

(1) Trump, Ghani ...

to defeat terrorism. But after 16 years in Afghanistan, the U.S. is looking for ways to offset the billions of dollars spent every year in propping up the government in Kabul and mining is increasingly being seen as a way to do that.

"They agreed that such initiatives would help American companies develop materials critical to national security while growing Afghanistan's economy and creating new jobs in both countries, therefore defraying some of the costs of United States assistance as Afghans become more self-reliant," the White House said.

The U.S. Geological Survey has estimated the potential value of Afghanistan's minerals, including gold and gemstones as well as substances like lithium and rare earths vital in modern electronics, at as much as \$1 trillion.

But a lack of even basic transport and industrial infrastructure as well as a growing insurgency that has taken almost half the country out of government control has meant minerals have been impossible to exploit economically.

Prices of some rare earths have shot up recently as demand for electric vehicle technology has grown, fuelling some talk that their value could compensate for the higher risks in getting them out of the ground. In addition, the rare earths sector is overwhelmingly dominated by China, causing some concern in Washington that Beijing has a stranglehold on raw materials vital to modern defense technology and prompting an interest in finding alternative sources.

However, it remains unclear how a feasible development plan in Afghanistan could be developed in the future.

Extracting the minerals remains a difficult and costly process and the fact that large parts of the economic reserves of rare earths in Afghanistan are located in Helmand province, now mostly under Taliban control, mean that miners are likely to look at easier opportunities elsewhere.

Mike Harrowell, an analyst at research firm Harwind, based in Sydney, said attempting rare earths extraction in Afghanistan at the moment "makes no sense on almost any level" unless it were treated as a government-funded, nation-building project. "It's not a simple business, and the technology is quite tightly held. It costs a lot," he said.

"There are so many well-studied projects in North America that were assessed during the rare earths boom after 2010 that still require funding. You would do any of those projects before you'd do one in Afghanistan". (Reuters)

(2) Pakistan Wants 'Zero' ...

want to do economic assistance, that's their prerogative, but there's no — we don't accept or see any role politically or militarily for India in Afghanistan," Abbasi asserted. "I think it will just complicate the situation and it will not resolve anything," warned the Pakistani prime minister.

Islamabad alleges the Indian intelligence agency is partnering with Afghan security institutions to fund and plot terrorist attacks against Pakistan through fugitive anti-state militants.

Pakistani officials said Abbasi also raised his country's objections over India's proposed role in his talks with U.S. Vice President Mike Pence Tuesday on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly. The meeting was the highest contact between Washington and Islamabad since Trump announced his "new strategy" in his August 21 speech. He accused Pakistan of harboring terrorists staging deadly attacks against American forces in Afghanistan despite receiving billions of U.S. dollars in financial assistance.

In a Twitter post after the meeting, Pence said he reiterated President Trump's "belief" that "Pakistan has much to gain from partnering with our effort" in the region." (VoA)

(3) Russia, India to Explore ...

with Kabulov and share the country's concerns as well as explore the possibility of effective collaboration with Russia in the Afghan peace process. The development marks a significant shift in policy for both India and Russia considering the fact that India holds a pivotal position in the new US strategy in Afghanistan which has been strongly criticized by Russia.

Moreover, last year, Russia had sought to collaborate exclusively with China and Pakistan in its effort to broker a peace deal between the Taliban and the Afghan government. India's exclusion from this multi-party conversation had sown the seeds of discontent between India and Russia.

However, Moscow later demonstrated its desire to engage India in the process by inviting it to six-party talks held in February this year. Kabulov's upcoming visit would mark the first bilateral engagement between Moscow and New Delhi on Afghanistan. It will be interesting to watch how Pakistan is factored in, especially after the BRICS resolution that identifies Pakistan as a terrorists' safe haven.

"In the changing geopolitical situation, Russia now wants to maintain a balance between India and Pakistan as far as the Afghan strategy is concerned. Like the US,

now Russia also seems very much keen to work with India on the Afghanistan peace process. The fact is that Russia is a close ally of India but recent overtures to Pakistan has been a major cause of concern for India despite assurances from Moscow. India has larger stakes in Afghanistan, therefore, it will be really great if both Russia and India work in tandem in the Afghanistan peace process. In fact, peace and stability in Afghanistan are essential both for India and Russia," Robinder Sachdev, President of an independent think tank, Imagindia told Sputnik. (Sputnik)

(4) Ghani, UN Chief ...

Afghan peace process. It quoted Guterres as saying the UN would remain partner of the Afghan government and people.

Thursday was President Ghani's last day in New York where he attended the 72nd UN General Assembly (UNGA) and in his address renewed dialogue offer to the Taliban and Pakistan.

