam, but due to insecurity the project was put on hold.

With the fall of the Taliban regime and in 2001, the project contract was signed, under which the facility was to be built in four years. However, insecurity and logistical problems delayed construction work for years. (Pajhwok)

(5) Too Early...

the Kabul government and the Taliban.

It will be the fifth meeting this year for the parties, known as the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, or QCG.

The four-nation group earlier finalized a road map to peace but has not persuaded the Taliban to join talks with the Afghan government. Deep differences remain between Kabul and Islamabad on how to push the Taliban to the negotiating table.

"These are trying times, challenging times. We are passing through it together. We have some differences, differences in our outlook. We are very sincerely trying to help out [in] the reconciliation. We are trying to play our role in bringing peace to Afghanistan and also to our restive areas. I am sure together we have a shared future," Janjua said.

The lack of progress on peace talks plus increased Taliban attacks are fueling tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, where insurgent commanders are allegedly sheltering. Waiting for a decision

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani repeated his demand last week that the time has come for Islamabad to deliver on its commitments.

"All four (QCG) states committed to a road map and their obligations, particularly by the state of Pakistan. Those obligations are that if Taliban groups prove irreconcilable then there will be use of force. We are waiting for that decision," Ghani said.

Pakistani officials insist military action would require consensus among all QCG members and in Wednesday's talks, their delegation will re-emphasize the need to give the reconciliation process "a fair chance and more time." In background discussions, officials have told VOA they do not believe the process has come to the point where the Taliban should be declared "irreconcilable" and be dealt with militarily. Bilateral relations deteriorated after last month's Taliban suicide bomb-and-gun attack at the Afghan intelligence compound in Kabul in which nearly 70 people were killed and hundreds more wounded.

Afghan authorities blamed the Pakistan-based militant Haqqani network, which is fighting alongside the Taliban, for plotting the bloodshed.

Officials in Islamabad reject the charges as "politically motivated" and an attempt to divert attention from "growing internal problems" facing President Ghani's national unity government.

Since the deadly April 19 attack, six Taliban prisoners convicted of terrorism have been executed on Ghani's order and he has instructed security forces to intensify counterinsurgency operations across Afghanistan.

Rejecting 'vengeance mode' Pakistani officials say if they follow suit and use force against the Taliban insurgents on Pakistani soil, the country will lose ground in pushing the insurgents to the table for talks. They say the country cannot go into "vengeance mode" the way Afghanistan has done in response to an suicide attack. The hardening of Kabul's stance, critics say, has further reduced chances for arranging reconciliation talks with the Islamist insurgency.

"We mean to serve the purpose we want to derive from (the Taliban) to the table. We are making our efforts," a senior Pakistani official dealing with matters related to national security told VOA.

The absence of incentives for the Taliban to engage in peace talks, along with prevailing skepticism in Kabul about the future of Ghani's government, have all made it extremely difficult for Pakistan to persuade the insurgent group to come to the talks, the official said.

Analysts say that differences among Taliban leaders on whether to engage in talks with Kabul are also hampering efforts to bring the insurgent group to the table. They believe new Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansoor has opted for intensifying the insurgency instead to avoid fragmentation within the group.

"The Taliban will be willing to sit down to talk when it has an incentive and it simply does not have an incentive right now," says Michael Kugelman, senior associate for South Asia at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

"If it [the Taliban] were to be beaten back significantly in the battlefield and if it felt like they were on the defensive, then they will have reasons to come to the table; but I don't think we are at that point now," said Kugelman.

National Security Adviser Janjua says Pakistan has been seeking a dignified and honorable return of nearly 3 million Afghans living in the country.

With almost no international financial assistance, the displaced population is facing extremely difficult economic pressures, and localities where they live have also caused security issues for Pakistan, he noted.

"More than everything else, it has earned us a bad name. People think that perhaps we are playing a double game. These are the refugees where [the] Taliban find their sanctuaries," Janjua said. (VoA)

(6) Mohaqiq ...

Telecommunications Day, Mohaqiq said one of Afghanistan's greatest achievements in the past 15 years was that of the telecommunications industry.

As such the industry is worth in excess of \$2.5 billion USD in the country. He said that technology over the past twenty years has brought enormous changes to the lives of people and that it allows for instant communication between people.

He said however that Afghanistan needs to attract investment in this sector - especially as the private telecoms sector is one of the economic pillars of the country.

"Today one of our problems is the lack of job opportunities. But if the ministry of telecommunications invests in technology infrastructure it will create more job opportunities for the youth in the country."

