

(1) US Stoutly Supports...

Passage to Prosperity" conference, attended by more than 1000 Afghan, Indian and international entrepreneurs, produced more than \$27 million in business contracts and another \$240 million in investment deals.

The event, showcasing the best of Afghan commerce and industry, is a platform for Afghans to help the world understand there is much more to this country than violence and conflict, according to the ambassador.

The conference enables Afghan businesses to reach new markets; expand their networks; and forge business and investment deals that strengthen the economy and create new employment. "Afghanistan is a country blessed with rich resources and a vast economic potential. Turning that potential into reality depends on you, the Afghan people - your hard work, creativity and determination to create a better future for your children," Bass said in a statement. (Pajhwok)

(2) Lawmakers Continue to...

The first deputy speaker tasked the house international affairs, internal security, defense affairs and territory integrity commissions to rethink about the agreement and refer it to the general session of the house after discussing it with permanent commissions.

He said casualties among civilians and Afghan security forces had increased and continuation of the current situation was not acceptable to the Afghans.

The Article 90 of the Constitution says, "Ratification of international treaties and agreements, or abrogation of membership of Afghanistan in them is duty of the parliament,"

A number of lawmakers and senators had earlier this week also asked for reconsideration of the BSA. (Pajhwok)

(3) Afghans Taking...

an unannounced visit to Kabul on Friday, Mattis met government leaders and the new commander of US and coalition forces, Gen. Scott Miller.

Mattis said the path to reconciliation with the Taliban and a sustained NATO campaign were the key subjects discussed during his meetings with Afghan leaders.

Mattis said the Trump administration was receiving mixed messages from Taliban. While intensifying attacks in some parts of the country, the insurgents had also evinced an interest in reconciliation, he concluded. (Pajhwok)

(4) President...

He called for a robust audit mechanism.

Eng. Ilham Omar Hotaki, procurement director, said: "Health sector contracts have been changed to a programme in coordination with the World Bank." Until recently, payments were made to NGOs even before the execution of contracts, he said. From now on, they would be paid on completion of work. (Pajhwok)

(5) Truck Packed...

Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in its latest report stated that 1,692 civilians were killed in the first six months of 2018.

According to UNAMA, the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in attacks by Anti-Government Elements remained the leading cause of civilian casualties.

"The combined use of suicide

and non-suicide IEDs caused nearly half of all civilian casualties. Continuing trends first documented last year by UNAMA, the majority of IED casualties were caused by suicide and complex attacks, which again were responsible for record high civilian casualties, resulting in 1,413 civilian casualties (427 deaths and 986 injured), a 22 per cent increase," UNAMA said. (KP)

(6) Gov't to Respond...

Special Operations Corps, ARG Palace said, adding that the military commanders shared their report regarding the security arrangements for the elections, fight against the militants.

The statement by ARG Palace also added that the military commanders also shared information regarding the existing barriers on the way of the operations of the armed forces.

President Ghani thanked the armed forces for their efforts in ensuring peace and stability and suppressing the militants and vowed that the government would respond to the recommendations and needs of the armed forces, ARG Palace said. (KP)

(7) 18 Afghan Hajj Pilgrims...

From Afghanistan, 29,699 people performed the annual ritual and their journey back home from Saudi Arabia began on August 4, process still ongoing. (Pajhwok)

(8) Concord State...

If elected, the Afghan woman will focus on Medicaid expansion, more housing opportunities and instilling paid family medical leave in New Hampshire. (Pajhwok)

(9) Peace Convoy...

Watandost, spokesman for the peace movement.

The activists went to Taliban-controlled areas in the north, passing on the message of peace to them.

"There are always conflicts. We call on the people to wake up and stand against it," said Hafizullah, a member of the movement.

On August 31, the activists faced harsh treatment by the Taliban when they entered areas controlled by the group in Baghlan province and that they were insulted and threatened by the Taliban in Dand-e-Ghori area on the outskirts of Pul-e-Khumri City, the center of Baghlan, when they wanted to pass on the message of peace to the group.