In his meeting with the UN chief, both the leaders discussed peace and stability in Afghanistan, the war against terrorism and regional issues, the statement said.

Ghani said the assessment of UN reforms in Afghanistan had been completed and his government welcomed the reforms.

The UN chief announced his support for the Afghan peace process and said the world body would remain partner of the Afghan people and the government.

"Through reforms, we will increase coordination among UN agencies in Afghanistan to make their work more effective," Guterres said. (Pajhwok)

(5) Commissioner ...

was done between four people while other commissioners were not consulted," Dawlati told TOLONews.

The IEC spokesman Gula Jan Abdulbadi Sayyad refused to comment on these allegations.

Electoral monitoring organizations said rifts among election commissioners are rooted in interference by groups from outside into the IEC affairs.

"In terms of management, the commission has lost the necessary abilities to make decisions jointly and implement the reforms," said Shah Mahmoud Mal, electoral affairs analyst.

"External factors are also involved in these disagreements. Government and a number of politicians also interfere in affairs of the election commission and such interferences have slowed down the activities of the electoral body," said Habib ul-Rahman Nang, executive director of Free and Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan.

The remarks comes after another member of the commission, Maliha Hassan, recently talked about secret decisions and marginalizing of a number of IEC members. (Tolonews)

(6) Cross-Border...

Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) between 2018 and 2020.

He said nomination of the country to the UNHRC was reflective of Afghanistan's commitment to the human rights agenda.

A statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) quoted Rabbani as telling the NAM meeting on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly that the best way to curb terrorist groups was to treat them without distinction.

"Terrorist networks should be not be provided with resources, safe havens and financial support by government and non-governmental organs to prevent them from targeting nations like Afghanistan," he said.

He said the NAM meeting was an opportunity for utilisation of the current global environment for dealing with common challenges.

"It is clear that common global problems could be resolved only through cooperation based on discussions, consensus and joint solutions with tangible results," he said.

Last year's stepped-up terrorist attacks in Afghanistan intentionally targeted civilians, he alleged, saying enemies tried to create tribal divisions among the people but the Afghan forces strongly resisted them.

As peace and prosperity were interconnected, sustainable development also had huge importance in the heart of Asia, Rabbani remarked. Extremism, poverty and migration are challenges that had been increased, he added. "NAM, in partnership with other organisations, should evolve consensus on addressing these problems," he said.

Rabbani said intensifying cross-border terrorism needed an effective global response and coordination on its eradication. "As members of NAM, we need to boost our cooperation on implementing UN's strategy for combating global terrorism," the minister stressed. "In this part, I want to draw attention of NAM members to Afghanistan's nomination for UNHRC from 2018 to 2020..."

"Our nomination for this position reflects our commitment to the advancement of human rights agenda in Afghanistan and the world," he observed. (Pajhwok)

(7) Khalili Says Platform ...

the peace council.

"Fingers are pointed at the High Peace Council sometimes which say that peace will come if these and those figures are appointed in this council. I say that the council has comprehensive activities if you see its strategy," said Qiyamuddin Kashaf, the head of Afghanistan's Ulema Council.

Meanwhile, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah said the Afghan government wants "peace with dignity" for both sides — the government, the people and the anti-government opposition groups.

"The war will continue until a political solution is found. The Afghan government has repeatedly said that it does not believe the war can end and peace can be achieved through war. But when it comes to defense, the people of Afghanistan are on the defensive; and they are making sacrifices every day and we should thank the Afghan security forces for their sacrifices," he said. He brought up Kabul's peace deal with Hizb-e-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and said this was an example of actual steps taken by government to achieve peace. (Tolonews)

(8) Pakistan, Taliban...

war is its own.

"To end all cross border attacks we ask the Afghan government and the Coalition to support and complement Pakistan's ongoing efforts to strengthen border controls and monitor all movement across it. What Pakistan is not prepared to do is to fight the Afghan war on Pakistan's soil. Neither can we endorse any failed strategy that will prolong and intensify the suffering of the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan and other regional countries," he said. (Tolonews)

(9) SIGAR Calls...

follows a U.S. decision to send more than 3,000 additional troops to Afghanistan, an increase of more than 25 percent in the number of American forces there.

America's mission, he said, is "to try to win the hearts and minds" of the people in Afghanistan so they will fight for their country, but notes that effort first needs to be focused on Afghan forces.

"They are not going to fight if they know they are not going to get paid," added the SIGAR chief, whose office released a report to highlight lessons learned from the past 16 years to improve future training efforts. Sopko also pointed to problems within the system, namely concerning morale, illiteracy, drug abuse and corruption. In response to a question, he said some soldiers' widows have been forced to offer "sexual favors" to receive pension benefits.

