

(1) NUG Fully Supports a ...

However, more than 50 percent of respondents have said they will participate in the next elections.

"41 percent of the respondents have said they do not believe the election commission has the capacity (to organize elections on time), 30 percent said they are not sure and 29 percent said the election commission has the capacity," said Shams Rasikh, TEFA program manager.

Most of the respondents have said the absence of a systematic plan to secure election security was one of their main concerns.

"An overall assessment on election security has not been conducted," TEFA head Mohammad Naeem Ayubzada said.

Nearly 40 percent of the respondents also expressed their concerns over government's interference in the election commission affairs, but the election commission said they will hold elections transparently and that people do not have to worry about this.

"We have not witnessed government interference or influence in our decisions so far," IEC commissioner Maa-zullah Dawlati said.

The Independent Election Commission commissioners have another nine months to organize parliamentary and district council elections – but as yet, the voters list has not even been drawn up, which has raised serious concerns over another delay in holding elections. (Tolnews)

(2) Education, Health ..

and as a result, most of the students today studied under the open skies.

The Education Secretary acknowledged the ministry's affairs had been at a slow pace. He said the ministry had spent \$41 million from its \$60 million uplift budget. Total development budget of the education ministry for the ongoing fiscal year was \$155 million.

The secretary said the Education Ministry in the first nine months of the fiscal year spent 42 percent of its development budget.

He did not say anything about changes to development projects but acknowledged some projects had been restructured on the bases of need.

The transfer of construction projects from the Education Ministry to the Urban Development Ministry was a lengthy process which caused delay in implementation of projects, he added. Dr. Ahmad Jan Naeem, the Public Health secretary, said 70 services projects and 45 construction projects were being implemented by the ministry.

He said the Health Ministry was allocated \$171 million uplift budget, of which 44 percent had been spent and 80 percent of the funds would be utilized until the end of the year.

He said the delay in procurement of contracts, land disputes and lack of capacity were main handicaps in execution of uplift projects of the ministry. Speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahim said the Public Health Ministry's spending on uplift projects was satisfactory and hoped health services would improve in the country.

The speaker, however, expressed concern over the spending of the Education Ministry budget and said reasons presented by the education secretary in this regard were not satisfactory. Ibrahim asked the education ministry to work on development of its capacity so more attention was paid to the education sector. (Pajhwok)

(3) Trump to Turn Up ..

Trump said: "We have been paying Pakistan billions and billions of dollars at the same time they are housing the very terrorists that we are fighting." This was in reference to the money the US has been paying to Pakistan to help fight terrorism. (Tolnews)

(4) 10-Nation Kabul ..

minister Salamat Azimi told the meeting that a draft regional cooperation strategy against drugs had been prepared by his ministry and would be discussed at the two-day conference.

He said the draft after being thoroughly examined and analyzed would be then finalized by the representatives. He said main points in the draft were strengthening regional cooperation in law enforcement, exchanging intelligence information, extradition of criminals, money laundering, tightening control over borders for curbing trafficking, regional cooperation in reducing demand for drugs, encouraging cooperation from regional and international organizations.

Azimi dubbed drugs as a critical issue for Afghanistan and the region, adding the menace had changed into an original factor behind insecurity in the country.

On the day one of the conference, journalists were denied the opportunity to speak with the foreign delegates but

they were told the result and remarks would be shared with media today (Tuesday).

Brig. Gen. Abdul Khalil Bakhtyar, deputy minister of counter-narcotics, said regional countries should increase their cooperation in terms of fighting drugs.

He said cultivation, smuggling and use of drugs were major challenge to stability and peace in Afghanistan.

He said combating drugs would yield positive result if the campaign had regional support and cooperation.

A recent report jointly published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Afghanistan government says drugs production increased by 43 percent in 1395 solar year, when 4,800 tonnes of drugs were produced.

The Ministry of Counter-Narcotics says the population of addicts in the country was nearly one million in 1388 solar year but jumped up to three million and 600,000 in 1396 solar year; including 850,000 women and one million and 200,000 children. (Pajhwok)

(5) Muscat to Host ...

announced that representatives of the Afghan government and Taliban insurgents would meet in Islamabad by the first week of March for direct talks. But it did not happen and the Afghan government accused Pakistan of not honoring its promises made at such meetings and withdrew from the process.

