

(1) Trump Discussing...

The president has often cast himself as a champion of the Pentagon, invoking the strength and size of the military at his campaign rallies and on Twitter. At the same time, he has frequently criticized U.S. military missions and decisions while personally attacking some former military leaders, contributing to a complicated relationship with the armed forces he commands.

Although he signed off on Defense Secretary Jim Mattis' requests to bolster the American military presence in Afghanistan and Syria and retain the footprint in Iraq, Trump isn't a fan of U.S. military operations there.

In meetings about a potential visit, he has described the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan as "a total shame," according to the advisers. He also cited the long flights and potential security risks as reasons he has avoided combat-zone visits, they said.

Questioned last week about why he has not visited American troops deployed in overseas conflicts, Trump indicated during a Fox News interview that a trip was in the works.

"I think you will see that happen," Trump said in the interview with Chris Wallace that aired Sunday. "There are things that are being planned. We don't want to talk about it because of security reasons and everything else."

The president also repeated his erroneous contention that he was opposed to the Iraq War. The Washington Post has found that Trump initially expressed support for the invasion and did not register public objections until more than a year after the war began.

"I think it was a tremendous mistake, should never have happened," Trump told Wallace.

"But this is about the soldiers, sir," Wallace responded.

"You're right," Trump said. "I don't think anybody's been more with the military than I have, as a president. In terms of funding, in terms of all of the things I've been able to get them, including the vets."

Trump has spoken privately about his fears over risks to his own life, according to a former senior White House official, who has discussed the issue with the president and spoke on the condition of anonymity to speak candidly about Trump's concerns. "He's never been interested in going," the official said of Trump visiting troops in a combat zone, citing conversations with the president. "He's afraid of those situations. He's afraid people want to kill him."

Pressure for Trump to make such a visit has been building for months. Eliot Cohen, a former Bush administration official and Trump critic, has raised the issue regularly in public. (mercurynews)

(2) Afghan Refugees...

spokesperson, Muhammad Zuma, told reporters at the rally on Monday.

Zuma said most of the Afghan refugees currently in Medan had been waiting in the city for five to seven years, which they said was too long.

Yassin, another refugee, said that when he set sail to leave his country, Indonesia was not his main destination.

"We want to be sent to the US soon," Yassin said.

He added that many of his fellow members of the Hazara tribe, a minority group in Afghanistan, were being hunted by the Taliban. He said killings of Hazara tribespeople still occurred today, forcing them to flee the country and avoid persecution.

"We just heard that some of our relatives back home have escaped [the Taliban] and are living in the mountains, despite the winter," he said.

No UNHCR representatives were willing to meet the protesters. (Agencies)

(3) UN: Afghan...

cultivation is still the highest ever recorded. This is a clear challenge to security and safety for the region and beyond. It is also a threat to all countries to and through which these drugs are trafficked as well as to Afghanistan itself," said Colhoun. He warned that more high-quality low-cost heroin will reach consumer markets across the world, with increased consumption and related harms as a further likely consequence.

"The significant levels of opium-poppy cultivation and illicit trafficking of opiates will further fuel instability, insurgency and increase funding to terrorist groups in Afghanistan," he said.

Colhoun noted that while there is no single explanation for the continuing high levels of opium-poppy cultivation, rule of law-related challenges such as political instability, lack of government control and security as well as corruption have been found to be among the main drivers of illicit cultivation.

The UNODC survey estimated that the total farm-gate value of opium production decreased by 56 percent to \$604 million, which is equivalent to three percent of Afghanistan's GDP, from \$1.4 billion in 2017. The lowest prices strongly undermined the income earned from opium cultivation by farmers.

The study finds that 24 out of the 34 Afghan provinces grew the opium-poppy in 2018, the same number as in the previous year.

The survey found that 69 percent of the opium poppy cultivation took place in southern Afghanistan and the largest province of Helmand remained the leading opium-poppy cultivating region followed by neighboring Kandahar and Uruzgan and Nangarhar in the east.

It noted that opium poppy weeding and harvesting provided for the equivalent of up to 354,000 full-time jobs to rural areas in 2017.

