

(1) Ghani Backs ...

in western Herat province. It was the first dam completed in 40 years. He urged US taxpayers to continue paying for America's longest war in Afghanistan, saying Kabul-Washington cooperation on combating terrorism was based on mutual interest.

Ghani said the cost of war had significantly decline after the withdrawal of combat troops from Afghanistan. He added the current number of foreign troops was one-tenth of what that was, meaning the costs were also one-tenth.

About the possible deployment of 3,000-5,000 more US troops, he said that Afghanistan needed advice at the division and corps command level. But it is at the division level where Afghan forces needed additional support, he explained.

He acknowledged is corruption in police ranks, saying he had forcibly retired over 150 generals, who were given several extensions, at the Ministry of Defence in the last two years. Reorganising the security forces was critical to sustainability, he argued. On the growing threat from the Taliban, Ghani said the security forces could hold them back. The Taliban and their supporters wanted to overthrow the government and create two political geographies, he alleged.

The militants were able to take control of Kunduz province momentarily, but they could not capture a single provincial capital, the president said.

"What I am saying is we are not about to collapse. We have been able both years [2015 and 2016] to contain immense onslaughts at a time when, because of Congressional sanctions against Russia, we had no airpower..."

Afghanistan could secure, after knocking on the doors of over 50 countries, four helicopters from India. Contingent upon President Donald Trump's approval, he expected a major overhaul of the Afghan air force, a doubling of special forces.

Ghani tended to support the dropping of the so-called Mother of All Bombs on ISIS fighters in the Achin district of eastern Nangarhar province. The massive ordnance destroyed a significant group of Daesh leaders, he claimed.

Daesh's pathology is to swallow its opponents and frighten the population, according to the president, who said: "In that regard, the threat is very real." The group's attempted recruitment is of a different standard, so it must be taken seriously. He stoutly defended the peace deal with Gulbadin Hekmatyar, asking if the accord in Northern Ireland underlined the culture of impunity. How many Nazis were prosecuted after World War II, he questioned. "They key issue is: can we change bullets to ballots? Bullets will flow and will kill. Can we shift the conflicts among us to the political arena? Our failure in the past has been a failure of politics."

He confirmed communication with many Taliban, who approached the government. But the discussions needed to be principled and open, he stressed. "We are not closing the door... It's going to be through the Afghan Peace Council and through a properly constituted delegation, along the lines that we did it in Murree."

Ghani declined commenting on US allegations that Russia was supporting the Taliban. Instead he called for engagement and a regional consensus on how to end the war in Afghanistan. "We have work to do with Russia and I hope that it will be productive."

He said a stable Pakistan was in Afghanistan's interest, and vice versa. He hoped the US, having sacrificed so much in blood and treasure, could help Pakistan normalize itself. Ghani deplored Afghan refugees in Iran, Pakistan and Greece were in difficult conditions. "And we need to be able to prepare. Again, it forces us to speed up certain parts of the economy." (Pajhwok)

(2) Peace Agreement...

can be prevented," Ghani told the elder.

Maulvi Khaleq Dad, one of the tribal elders, congratulated the president over successful peace agreement with HIA which was an Afghan owned and led process. He hoped the continuation of this process would help to reconcile other groups as well.

Khaleq Dad thanked the president for condoning the demise of Sardar Ahmadzai and termed him honest and peace loving personality.

He also thanked the president for economic and uplift projects and the success he achieved during the last

more than two years. (Pajhwok)

(3) Incumbent ...

who believed the unity government had no program to hold the elections because of its internally political rifts.

Meanwhile, politician Mohammad Yunus Qanoni, said: "The signs and situation suggest that elections are delayed based on technical and political pretexts."

However, Mujib Rahman Rahimi, the CEO spokesman, said the government had a strong political determination and intention to hold elections.

"The government has many times declared it and I again repeat that we don't have a second opinion about holding the elections and we are committed to proving it."