Without telecommunications technology in Afghanistan, the people and

government would face huge challenges, he said.

But the telecoms sector also faces challenges - particularly with regards to security. "They are often under threat," he said.

"We have promised the telecoms industry that we will discuss their issues with the national security council," he added.

In conclusion he said the fiber optic program is a key plan moving forward and that Afghanistan needs to attract foreign investment in this regard.

He said the development of this sphere needs more focus and that he hopes in future fiber optics can be taken from Kabul to the provinces and districts. (Tolnews)

(7) Finland Says ...

political groups have been on the rise, said security had improved to such an extent that refugees would generally not be at risk in any parts of the three countries, despite the running conflicts.

There was no immediate reaction from refugee agencies. But the statement by the Finnish Immigration Service came in the face of a string of international assessments of the scale of the ongoing bloodshed and refugee crisis.

"It will be more difficult for applicants from these countries to be granted a residence permit," the immigration service said in a statement.

"It is currently possible for asylum seekers to return to all areas in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia without the ongoing armed conflicts as such presenting a danger to them only because they are staying in the country." Asylum seekers would now only be allowed to stay if they could prove that they were individually at risk.

Somalia has been slowly recovering from more than two decades of war. But the government is still fighting an Islamist insurgency by the militant group al Shabaab, which regularly launches gun and bomb attacks in the capital Mogadishu and other cities.

Islamic State still holds key cities and vast swathes of territory in northern and western Iraq which it seized in 2014.

Despite battlefield setbacks over the past year, the militants have continued to attack civilians in areas under government control including a string of attacks last week in and around the capital that killed more than 100 people.

The Taliban launched a spring offensive in Afghanistan last month, vowing to drive out the Western-backed government in Kabul and restore strict Islamic rule.

Finland's center-right coalition government - which includes nationalist Finns party - has tightened its immigration policies since the influx of asylum seekers last year.

Groups of self-proclaimed patriots have launched regular patrols and marches, saying they want to protect locals from immigrants.

Around 32,500 people applied for asylum in 2015 from 3,600 in 2014, with most of them coming from Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. Numbers have come down significantly this year. (VoA)

(8) 1,000 Afghans ...

about 118,000 people fled their homes in the first four months of 2016, the UN's emergency aid coordination body, OCHA, said in a report on Monday.

"It's been a rather alarming rise in the number of families displaced," Stacey Winston, an OCHA spokeswoman in Kabul said.

The northeastern province of Kunduz has been especially hard hit this year, according to the report.

So far, 22,400 people have been forced from their homes by fighting between the Taliban and government forces. Many of those displaced have been repeatedly forced from their homes.

The Taliban briefly took control of the provincial capital, Kunduz City, in October last year but in March, insurgents surrounded the city, setting off improvised explosive devices that caused "widespread destruction" and sent 7,000 people fleeing into the homes of families and neighbors, OCHA said in its report.

An assessment mission subsequently found as many as six families sheltering in one house.

On 15 April, the Taliban launched its "spring offensive" throughout the country, which was quickly followed by a counteroffensive by pro-government forces. Fighting has been raging in all seven districts of Kunduz province, with civilians caught in the crossfire, which has included the use of heavy artillery and airstrikes, stated the report.

The UN went on to say the situation is similar throughout much of the country. Of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, 24 have recorded some level of forced displacement this year, and a quarter

of those displaced are in areas that are difficult to access.

Almost 118,000 people were displaced between 1 January and 30 April Afghanistan's rugged terrain adds to the challenges for agencies trying to provide humanitarian aid.

"We're facing a double-edged sword," said Winston. "We're trying to reach people in remote areas, but also trying to reach people in conflict areas."

For example, aid agencies know that 10,500 people are displaced in Dehrawud District in Uruzgan province, but they can't reach them.

Agencies were initially able to conduct an assessment and found urgent health concerns, as well as food, water and shelter needs. But fighting has since blocked the road into the area, and displaced families have been stranded for weeks without help, read the report.

The OCHA report notes relief agencies have not managed to deliver aid to people displaced in districts outside of Kunduz City.

The situation doesn't look like it's going to improve anytime soon, said the OCHA.

The OCHA report asks: "In a year when the Taliban have gained more control of the countryside than ever before, is the UN and NGO part of the international aid community balanced to assist both sides of the conflict?" (Tolnews)

(9) 200 Schoolchildren...

Aged between eight and 16 years, the pupils were rushed to hospital for treatment and most of them were in stable condition, he added.

Ghafar, one of the students, said: "I smelt a gas as soon I entered my classroom. After a few minutes, I felt unconscious and don't what happened later on."