A U.S. government agency, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), has noted in its latest report that as of September 30, Washington's counternarcotics-related appropriations for the country had reached almost \$9 billion. "Despite the importance of the threat narcotics pose to reconstruction and despite massive expenditures for programs including poppy-crop eradication, drug seizures and interdictions, alternative-livelihood support, aviation support, and incentives for provincial governments, the drug trade remains entrenched in Afghanistan, and is growing," said Sigar, which monitors U.S. civilian and military spendings in the country. (VOA)

(4) Taliban Say...

diplomat authorized by U.S. President Donald Trump's government to lead negotiations with the Taliban, on Sunday said he hoped to cut a peace deal by April 20, a deadline that coincides with the date set for presidential elections in Afghanistan.

Two senior U.S. officials confirmed that the second round of peace talks ended last week and the Taliban expected Khalilzad to visit Qatar for a meeting before the end of 2018.

"The second round of talks went on for three days. This clearly proves that both sides are exercising patience and caution during their diplomatic engagement," a U.S. official said on condition of anonymity.

But Khalilzad's public statement that the Taliban believe they will "not win militarily" angered senior members of the group, who warned U.S. officials against mixed messages that could muddle the peace process.

"We were astonished to see Khalilzad's statement in Kabul on Sunday. He wrongly quoted us, saying that the Taliban admitted that militarily we would not succeed," said a senior Taliban member in Afghanistan.

Another senior member said Khalilzad's strategy to declare a deadline showed how desperate the United States was to withdraw foreign forces.

The Taliban "are not losing" in Afghanistan, Gen. Joseph Dunford, the top U.S. military officer, said last week.

"We used the term stalemate a year ago and, relatively speaking, it has not changed much," he told a security forum.

The NATO-led Resolute Support mission involves 41 nations contributing more than 12,000 soldiers, equipment and training for Afghan forces.

The Taliban have strengthened their grip over the past three years, with the government in Kabul controlling just 56 percent of Afghanistan, down from 72 percent in 2015, a U.S. government report showed this month.

A separate report released by a U.S. government watchdog on Monday said there had been little progress toward reconciliation between July and September. (Reuters)

(5) Zarif: Iran...

stability in Afghanistan and called for continued constructive role and presence of Iran in the upcoming Geneva conference on Afghanistan.

Geneva conference on Afghanistan will be jointly hosted by Afghan government and United Nations, he said. (IRNA)

(6) EU Says...

sustainable connectivity.

This comes after the Ministry of Foreign Affairs last week said government will attend the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan and will try to create a single definition of "Afghanistan's peace" for regional and world countries attending the summit. Nasir Ahmad Andisha, Deputy Foreign Minister for Management and Resources, said they hoped to bring together foreign powers and regional stakeholders regarding peace in Afghanistan.

"Our definition of peace should be the same and depending on this, competition (among different nations) should move in one direction so we can stop the lack of coordination either on a regional level or inside Afghanistan," said Andisha.

Sources meanwhile said that on the second day of the Geneva Conference, six countries involved in the Afghan peace process will meet behind closed doors to discuss the issue.

The conference provides a platform for the Afghan government and international community to demonstrate progress and commitment, and maintain the momentum for presidential elections and opportu-

nities for peace and security.

The conference also aims to emphasize the importance and the implementation of mutual commitments made by the Afghan government and the international community towards reform and development and in measuring results against the \$15.2 billion committed by the international community for Afghanistan in 2016.

In August, the World Bank said that the Geneva conference on Afghanistan in November will be important for the country so as to ensure continued support by the international community towards Afghanistan in years to come.

Speaking to TOLONews, World Bank country director for Afghanistan Shubham Chaudhuri said at the time that at the conference, donors will assess the performance of the National Unity Government and its programs in order to boost Afghanistan's economic situation in the future and to improve good governance. (Tolo news)

(7) Poverty, Violence...

are giving children the opportunity to take over segments of their programming. Participating TV and radio stations include RTA, TV24, Shamshad, Tolo, Pajhwak and Radio Free Europe.

"It's a fun day with a serious agenda," said UNICEF Representative in Afghanistan, Adele Khodr. "Here in Afghanistan, it is very important to give children a voice because they are a very big part of this country's young society. However, girls and boys in Afghanistan are largely invisible as citizens and we need to give them the chance to speak up. Today is a day for children to 'take over', express their hopes, highlight their challenges and hold us as adults accountable, for the promises and commitment we have made to them. We must listen, discuss and take action."

Child-led activities will take place in various areas of the country to discuss issues affecting Afghan children so that they can share their views and ideas with the government, community leaders, development partners, teachers and families. Senior members of Government and the international community have lent their voice to support the realization of child rights in Afghanistan and we are grateful to them!