He said the main factor behind the delay in holding the elections were electoral reforms and logistic arrangements. He said announcing a date and for elections was related to the electoral bodies.

Despite efforts, Pajhwok wasn't able to have comments from IEC officials in this regard. (Pajhwok)

(4) Gen. Murad ...

Interior and approval of President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani.

Murtazawi further added that other appointments have also been made in the ministry in accordance with the recommendations of the ministry's leadership and President Ghani's approval.

The other appointments include appointment of Gen. Aminullah Karim as deputy interior for administrative affairs and Abdul Khalil Bakhtiar as deputy interior minister for counter-narcotics.

According to Murtazawi, Janan Barezai has been appointed as the first deputy interior minister and Mohammad Farid Afzali has been appointed as the head of the intelligence and criminal investigation department.

The latest appointments came as President Ghani earlier said the Ministry of Interior has become the heart of corruption and insisted that persistent graft in the ministry's leadership will not be acceptable.

The Afghan government has stepped up efforts to root out corruption from the key government institutions amid reports some breakthroughs have been in this regard so far. (KP)

(5) HRW Calls...

7,920 injured), according to the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA).

While the Taliban and other insurgent groups have caused most of these casualties, casualties caused by US and Afghan forces have also been on the rise.

A recent UNAMA report shows that in 2016, aerial operations by US and Afghan government forces resulted in the deaths of 250 civilians and injuries to 340 others, which is nearly double the total from the previous year.

Aerial operations remained the second leading cause of civilian casualties by Afghan government forces in 2016, causing 43 percent of civilian casualties.

Most support for Afghan air operations has come from the US military, though Afghan civilian casualty tracking and mitigation measures are significantly lacking. (Tolonews)

(6) Afghanistan...

Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), with the technical support of the International Trade Centre (ITC). Further technical and logistical support was provided by the GIZ Facility for Agricultural and Rural Market Development (EU FARM), in particular with the provision of a meeting venue. The provincial consultation follows the first NES stakeholders' consultation held in Kabul on 20 and 21 February 2017. The launch brought together 150 public and private stakeholders to discuss challenges and opportunities for Afghanistan's export sector.

The NES will provide a guiding compass for achieving Afghanistan's trade vision and will include detailed activities, targets and impact measures, indicating what exactly needs to be done, by whom and with what resources to improve the country's export competitiveness.

Between May and July 2017, further consultations will be held in Kandahar, Herat and Jalalabad, culminating in a second national consultation in Kabul. The provincial NES consultations are crucial in making sure that key stakeholders beyond the capital are included in the design of the strategy.

The NES has strong support from both the government and the private sector, as it provides national

and international development partners with an appropriate implementation plan for trade-related operations. Resource mobilization efforts will be developed in line with the strategy's plan of action.

Reiterating the government's support to this event, Deputy Minister for Commerce Mohammad Qurban Haqjo said: "This provincial consultation in Mazar-e-sharif illustrates the continued focus on collecting inputs and mobilizing support across the country for the NES initiative."

"The strong public and private sector dialogue that has taken place today on topics such as quality management, skills development and market intelligence will be invaluable in developing a sustainable and inclusive NES. MOCI congratulates all stakeholders involved in reaching this important milestone"

These views were echoed by Chief Executive Officer of the Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Atiqullah Nusrat. "ACCI fully supports this important consultation in Mazar-e-Sharif that captures the challenges, opportunities, and aspirations of the private sector in the Balkh region," he said. "The impetus on ensuring a pan-Afghanistan focus for the NES beyond Kabul demonstrates the national scope of the strategy, and will go a long way in developing the private sector as a robust engine for Afghanistan's growth."

The NES initiative falls under the auspices of the EU-funded 'Advancing Afghanistan Trade' project, which aims to assist Afghanistan in improving the conditions to use trade as a lever for enhanced regional cooperation, economic and human development, and poverty reduction.