However, after a long gap, a meeting about the Afghan peace process is expected in Muscat, said Qadir Shah, the National Security Council (NSC) spokesman.

He said the meeting was between representatives of Afghanistan and Pakistan about the Afghan peace process and US and Chinese officials would play the role of observers.

He said the meeting was part of the quadrilateral push which was suspended last year.

"The Muscat meeting will define goals for the next three months and discuss making a mechanism for continued negotiations", he said.

Shah said the meeting would be attended by delegations from the Afghan government and the High Peace Council (HPC).

Few days back, Pakistani Foreign Minister Khwaja Asif during his visit to the US had said that a meeting about the Afghan peace process would be held soon in Oman. (Pajhwok)

(6) Ghani will Visit ...

Trump administration of Afghanistan-Pakistan relations being sabotaged. In reality, the envoy believed, the US was encouraging good ties between the neighbours.

He praised Gen. Bajwa as serious and sincere about improving relations with Afghanistan. Ghani too was serious about sincere friendship with Pakistan, the diplomat hastened to add.

The Ghani-Bajwa meeting served as an "expression of interest" in bringing cordiality to relations between the two countries, he remarked, saying many contacts had taken place before that.

Zakhilwal acknowledged mistrust on both sides, urging Kabul and Islamabad to keep trying to overcome their trust deficit. "We should learn from mistakes," he stressed. (Pajhwok)

(7) Military Pressure ...

government.

During their recent trip to Kabul, the NATO secretary general and US defense minister discussed the fight against Daesh, or so-called Islamic State (IS) group, an ominous phenomenon in the country, he said.

About his trip to India, Abdullah said his visit was mainly focused on economic and commercial issues with India. He was accompanied by more than 200 traders and investors, who discussed Afghan carpet exports through India.

"During our visit to New Delhi and meetings with India traders, Afghan and Indian businessmen also struck deals worth of \$250 million," the chief executive said.

Abdullah added an agreement on technical cooperation with Afghan police was also signed during his meeting with the India president, prime minister and foreign minister.

The agreement would be implemented in the near future, he concluded. (Pajhwok)

(8) Karzai Accuses ...

stronger since the 9/11 terror attack, although the US had spent billions of dollars in the "war against terror".

He once again raised his voice regarding the use of MOAB by the US forces on ISIS hideouts in Afghanistan and said US used the bomb to show its power to its rivals, mainly North Korea. (KP)

(9) Pakistan No ...

or restraints put on the country's systems would only degrade the efforts to fight terror, affecting equation in the region.

"We have major US weapons systems in our military, but we've also diversified. We have Chinese and European systems. Recently for the first time, we inducted Russian attack helicopters," he said.

Abbasi said for government, it was a complex job, facing a barrage of domestic and international challenges including terrorism, an energy deficit, and economic and regional volatility.

He said governing a country with a ballooning population of over 207 million was "no walk in the park".

He said Pakistan being one of the largest countries in the world and a nuclear power, was confronting many issues including a challenging neighborhood, war on terror and the Afghanistan conflict. "We have a neighbour to the east with which we've had several wars. They (India) are also a nuclear power. We have a dispute. (Monitoring Desk)

(10) Freedom of Expression...

said a huge difference was noticed in violence against journalists when the unity government was compared with the government of former president Hamid Karzai. Violence against journalists increased by four times in the Ashraf Ghani-led government, he said. He said 260 incidents of violence happened to journalists between October 2014 and October 2017-- higher than the incidents between 2001 and 2014. Khelwatgar said censorship increased under the unity government and a NAI survey showed journalists and citizens were unhappy over curbs on the access to information.

As many as 112 media outlets have been closed since the incumbent government's coming into power while no media outlet was closed in the previous governments.

In addition, 500 journalists and media employees were among fleeing the country due to insecurity and unclear future of Afghanistan.

"The only positive step taken by the national unity government towards the freedom of speech was investigation into cases of violence against journalists."

The government has so far assessed 170 cases of violence against journalists while tens of cases are yet to be opened. (Pajhwok)

(11) NATO Chief Hails ...