Despite global progress, 1 in 12 children worldwide lives in countries where their prospects today are worse than those of their parents, according to a UNICEF analysis conducted for World Children's Day. According to the analysis, 180 million children live in 37 countries where they are more likely to live in extreme poverty, be out of school, or be killed by violent death than children living in those countries were 20 years ago.

Similarly, in Afghanistan, despite our best efforts and the significant progress made across all sectors, millions of children are still affected by conflict, missing school, lack access to quality health care, proper sanitation or safe water and many more are victims of decades of conflict.

In Afghanistan, an 'Activate' talk will be carried out by children and for children, to mark this important event.

"World Children's Day is about listening to us and giving us a say in our future. And our message is clear: We need to speak up for ourselves, and when we do, the world needs to listen," said Hinna Asifi Wardak, 17-year-old activist and UNICEF child advocate.

Afghanistan ratified this human right document in 1994. (Pajhwok)

(8) India Seeks More...

China's Wuhan city.

For China, which shares a border with Afghanistan, this is a rare initiative as it closely coordinates its Afghan policy with Pakistan. Kabul has been accusing Islamabad of backing the Taliban's frequent violent attacks destabilising the country.

Addressing the inaugural session of the China training programme, India's Deputy Ambassador in Beijing, Acquino Vimal said "We are hopeful that in the months to come we will be able to identify more specific projects which can be jointly done by the government of India and government of China for the benefit of Afghanistan as desired by the government and people of Afghanistan".

Vimal said India, which is committed to Afghanistan's efforts to emerge as a united, peaceful, secure, stable, inclusive and economically vibrant nation, has committed USD 3 billion for its development in the last 17 years.

"India and Afghanistan are close neighbours as well as strategic and development partners. All efforts of India as a development partner of Afghanistan have been based on the priorities set by the government and people of Afghanistan. This has been our fundamental basis for any development partnership," an Indian Embassy press release quoted him as saying.

India's development programmes in Afghanistan focus particularly in the areas of building infrastructure, development of human resources, enhancing connectivity and promoting trade and investment links, he said.

Most of these major development projects

have been completed over the years," he said.

Since 2017, the next generation of new development partnership has been launched in Afghanistan through high impact community development projects in all the provinces of Afghanistan, he said.

"I am happy to inform that through our scholarship and training programme, more than 3,500 Afghan diplomats are being trained in India every year," he said. (Pajhwok)

(9) Pakistan's...

militant safe havens in Pakistan," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "Because Pakistan failed to address the problem, the Administration suspended security assistance to Pakistan," the official said.

Earlier in the day, Trump slammed Pakistan for not doing anything for the US. "We paid Pakistan Billions of Dollars and they never told us he was living there. Fools!..." Trump said in a tweet, a day after he told Fox news in an interview that Osama bin Laden should have been captured long before.

"We no longer pay Pakistan the \$Billions because they would take our money and do nothing for us, Bin Laden being a prime example, Afghanistan being another," Trump said

"They were just one of many countries that take from the United States without giving anything in return. That's ENDING!" Trump said.

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan responded on twitter by saying that his country has suffered enough fighting terrorism on behalf of the United States. "Now we will do what is best for our people & our interests," the cricketer-turned politician wrote on Twitter.

Republican Senator Rand Paul, came out in support of Trump. "I agree completely. That's why we should push hard on Pakistan to let persecuted Christian Asia Bibi find asylum in America," he said retweeting Trump.

"Until Asia Bibi is freed, Pakistan should not receive a penny of U.S. aid! Not one penny should go to any nation that persecutes or kills Christians!" Paul wrote in an op-ed in Breitbart News. (Pajhwok)

(10) IEC Under Fire for...

have influenced the announcement of the presidential elections and that the issue is now out of the election commission's control.

According to election watchdog organizations, due to recent political issues, the authority on deciding about the presidential election schedule has been taken away from the IEC.

"They cannot use their authority and currently are waiting for government's order," Sughra Sadat, spokeswoman of the Transparent and Free Election Foundation of Afghanistan said.

"The international community's decision is also very important. The commission needs to know whether the international community wants the elections to be held on April 20 or wants to delay the elections by making the peace process an excuse," Naem Asghari, program manager at the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan said.

These remarks about the IEC's failure to announce the election schedule comes after reports emerged that Washington was reportedly keen to get the Afghan government to suspend the presidential elections in a bid to promote peace talks.

The Afghan government however rejected any such move, or delay in holding the elections.