About a week ago, a hundred students were poisoned in a similar attack in Nimroz, but the authorities are yet to find any clue to the attackers. (Pajhwok)

(10) Kunduz Governor ...

Omarkhel called upon other armed opponents of the government to put down their weapons and join the reconciliation process.

The governor recalled he demanded the rebels three months back to join the politics and renounce violence because the armed conflict pleased the enemy and supported the agenda of regional intelligence networks.

Also former peace committee chief, Omarkhel said people wanted peace to prevail, but they were disappointed with the way the process was being conducted. The performance of the peace council was not up to public expectations, he noted.

Huge sums of money had been spent on the peace drive but most of youth continued to join the Taliban ranks due to unemployment, the governor admitted. He, however, praised the council for persuading thousands of fighters to join reconciliation.

Omarkhel said issues could not be settled through fighting and talks were the only option to bring lasting peace to the country. He welcomed Hikmatyar's decision to go for negotiations. The HIA return to politics would be a great achievement of the government.

He favoured talks with those had seen the nefarious designs of regional intelligence networks. Omarkhel is considered close to renowned jihadi leader Prof. Abdur Rab Rassoul Sayyaf. (Pajhwok)

(11) Deh Raud ...

Dost Mohammad Naib, ruled out the possibility of the district falling to the Taliban. He said there were enough security personnel to resist the militant onslaught. (Pajhwok)

(12) Militants...

insecurity, polio teams could not cover some areas of Jurm and Yamgan districts. But the deputy police chief, Col. Sakhi Dad Haideri, said police would cooperate with polio teams to make sure that every child was vaccinated. (Pajhwok)

(13) MSF Urges...

MSF representative for Afghanistan. The Pentagon said the sustained attack was a mistake caused by human error. After a months-long investigation, the United States dismissed allegations by MSF that the incident amounted to a war crime, and exonerated all involved of any criminal action.

President Barack Obama apologized for the attack, which was one of the deadliest assaults on civilians in the 15-year war in Afghanistan.

But while the Pentagon report, released on April 29, said no criminal charges had been leveled against U.S. military personnel for mistakes that resulted in the attack, about 16 American military personnel, including a two-star general, were disciplined. A dozen survivors interviewed by

The Associated Press since the Oct. 3 assault on the MSF hospital - which treated wounded Taliban and government fighters alike - are convinced the bombing was no accident. They have said that the attack was sustained and focused on destroying the main hospital building. Doctors Without Borders has said it provided the GPS coordinates of the Kunduz clinic to all parties in the conflict in Afghanistan.

The Afghan government has accepted \$5.7 million from the U.S. Department of Defense to rebuild the Kunduz facility. According to the U.S. military spokesman in Afghanistan, Brig. Gen. Charles Cleveland, construction could begin on the same site later this year.

"The money has been transferred to U.S. forces in Afghanistan, and military engineers have begun assessing the site as they work on designs for the new facility," he said.

That work should be finished by September, he said, adding that an Afghan company would be contracted to build the infrastructure and the U.S. would not be equipping it.

Meanwhile, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has ordered that the hospital be rebuilt on the same site as the MSF clinic that was destroyed, said Wadidullah Majroh, director of international affairs at the Ministry of Public Health in Kabul. The president's office did not respond to requests for further information.

Molinie, the MSF representative in Afghanistan, told the AP that the medical charity was not involved in discussions on the rebuilding of the clinic and received no funds from the U.S. or the Afghan government.

As a condition for resuming activities in Kunduz, MSF sought guarantees there would be "no military interference or use of force against MSF medical facilities, personnel, patients and ambulances," Molinie said. But no guarantees have been offered so far.

The organization also wanted agreement from Afghan authorities, the U.S. military and all combatant groups fighting in Afghanistan that "MSF staff can safely provide medical care to people based on medical needs, without discrimination, and regardless of their religious, political or military affiliations," he said.

"We have not yet made a decision on resuming medical activities in Kunduz," Molinie said.

"It is extremely difficult to understand why adequate compensation has still not been offered to the families who have lost their sole breadwinner and to victims whose injuries are so severe they will struggle to earn an income," Molinie added. (AP)

(14) Infighting...

Taliban militants have yet to make comments.

This is the second bloody fighting between the two rival factions in the western region over the past three days.

On Sunday, seven more militants were killed from both sides as clashes flared up in Balamurghab district of the western Badkhis province, according to Balamurghab district governor, Ahmad Zia Akazai.