"Romania is essential to our missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan. I have just returned from a visit to Afghanistan and met the Romanian troops in Kandahar. They are making a real difference, helping to train Afghan security forces to secure their country," said Stoltenberg in a statement.

"Today, we discussed how important it is that we stay the course in Afghanistan, to prevent Afghanistan ever again becoming a safe haven for terrorism. And I really thank Romania for your strong contribution to our presence in Afghanistan." (Pajhwok)

(12) Homayoon Forcibly ...

Maula Mohammad Payman, another protestor, said: "We have documents and for the last 12 years we have been collecting rents from shops, but suddenly Homayoon appeared and took control of our market."

He said they had been complaining to government organizations over the past seven months but due to the 'influence' of the Wolesi Jirga top official, their complaints were not addressed. Other protestors warned of withdrawing their capital from Afghanistan if their legal right was denied. They also warned of continuing their protest until their issue was resolved.

Wolesi Jirga speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahim tasked a three-member team of the house with listening and assessing the protestors' complaints and reporting back to the house.

Lawmakers Zakria Zakria, Zamarok Padkhawabi, and Abdullah Mohammadi, who were assigned the task, said they would share complaints of the protestors with colleagues on Wednesday.

However, Homayoon Homayoon, talking to reporters, rejected the allegations of demonstrators as baseless, saying: "whenever I try to fight corruption, such allegations are raised against me."

He said he was ready to stand trial and the judicial organs could assess documents of both the parties. Homayoon said no governmental or political pressure could weaken his resolve to combat corruption. (Pajhwok)

(13) ICRC to "Drastically"...

in Afghanistan, told a news conference in the capital, Kabul.

"We have no choice but to drastically reduce our presence in Afghanistan," she said, adding that the decision would particularly affect operations in

the north, where facilities in Kunduz, Faryab, and Balkh provinces would be closed or downsized.

Red Cross officials said the assessments are ongoing and could not say how many of its 1,800 staff would be affected.

The Red Cross had already warned of the threat to its operations following a series of attacks over the past year.

In February, the organization put all of its operations on hold after six of its staff were killed in an attack on an aid convoy in the far north.

Operations gradually resumed over the summer, but last month, a Spanish Red Cross physiotherapist working in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif was shot dead by one of her patients.

In addition, four of its staff have been abducted over the past year.

The spreading conflict has combined with an increase in criminality, making for more "blurred lines" between the various armed groups which complicate efforts to safely provide aid, Zanarelli said.

"I would say there are more gray areas than there were in the past, and this is certainly what is affecting our capacity to assess our security," she said.

According to U.S. military estimates, the government controls no more than 60 percent of the country, with the rest either controlled or contested by the Taliban and other insurgent groups. (Reuters)

(14) Development ...

while four million afghanis was being spent on a public health department training centre.

Momand added the schemes also included retaining walls funded by the Ministry of Water and Power, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development.

He informed construction work on two power plants in Nuristan had also been launched. The provincial project will cost 120 million afghanis while the rural plant will account for 20 million af

He said the construction of a road in the provincial capital, Paroon, was also ongoing. It is the first road in Nuristan to be asphalted at a cost of 52 million afghanis.

Meanwhile, a resident of Nuristan alleged development projects and construction works were currently being done only in the provincial capital. No attention was being paid to the uplift of rural areas, he deplored.

Anayat Rahman, a tribal leader, asked local authorities to pay attention to other areas' development and reconstruction as well.

However, the governor's spokesman promised development projects would be executed in districts next year. (Pajhwok)

(15) Mafia Members ..

with legal sources. The Kabul governor and Khak-i-Jabbar officials are yet to comment on the issue. (Pajhwok)

(16) Afghan U-19 ...

"After gaining permanent membership of the International Cricket Council, we showed the world that we had the right to get this position and we managed to defeat Bangladesh on their home ground," said Bashir Stanikzai, development manager for the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB).

"We were able to defeat Bangladesh in the five match (series) that we played," said Nawin-al-Haq the U-19 coach.