The Advancing Afghan Trade project is a project funded by the European Union and is being implemented by ITC under the leadership of the Ministry of Commerce and Industries (MoCI).

The intervention is recognition of ongoing efforts by the Afghan government to use trade as a driver of economic growth, regional cooperation and stability. Afghanistan acceded to the WTO in July 2016 and has placed trade and regional economic cooperation at the heart of its development strategy. Its first action after acceding to the WTO was to ratify the body's Trade Facilitation Agreement.

To ensure sustainability, local ownership and long-term impact of the project, ITC will be working with a range of partners from the private sector, non-governmental organizations, academia and civil-society organizations based in Afghanistan. ITC is the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations. ITC assists small and medium-sized enterprises in developing and transition economies to become more competitive in global markets, thereby contributing to sustainable economic development within the frameworks of the Aid-for-Trade agenda and the United Nations' Global Goals for Sustainable Development. (Wadsam)

(7) Taliban Ask ...

verbal clash with the Taliban last month over their increasing meddling in school affairs, including the payment of salaries in their presence.

Another teacher said: "The Taliban haven't advanced a clear argument for teachers receiving salaries through banks. Some Taliban may be among the teachers who can't go to banks. Maybe there is some other reason."

School staffers believe that Taliban's pressure tactics are aimed at forcing teachers to quit their jobs and let their associates fill the posts. But the move may also scare away students, they say.

Subjects like culture and arts have already been banned by the Taliban, one teacher claimed. Instead, he revealed, there were six Talimul Islam (Teaching of Islam) periods daily.

Education Director Taj Mohammad acknowledged the problems created by the Taliban. He said they had been threatened by the Taliban on the issue of salary payments through banks.

Mohammad Asif Shinwari, spokesman for the education department, also confirmed teachers had been restricted from going to banks, which were under threat of attack. He said for the time being, salaries were sent to schools.

Shinwari rejected Taliban interference in school results, but acknowledged the ban on certain subjects and introduction of new ones by the militants.

On the other hand, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said they were involved in the result compila-

tion process was to ensure transparency and fairness.

He added they had barred teachers from getting salaries through banks in order to block payments to ghost teachers and ensure deserving ones were given wages. (Pajhwok)

(8) No Evidence ...

experts from Russia, Pakistan and Egypt and other countries had arrived in the province and were aiding the Taliban.

Rahimi said Daesh was a common threat to Afghanistan and the global community and the group was struggling with leadership crisis since its two leaders were killed within one year in Afghanistan.

The CEO spokesman said operations to eliminate Daesh from Afghanistan were underway in different parts of the country. (Pajhwok)

(9) Evidence of ...

insurgency-saturated southern and eastern areas -- can be partly attributed, say many experts and officials, to Russian involvement.

"The success of the Taliban in the north is due to Russian support. In Kunduz province, 30 miles from the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border, Taliban has control," Kabul-based analyst Silab Mangal told Fox News. "That's where they get Russian finance and logistics and their wounded fighters can get treatment."

According to Mangal, who cites personal engagement with Taliban in those areas, the Russians have given them weapons over time, including the Dragov sniper rifle and the PTRS-41 anti-tank rifle.

Getting in such weapons or advisers smoothly, by air or land, is a hypothetically straight-forward task. Tajikistan shares a zig-zag 750-mile border with northern Afghanistan, and Russia's largest foreign military installation, Russia's 201st Rifle Division, is located just across the border.

"Russia has a lot of influences with all the tribes here on the border. They know all the local commanders," one Afghan official, who previously operated in the Panj region and had direct ties to Moscow, said. "In just a few minutes, helicopters can go and come back without too much notice. And boats attract little attention."

Another well-placed intelligence source, who also requested anonymity due to safety concerns in the Taliban-infested region, told Fox News that the mysterious weapons transfers -- coming from abroad -- are in due course empowering the Taliban to maintain a strong foothold in the north of Afghanistan.