"Would any American put up with that?" asked Sopko in a speech Thursday at Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies. Afghan officials did not immediately comment on the allegation.

Afghan forces continue to struggle with terrorism and a resilient Taliban insurgency because the \$70 billion in U.S. security assistance has suffered from serious problems over the last 16 years, many of which still persist, Sopko said. The Taliban control more than 40 percent of Afghan territory.

In the aftermath of U.S. President Donald Trump's new Afghan strategy, Sopko advocated taking "fresh" and "bolder" looks at Afghan National Defense Security forces. He said SIGAR's report offers a better way forward for the Afghan people and ultimately a more successful way to hasten the end of America's longest war.

"Now more than ever I would urge it is necessary not to dwell upon failure but to learn the lessons from the last 16 years and improve security sector assistance efforts," said Sopko.

On the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York Thursday, President Trump met with his Afghan counterpart, Ashraf Ghani, who thanked Trump for increasing the number of American troops in Afghanistan. "The additional troops...are to enhance the assist, support, advice mission and that is playing a very crucial role."

Trump said, "I think it's important to understand that the Afghan soldiers are doing the fighting. We're training and we're working with them very closely, but it's the Afghans that are doing the fighting..."

The SIGAR report found the U.S. government was "ill-prepared" to conduct security assistance programs of the size and scope required in Afghanistan, where 70 percent of the population is illiterate and largely unskilled. "Consequently, the Afghan security forces were ill-prepared to deal with the deteriorating security situation after the drawdown of U.S. combat forces," said Sopko. He added, mostly untrained U.S. military officers and coalition officers are conducting the training mission for Afghans. President Ghani discussed some of SIGAR's assessments while delivering a speech in New York this week.

Ghani said that a lot of criticism the U.S. agency had directed at the performance of the Afghan Defense Ministry is "in the process of correction." He added, a three-star Afghan army general, for the first time, was tried by a court and given a jail term for stealing fuel. "We are not in denial about what we inherited. But what we are responsible for is the tenure of going forward," Ghani said. (VoA)

(10) India to Take up...

national Park and economic development," Kumar said.

In their meeting, Kumar said Swaraj and Ghani discussed the new "development partnership," between the two countries, which was decided was during the visit of the Afghan foreign minister to India earlier this.

The two leaders also discussed aspect of peace and reconciliation process.

The move comes weeks after the US President Donald Trump pushed for greater developmental role for India in Afghanistan. Pakistan has opposed any such role for India.

The visiting Pakistani Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi told a New York audience that Pakistan sees "zero" political or military role for India in Afghanistan.

"We don't foresee any political or military role for India in Afghanistan. I think it will just complicate the situation and it will not resolve anything. So if they want to do economic assistance, that's their prerogative, but we don't accept or see any role politically or militarily for India in Afghanistan," Abbasi said in response to a question at the Council on Foreign Relations here.

"Do you see a business role for them in Afghanistan as investors, as," he was asked. "That's up to them. All countries have the right to trade with each other, invest in other countries. So if they want to do that? and India has invested in Afghanistan in the past," Abbasi said. (Pajhwok)

(11) Washington Claims ...

the high illiteracy rate among them, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) said in a report on Thursday.

"The United States provided advanced Western weapons and management systems to a largely illiterate and uneducated force without appropriate training and institutional infrastructure [and that] created long-term dependencies, required increased US fiscal support, and extended sustainability time lines," the report stated. The SIGAR noted in the report that nearly 70 percent of the adult population in Afghanistan is illiterate, one of the highest in the world

"[I]n Afghanistan's rural areas, the situation is even more acute: an estimated 90 percent of women and 63 percent of men cannot read, write, or compute," the report said.

The SIGAR also said the illiteracy problem has made it particularly difficult to recruit maintenance crews and pilots for Afghanistan's air force. (Sputnik)

(12) Regional Ties More...

said that when looking back on Afghanistan's past, ethnic divisions have never been quite so bad as they are today.

He said the gap between ethnic groups in the country had widened under the National Unity Government (NUG).

But former deputy minister of education Sediq Patan said the past needs to be put aside.

"We should act wisely and say good bye to the past," he said.

However, government is adamant that it has worked to fix past mistakes.

"Over the past three years the National Unity Government has worked hard to fix the bad heritage it inherited from the previous government; we defined our foreign policy to five key circles and the example is our friendly relations with the neighbors and foreign countries except Pakistan," said deputy presidential spokesman Dawa Khan Menapal. Mehwar-e-Mardum-e-Afghanistan was formed in July by a number of leading political figures who have in the past worked for government.

Around 100 individuals - including Rahmatullah Nabil, the former head of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) and Rangin Dadfar Spanta, the former adviser to the national security council - are included in the leadership of the new party.