Militants loyal to Mullah Rasoul also publicly executed three fighters from Mansoor group in Balamurghab district on Monday after capturing them alive, Akazai asserted.

Since confirmation of the death of Taliban former leader Mullah Mohammad Omar in August last year, Omar's deputy Mullah Akhtar Mansoor succeeded him. However, his rival Mullah Mohammad Rasoul challenged Mansoor's leadership and since then fighting occasionally erupts between the two groups in parts of the country. (Xinhua)

(15) Sar-i-Pul ...

being harassed by other uprising commanders.

Saleh Mohammad, a 65-year-old resident of Syedabad area, said they were armed in the presence and with permission of the Shiberghan-Sar-i-Pul highway commander Ziaul Haq.

"We picked up the guns in support of government and security officials against the insurgents to keep security of our areas," he said.

But they were being harassed over the past two days since security forces launched a military operation spearheaded by Second Vice-President Abdul Rashid Dostum on the highway in Sar-i-Pul province.

He said some uprising commanders linked to Dostum were forcing them to fight only on their behalf.

Saleh Mohammad said they wanted the vice president and Sar-i-Pul officials to listen to their problems.

Another man in the group, Habibullah, told Pajhwok Afghan News the uprising commanders opened fire at their houses and aimed guns at their women and threatened them with death. (Pajhwok)

(16) Over 200 ...

with militants or other criminal groups.

MalimLala Gul, a member of the fact-finding delegation and head of the Senate's Economic Commission, said the detainees had admitted to their plans travel to the north for harvesting opium.

He said 198 of the detainees had been released while 12 others were still in police custody on charges of having links with the insurgents. Two coins of money were recovered from each of the detainees that proved they used them for opium harvest.

Meshrano Jirga Chairman Fazal Hadi Muslimyar also said the men had been detained based on intelligence information. The arrests were aimed to thwart terrorist attacks in the north, he concluded. (Pajhwok)

(17) District Police ...

in different areas of the country. The Taliban urged civilians to stay away from official gatherings, military convoys and centers regarded as the legitimate targets by militants besides warning people not to support the government. (Xinhua)

(18) Refugees Host ...

wakes to a day when he weighs 700 kilos more," he spoke of the dire situation facing his city using a metaphor. "Imagine the physiological and psychological trauma to him."

"We do not share the same language with them," the mayor said, adding "Our traditions, our culture and all are different. (Xinhua)

(19) Vienna Syria ...

meeting are scheduled to discuss how to create conditions for a better implementation of the agreed ceasefire nationwide. The meeting will also focus on measures to bring the Syrian opposition back to the peace talks, the foreign minister said. (Xinhua)

(20) Iran's Parliament...

hardliner legislator Hamid Rasa'ei also proposed a complementary to the bill that obliges Iran to "seize U.S. assets" passing through the strategic Strait of Hormuz in response to the U.S. hostile acts. (Xinhua)

(21) Liberian ...

3 million dollars for road maintenance fund and 1.5 million dollars toward the airport runway rehabilitation," he said.

He said with the approval of the legislature, government intends to seek donor funding either in grant or loan to help underwrite these expenditure. (Xinhua)

(22) Denmark ...

therefore the country will have to leave the EU's law enforcement agency Europol when the new regulations for the organization enter into force on May 1, 2017, unless a parallel agreement can be reached for continuing the cooperation.

Rasmussen argued that Denmark and Europe have a common interest in fighting terrorism. "This could mean that we will find a solution after all. (Xinhua)

(23) Singapore, ...

the current and emerging threats of terrorism, and strategies to prevent and respond effectively to such threats were discussed. The FGD attendees concluded that transnational cooperation is critical in the fight against the terrorist threat. The strong and on-going bilateral cooperation between Singapore and Indonesia on counter terrorism measures is a good way for countries to narrow the space that terrorists could use to operate within the region. (Xinhua)

(24) 31 Killed ...

the toll at 11 killed and 37 others wounded. According to Maan, the suicide bomber apparently was a female in accordance with the remains of the attacker's body. The attackers apparently followed the old tactic of first creating an initial explosion to attract security forces and people, and then setting off another blast to inflict heavier casualties. (Xinhua)

(25) Sisi Urges ...

However, Israel rejected the initiative. "If the Palestinian issue is resolved with an earnest will, it will open a new chapter that may add to what has been achieved between Egypt and Israel through the peace treaty that lasted for over 40 years," Sisi said. (Xinhua)

(26) French ...

United Nations) and many Arab countries. While Israel and Palestine would not initially participate, the conference aims to lay the groundwork for future peace talks involving both parties. (Xinhua)