"Based on the law, the elections calendar should be announced 120 days ahead of elections and now it is too soon," IEC deputy for administration and finance Mazalal Dawlati said.

"No political pressure or issues around peace have any effect on the commission's decisions and will not have," IEC chief Abdul Badi Sayyad said.

The election commission has specified April 20 as the presidential elections date, but as the commission is currently busy with parliamentary elections, analysts say that it will be difficult to hold the elections at the specified time. (Tolo news)

(11) Number of...

many countries exclude them from their national education systems. Asylum-seeking children in detention in countries such as Australia, Hungary, Indonesia, Malaysia and Mexico, are given limited access to education, if any. Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania, Karen refugees in Thailand and many Afghan refugees in Pakistan can only get an education in separate, non-formal, community-based or private schools, some of which are not certified. Some of these host countries, do not provide refugee learners with the language tuition they will need to achieve social integration and acquire good employment prospects.

Kenya, for example, allows refugees to benefit from its national educational

curriculum but does not achieve full inclusion because its refugee learners are living in camps where they are unable to interact with their Kenyan peers. Lebanon and Jordan, hosts to the largest number of refugees per capita, do not have the resources necessary to build more schools. They have therefore established separate morning and afternoon school shifts for citizen and refugee children, which limits interaction between the two groups.

The Report recognizes the considerable investments made by countries such as Rwanda and the Islamic Republic of Iran to ensure that refugees attend school side by side with nationals. Turkey has committed to include all refugees in its national education system by 2020, as have seven countries in East Africa. Uganda has already fulfilled this promise.

Efforts for inclusion may come to nothing in the absence of enough trained teachers. In Lebanon, only 55% of teachers and staff received specialized training to meet the needs of displaced learners in the past two years. To provide quality education to all refugees, Germany would need 42,000 new teachers, Turkey 80,000 and Uganda 7,000.

Low and middle income countries host 89% of refugees but lack funds to cope. Donors need to multiply their expenditure on refugee education by three and ensure long term support.

Immigrants: The share of students with immigrant backgrounds in high income countries has increased from 15% to 18% between 2005 and 2017. They now number 36 million, equivalent to the entire school-aged population in Europe. At current rates, it could rise to 22% by 2030. But immigrant children are not given a fair chance to succeed. In 2017, in the European Union, twice as many young people born abroad left school early compared to natives. First-generation immigrant students in the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) were 32% less likely than natives to achieve basic skills in reading, mathematics and science in 2015.

Manos Antoninis, Director of the GEM Report, said: "Countries cannot think the job is done once immigrants are in school. They are being excluded in so many other ways. They end up in slower school tracks or in under-resourced establishments in troubled neighbourhoods. Nevertheless," Antoninis continued, "almost all countries are now signing two global compacts on refugees and migrants, which contain several key education commitments. This could be the much-awaited turning point."

Canada, with the largest percentage of immigrants among the seven richest industrialized countries, makes sure children learn about migration starting in second grade and has enshrined multi-culturalism in its constitution. Ireland, with the highest percentage of first generation immigrants in the European Union, succeeded in funding an intercultural education strategy while in the midst of a deep financial crisis. (Pajhwok)

(12) MPs Call for...

outposts in the districts and station security forces at outposts to prevent the Taliban from re-entering the area.

The MPs said if permanent security outposts are not established in the districts, it is possible that the Taliban could return and cause further security problems in the future.

"Government at least should station a battalion of security forces in these districts," MP Ali Akhlaqi said.

"Our demand is that no crisis should happen in the future," parliament's second deputy speaker Amir Khan Yar said.

"The strongholds of the enemy are located in these areas and from there they target all parts of the country," MP Ali Alizada said. The Ministry of Defense meanwhile said Jaghori and Malistan districts have been completely cleared of Taliban.

Defense ministry spokesman Ghafoor Ahmad Jawed said two units of territorial army forces will be established in these two districts and they will maintain security. "Two territorial army units will be established in these districts which will operate under the 203 Tandar Military Corps," said Jawed.

"All problems in these two districts have been assessed and that includes strengthening the government forces there and gaining people's trust," interior ministry spokesman Najib Danish said.

Jaghori and Malistan were two of the most secure districts of Afghanistan and have not witnessed clashes in 17 years - until recently.

On November 6, the Taliban for the first time launched group attacks from a few directions on Jaghori district.

Later, the group also launched attacks on Malistan district which is a neighbor of Jaghori.

The clashes in the districts lasted for nearly two weeks. (Tolo news)