According to the source, Russia tightened engagement with the Taliban during the second term of former President Hamid Karzai, around 2009, as his ties with the U.S. deteriorated. But mysterious deliveries allegedly started just prior to the first fall of Kunduz city in 2015. Although seemingly random, they have become more frequent in the past eight months.

Moscow has openly stated that it has an intelligence-sharing relationship with the Taliban regarding the ISIS threat. But they have staunchly denied that the Russian military is aiding or arming the Taliban. Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid also denied any Russian monetary or material assistance. (Wadsam)

(10) Some Countries ...

province to assess the security situation.

Jahid said Afghan security forces with the support of people were fully prepared to foil the nefarious designs of the enemy. The minister did not name any other country without Pakistan that supported terrorism in Afghanistan. He avoided naming which areas and highways the insurgents tried to capture and block. Governor Mohammad Khalid Hashami demanded the deployment of more police into Kapisa to improve the security situation and protect the natural resources of the province.

Jahid pledged to increase the number of police in the province. (Pajhwok)

(11) Pakistan to ...

Afghan refugees in the country, he added.

"Through this, the process of registering undocumented Afghan refugees will begin," he explained adding that 21 registration centers and mobile teams would work to register the refugees around the country. He also said the Afghan government would provide about 100 officials to man registration points.

"Before the registration process, an awareness campaign will be launched in the province related to inform the illegal refugees about the benefits of having themselves regis-

tered," he said. (Tolonews)

(12) Ghani Inaugurates ...

inaugurated the \$204.9 million road project.

The president termed the project as vital and said people in every corner of the country were happy over its launch.

"For Afghanistan's economic development, we have given a priority to infrastructure projects and I am very happy to see this project is kicked off as it will connect the country's north with the south," the president said. Public Works Minister Mahmood Balegh said the road, part of connectivity road between north and south of the country, was being constructed with financial support from the Asian Development.

He said the road was 178 kilometre long, nine meters wide and would have eight bridges, 196 culverts and 5,950 metres of retaining walls. The project, he said, would be completed in 1,278 working days.

Second Vice President Sarwar Danish congratulated residents of Bamyan and Samangan province on the project's launch and assured them of more infrastructure development projects in future.

Thousands of residents of Bamyan were present at the site to welcome President Ghani. (Pajhwok)

(13) North to ...

Mohammad Noor, also the executive director of the Jamiat-i-Islami Afghanistan party, said the war had been transferred to the north and the fire burning the region must be extinguished.

The governor was addressing a gathering observing the fourth death anniversary of Mohammad Rassoul Mohsini, former Baghlan provincial council head.

"Daesh did not come from outside, only white flags were changed with black, they are provided great resources. Helicopters, which I don't know coming from this or the other side of Amu River and Durand Line, are equipping motorcyclists," Noor claimed.

"Some countries are training and empowering Daesh while others changing their policy are supporting Taliban militants to eliminate Daesh," he added.

"The war is between powerful countries and neighbors, but the victims are Afghans, unfortunately the government has no a working program for controlling such dangerous phenomena," he said.

Former vice-president and member of the Protection and Stability Council (PSC), Mohammad Yunus Qanuni, called the war's extension to different parts of the country, particularly to the northern region, a strategy that involved inside and outside hands, saying the ongoing situation had given birth to painful challenges for the nation.

Calling terrorism a great challenge for Afghanistan, he said the war in Afghanistan had been imposed on the country.

About increasing targeted killings, Qanuni said the killing spree was aimed at neutralizing those who could play a vital role in the country's defense.

He asked the government to identify those behind the targeted killings in order to avoid losing more influential figures.

"The targeted killings have been ongoing since the loss of Ahmad Shah Massoud and may continue in future, unfortunately no clue to who were the masterminds of these incidents could be discovered so far," he said.

Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, the leader of his own faction of Hezbi-Islami Afghanistan (HIA), also called the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan as imposed one.