"We were chanting peace slogans and were chanting stop the war and we want peace. Around 20 Taliban members came and threatened, humiliated and insulted us," said Bismillah Watandost, a member of the movement, after the incident.

The activists will hold a gathering at the Blue Mosque in Mazar where they will call on the people to help them in their goal for peace.

The Journey Began In Helmand The peace activists initially launched their protest in Lashkargah City after a suicide bombing outside a stadium in March. About a month later, a group of eight protestors left Helmand on foot for Kabul.

The activists walked through towns and villages, crossed provinces and met with local residents along the way. For 38 days, they walked and as they progressed, so their numbers grew.

About 700kms later, the group of eight had grown to an estimated 100. They arrived in Kabul on June 18 and handed over demands for a ceasefire and peace

to both the Afghan government and the Taliban.

The group gave the Taliban three days in which to answer and said if they failed to do so, they would embark on sit in protests outside diplomatic offices and missions in the capital.

The Taliban's deadline passed without any response. The activists then held a three-day sit-in protest outside UNAMA's office in Kabul. They sent a letter to the UN Secretary General António Guterres in which they asked him not to remain indifferent towards ending the ongoing war in Afghanistan.

From there, they moved on to the US embassy - where they stayed for nine days. The activists sent a letter to the American people, asking them to put pressure on the US government to end the war in Afghanistan.

The activists, whose ages range from 17 to 65, come from all walks of life and include students, athletes and farmers among others. The activists also established sit-in protest camp in front of Iranian, Pakistan, Russian and British embassies as well as the office of the European Union in Kabul.

The movement called on Afghan allies to put pressure on Pakistan to stop its interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. (Tolo news)

Germany: We Must Do All We Can to Prevent Chemical Attack in Syria

BERLIN - Germany and other countries must do all they can to prevent chemical weapons being used in Syria, Germany's defense minister said on Wednesday, adding that a "credible deterrent" was needed.

"The international community, including us, must do everything to prevent chemical weapons being used," Ursula von der Leyen told the Bundestag lower house of parliament, two days after the government said it was in talks with its allies about a possible military deployment there.

"And on this specific topic we, Germany, can't act today as if it doesn't affect us," she added.

The German government would need to carefully assess any situation that occurred in Syria and make a decision on the basis of international law, the German constitution and the parliamentary participation act, she said.

Chancellor Angela Merkel said earlier on Wednesday Germany could not simply look away if chemical attacks took place in Syria. (Reuters)

Saudi, Uae Trying to Avoid Civilian Harm in Yemen: Pompeo

WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Wednesday he had certified to Congress that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are working to avoid harming civilians in Yemen, clearing the way for continued U.S. help to Saudi Arabia.

Pompeo said in a statement he had advised Congress on Tuesday that "the governments of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates are undertaking demonstrable actions to reduce the risk of harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure resulting from military operations of these governments."

The three-year-old war in Yemen is widely seen as a proxy battle between regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran. U.S. lawmakers concerned about the ensur-

ing humanitarian crisis included a measure in the spending bill that required Pompeo to certify by Wednesday whether Saudis and UAE are taking meaningful measures to reduce civilian casualties and allow humanitarian aide.

Without the certification, the law would prohibit the United States from refueling ally Saudi Arabia's planes.

U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis said he backed Pompeo's finding that Saudi Arabia and UAE "are making every effort to reduce the risk of civilian casualties and collateral damage to civilian infrastructure resulting from their military operations to end the civil war in Yemen."

The war in Yemen pits the government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, based in the south and backed by Saudi Arabia, against the Iran-aligned Houthi movement that controls the north including the capital Sanaa. (Reuters)

Iran President's Chief of Staff in Ashgabat for Trade Talks

ASHGABAT - The Iranian president's Chief of Staff Mahmoud Vaezi arrived in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, for talks with senior officials of the Central Asian country on bilateral and economic issues.