They said that the only solution to the ongoing turmoil in the country is for the people of Afghanistan to play a great role in politics. (Tolonews)

(13) Nepalese can Better ...

cooperation between regional countries and transit trade could help bring peace and stability to the region and make people's lives prosperous. President Ghani said peace was his countrymen's basic demand and a stable Afghanistan was in the interest of the region's economic development.

He said Afghanistan had the chance to become Asia's economic roundabout and his government wanted to exploit the opportunity for the benefit of his people. (Pajhwok)

(14) Reforms do not ...

on a plan to lower the retirement age for police officers and military generals, but no details about it have so far shared with the media. Brig. Gen. Sayed Jalal Jalal, acting head of police higher education department at MoI, talking on behalf of the graduates, said they received essential training in making plans and policies as well as management and politics.

He expressed concern over a possible cut in the retirement age and said: "There are rumors that some circles inside the govern-

ment want to remove figures of People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and Mujahideen from armed forces to replace them with inexperienced youth who could be used for personal interests."

However, the interior minister said the Ministry of Defense was working to amend its personnel law and the MoI would maintain accuracy when the issue was referred to it for discussion.

"No one wants and it is intolerable to create a vacuum in the armed forces," Barnak said, adding there was no problem in the retirement age and MoI officials should avoid statements that could hurt the morale of other officers. (Pajhwok)

(15) 500 Volunteers to...

"We have assessed Kabul's security gaps after an accurate calculation and we came to know about threats to mosques. Keeping in view all security vacuums and lapses; we took needed measures."

Meanwhile, Aman during an interview on the sidelines of the presser told Pajhwok Afghan News that some of the volunteers offered by civil society organizations might be equipped with light weapons for better security on the 10th of Muharram, the last day of the mourning period.

"These youngsters are chosen because they are well aware of their areas and they serve for only 10 to 12 days, but there is some possibility that these youngsters are permanently hired for maintaining security of mosques and religious centers."

As preparations for Muharram announced, a large number of people gathered in Kabul and asked security officials to ensure Shiite mourners were protected.

Sayed Essa Hussaini Masari, an Islamic scholar and one of the participants of the gathering, said the Afghan forces should adopt strict measures so deadly incidents of the past were not repeated. He said distribution of weapons to volunteer youth would be helpful.

Sayed Mohammad Baqi Waezi, another Islamic scholar, said that serious threats might occur during Muharram processions.

"We know threats from Daesh and Taliban, but we would observe Muharram with special will and power and would stand with Afghan security forces for protection of our sisters and brothers," he said.

The ceremonial mourning ceremonies start from tomorrow, Friday, and would last until the tenth of Muharram, called Ashura.

Acting interior minister Wais Barnak on Wednesday said Afghan forces had adopted special security measures for protection of Muharram ceremonies in many areas of the country.

He had said the training of "hundreds of people" recruited by the ministry to protect mosques had almost finished. They (volunteers) will support the additional forces to be deployed around "sacred places".

Daesh or Islamic State in the past 14 months has claimed a series of attacks which killed scores of Shia Muslims.

There were two major assaults on Shia mosques in August alone. In Kabul a suicide bomber and gunmen stormed a building during Friday prayers, killing 28 people and wounding scores more. (Pajhwok)

(16) Dozens of Villages...

police chief for Mohammad Agha district. "Our joint military operation was launched in those parts of Mohammad Agha district where the insurgents had built strongholds and our security forces had good achievements in this crackdown," Logar security officer Mohammad Ayub Wardak said. He said the military operation will continue in the district.

Meanwhile, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid has claimed in a statement that in this operation 11 security forces were killed and a number of them were wounded.

Mujahid also claimed that a number of weapons and equipment belonged to Afghan security forces were destroyed in the clash. (Tolonews)

(17) Speakers Express ...

to secure their own interests and that of their foreign masters."

He added the public in general wanted unity but some specific figures inside and outside the government were fueling divisions. "They are not Afghans," he continued. Ayar said: "You should not be deceived by those who create differences among different tribes in pursuit of their own interests." "Afghans have historically lived in unity and without any tribal or religious differences. They would also stand united in the future too. No one can fuel divisions among them," he remarked.

He asked the government to control those who fueled differences among tribes. "We support national unity, independence of the country and peace. We are tired of war and cannot tolerate it anymore." (Pajhwok)

(18) Hekmatyar Declares ...

group or a specific region. He said the number of political parties have increased considerably and there is a need that smaller parties should come under the influential parties.

The leader of Hezb-e-Islami also assured that the current situation would change soon, the violence will end, and peace and stability will return to the country. (KP)