"Now that we have gained permanent membership of the International Cricket Council, we are a good team and we are trying to have a good sparkle in Asian and global competitions," said Darwish Rasouly, a player. ACB officials meanwhile said that after a short break for the U-19 national cricket team, players will play test matches in Kabul within the framework of the ICC. (Tolnews)

(17) Popular Afghan ...

opposition of such events by some extremist groups – who are opposed to the promotion and growth of artistic and cultural programs in the country. ANIM bestowed the honor on Aryana following her successful concerts in the country. But this came after extremist groups were vehemently opposed to Aryana's Independence Day show and tried to shut it down.

However, the concert went ahead as planned.

"After concert in Samangan, Herat and Bamiyan, the extremist groups were following the musical and cultural programs step by step and were standing against these programs and concerts were cancelled one after another," said Ahmad Nasir Sarmast, the head of ANIM.

"They (extremists) wanted to stop the concert in the Afghan capital ... would their next demand have been to close the doors of the National Institute of Music? Aryana Jan, on Afghanistan's

Independence Day, stood against the extremists and held the concert," Sarmast added.

Meanwhile, Aryana said: "The concert on Afghanistan's Independence Day would not have happened if it had not been supported by the people including men and women." (Tolnews)

(18) Notorious Taliban..

plotted to assassinate him. He was gunned down by his bodyguard on Sunday night.

"Jan Agha had murdered his mother-in-law about eight months ago before coming to our area. He worked for me as driver and wanted to kill me last night, but was shot dead before he could implement his plot," he said.

Local officials confirmed the shooting, without giving details. The security personnel have not yet commented on the murder. (Pajhwok)

(19) Insecurity on ...

due to a clash between the Taliban and the Afghan forces there, he recalled. Zahidullah, a driver, said the security situation on the highway had worsened as the Afghan forces and militants had engaged in clashes multiple times in a single day.

"Despite the presence of security posts on the highway, Taliban launch attacks. People are worried about such the situation and no one can travel the road early in the morning or after sunset," he said.

However, Logar officials reject the claim. Police spokesman, Shahpoor Ahmadzai, said security forces had secured the highway. He called claims of insecurity baseless.

Salim Saleh, the governor's spokesman, said police posts had been deployed along the highway passing the province and there was no security problems for passengers.

"Our ground and mobile forces are patrolling the highway. There is no serious problem," he said, adding the Taliban occasionally launched ambushes, but they were unable to block roads for hours.

A 95 kilometres portion of the Kabul-Gardez highway, passing through Logar, connects the southern zone with the central capital. (Pajhwok)

British Special Forces Back in Helmand to Hunt Taliban Bomb-Maker

LASHKARGAH - The British special forces, who left Afghanistan three years ago, are back in southern Helmand province and are working with Afghan security forces to hunt down a Taliban bomb-maker behind roadside blasts in Kabul, The Sun reports.

According to the report, the forces are hunting down the bomb-maker believed to be hiding out in house belonging to Helmand Taliban's second in command.

This comes after a former senior UK defense commander reportedly told British media last week that the UK had pulled out of Afghanistan too soon, saying they had abandoned local forces before they were ready to cope on their own.

According to The Sun, a special forces source said the Taliban are well-armed and better organized than when UK forces left three years ago.

"The Taliban have an iron grip on Helmand. We rely on electronic intercepts and elements of the Afghan security services who are very good," he said added that: "In recent operations we have been forced to deploy AC-130 gunships to hit back at the Taliban as we have little else to call on apart from Apache helicopters."

"The situation here is very challenging. The bad guys have huge influence – all we can do is bounce in and out of the area to capture or kill the targets we are given," he added.

According to The Sun, almost 600 British troops are on the ground fighting the Taliban in Helmand. (Tolnews)

Work on Wall Surrounding Historic Saraj Qala Begins

MEHTARLAM - Construction work on a wall surrounding the historic Saraj Qala castle in the capital of eastern Laghman province began on Monday, the fifth project to rehabilitate the castle.

The provincial governor's spokesman, Sarhadi Zwak, told Pajhwok Afghan News that Governor Abdul Jabbar Naemi, local officials, tribal elders, culturists and civil society activists attended the ground breaking ceremony. He said the three-meter high wall would run a course of 1,158 meters in length and would contain six big gates and 11 small doors.

The project would cost 3.33 million afghanis to be provided by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), he said. (Pajhwok)