"We should strike unity in our ranks and establish a government based on people's wishes, we should discharge our responsibility towards our people and country."

Ahmad Wali Massoud, head of Ahmad Shah Massoud Foundation, said attempts at holding Afghanistan backward existed, but the Afghans looked forward to change and development.

But Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Dr. Abdullah Abdullah said the unity government was paving the ground for major national goals.

He said the struggle for development of the country needed patience and a clear route and that all people had the responsibility to defend the country against the enemies. (Pajhwok)

(14) Afghan Women ...

often slow and patchy.

"I am so happy that this TV station has been created for women because there are women in our society who are not aware of their rights," said 20-year-old Khatira Ahmadi, a pro-

ducer at the station.

"So this station represents women and we work to raise the voice of women so they can defend their rights," she said.

Women's rights and education as well as media freedom are often cited by the government and foreign aid organizations as among the biggest achievements in the country since the Taliban was toppled in 2001 (Reuters)

(15) RTA Office ...

organization that supports open media in Afghanistan, told a press conference in Kabul that the governor and security organs of eastern Nangarhar province had been informed four days in advance about a possible attack.

He said security organs had committed negligence in protection of the RTA building in Jalalabad, saying local officials should be interrogated about the incident.

"Terrorists once again targeted media and journalists who are neutral and exhibited their enmity with innocent and non-military people," he said. (Pajhwok)

(16) Families of ...

old now, said Ghani's father Zahir, referring to Ghani's children.

"He has two children, we are very poor," said Ghani's mother Diljan. Mullahkhalil was another RTA employee killed in Wednesday's attack. He had worked for RTA in Nangarhar for 30 years and was a marketing officer. He is survived by six children.

"We have nothing to survive on, the government should take care of us," said Mullahkhalil's son Jaffar. (Tolonews)

(17) Roadside Bombs...

resulting from conflict-related incidents in the country have risen by 21 percent in the first four months of 2017.

The mission recorded 987 child casualties, including 283 deaths, between January 1 and April 30, the highest number of children killed for the same period since UNAMA began documenting Afghan civilian casualties.

Hours earlier on Friday, a roadside bomb hit an American military convoy north of the capital, Kabul, but "no injuries have been reported," said the U.S. military.

Without sharing more details, a U.S. military spokesman told VOA "the disabled vehicle is being recovered and the convoy will continue and complete its mission." (VoA)

(18) Regional...

Ahmad Shah Sepahr.

He claimed that there is sufficient evidence to show that Pakistan, Russia and Iran are funding the Taliban and other militant groups in the country.

"The Russians have been in contact with the Taliban militants since 2004 or 2005. It is not correct to say that they (Russians) engaged in ties with the Taliban in recent times (only), but now these relations have been clarified. Pakistanis, Iranians and the Russians are jointly supporting the terrorists, however the Russians do their work through Iran, for instance sending the Taliban weapons and money," said Raziq. (Tolonews)

(19) Pakistan Fires ..

that the incident took place after the Pakistani troops were stopped to conduct surveys in villages belonging to Afghanistan but the Pakistani officials reject the allegations and claim that census work was being done in the areas belonging to Pakistan. (KP)

(20) Troop Surge ...

Agha said more than 36,500 political prisoners were held in government jails. However, he did not provide information about prisoners in Taliban's jails.

Execution of political inmates by the government would complicate the situation, he believed, adding the ASC was creating a commission to build trust between the two sides in first step. He said the ASC also planned to create a grand council of elders, political figures, ulema and influential individuals for supporting the peace process in the country. "The security situation would not improve by increasing the number of foreign troops, it would harm the country. Foreign troops should make their strategies for peace in Afghanistan and avoid engaging in more wars," Agha added. (Pajhwok)

(21) Ex-Taliban ...

committee head for Jawzjan, said: "Nimat used to have problems with Darzab residents and it will be difficult for him to regain his lost status and it's been unknown what program Daesh has set for him." (Pajhwok)