Heading a high-ranking politico-economic delegation, Vaezi was received by the Iranian ambassador to Ashgabat and the country's officials on Wednesday morning, Tasnim news agency reported.

During his visit, he is scheduled to sit down with senior Turkmen officials, including ministers of oil, foreign affairs, economy, road and urban development, and energy.

Vaezi would also hold talks with the country's governor of central bank, the report added. (Trend)

Polish Leader Slammed for Saying EU Has Little Relevance

WARSAW, Poland - Poland's president came under heavy criticism from political opponents Wednesday after he called the European Union an "imaginary community" of little relevance to Poles.

Andrzej Duda is aligned with the ruling Law and Justice party, which has been in conflict with the EU over an overhaul of the Polish judicial system which Brussels sees as violating the rule of law.

"When our affairs are resolved, we will deal with European affairs," Duda said in a speech on Tuesday. "For now let them leave us alone and let us fix Poland, because this is the most important thing."

Duda and government officials insist that the changes, which give the ruling party vast new powers over the courts, are democratic, making judges more accountable. The EU and a number of human rights groups say the changes erode the independence of the judicial branch.

Duda's speech came as the EU is struggling with challenges on several fronts, including a similar conflict with Hungary, Britain's departure next year and a new euroskeptic government in Italy. EU lawmakers on Wednesday voted to launch action against the Hungarian government of Prime Minister Viktor Orban for allegedly undermining the bloc's democratic values and rule of law.

The reaction in Poland to Duda's words was strong, and some commentators expressed fears that Polish authorities could be putting the country on a path of eventual departure from the union.

Chief opposition leader Grzegorz Schetyna said that Duda didn't understand the "damage that such words bring to Poland's image and reputation."

Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz, the leader of the small agrarian Polish People's Party, accused Duda, who is a practicing Catholic, of rejecting the teaching of Poland's top authority, the late pope St. John Paul II, who advocated for EU membership.

In his speech to the southeast community of Lezajsk, Duda accused Europe of abandoning Poland to Soviet control after World War II. He said because of that history, Poland has the right to have expectations of Europe and that above all, Poles "have the right to govern here and decide what kind of Poland we should have."

Poland joined the EU in 2004, a step that has brought 14 years of strong economic growth, fueled by billions of euros received from various EU funds.

EU membership offered new freedoms for Poles to travel, work and study across Europe. That opportunity has been grasped by millions of Poles. Opinion surveys repeatedly put support for EU membership around 80 percent.

The spokeswoman for the ruling party "protested strongly" against any suggestion that it was trying to "eliminate" Poland from the 28-member bloc.

"We are a part of the EU, we are in the EU and absolutely nothing is changing that," Beata Mazurek said. (AP)

Russia Says Joint War Games with China Will be Routine

CHITA, Russia - Russia's defense minister says Moscow and Beijing intend to regularly conduct joint war games similar to the massive ones being held this week.

Sergei Shoigu and his Chinese counterpart, Gen. Wei Fenghe, on Wednesday visited the Tsugol firing range in eastern Siberia where nearly 300,000 Russian troops and about 3,200 Chinese troops are participating in joint exercises.

The weeklong Vostok (East) 2018 maneuvers launched Tuesday span vast expanses of Siberia and the Far East, the Arctic and the Pacific Oceans. They involve 1,000 Russian aircraft and 36,000 tanks. (AP)

Markets Right Now: Stocks Mixed, Energy Gains ahead of Storm

NEW YORK - Stocks are mixed at the open after two days of gains. Energy stocks are higher as Hurricane Florence heads for the U.S. East Coast.

Oil prices are up more than 1 percent. Drivers in North Carolina and South Carolina are using more gasoline as they flee inland before Florence strikes. There also are fears that the storm could disrupt oil supplies.

Apple is down slightly. The iPhone maker is scheduled to introduce new phone models and other products at a company event later in the day. Tech stocks are lower overall. Facebook is down more than 1 percent. (AP)