

(1) Afghanistan's...

for development spending," said ADB Country Director for Afghanistan Mr. Samuel Tumiwa. "ADB is proud to be Afghanistan's leading development partner in infrastructure development and regional co-operation, and remains committed to support the country build the needed infrastructure for poverty reduction."

Pick up in the agriculture sector due to better weather conditions is expected in 2019. Inflation will accelerate to 3.0% in 2019 and 4.5% in 2020 with the lagged impact of 2018 currency depreciation and further depreciation expected in 2019 and 2020 as inflows of assistance slow. However, food prices are expected to remain low as agriculture recovers.

Domestic revenue is estimated to have reached 11.7% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2018 due to enhanced tax administration and compliance, as well as measures against corruption in the customs department. Foreign aid comprised 56.3% of budget revenue, or 15.1% of GDP, to bring total revenue and grants to the equivalent of 26.4% of GDP.

The Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey, conducted in 2016 and 2017, revealed that only 36% of the population has access to safe drinking water nationally, only 31% of the population is connected to the electric grid, and only 63% of the rural population lives within 2 kilometers (km) of an all-season road, and road density is estimated at a low 15 km per 100 square km of territory, which is below the densities achieved by Afghanistan's neighbors.

Some of the measures to enhance infrastructure development, according to the report, include a coordinated government approach to implement ongoing construction projects and upgrade its capacity in the design, implementation, and monitoring of investment projects. The government needs to address skills shortages and stimulate private sector investment in infrastructure development.

In addition, the government needs to seek sustainable infrastructure financing and look at innovative approaches to increase access to funding. Financing needed for the National Infrastructure Plan, 2017-2021, of about \$1 billion annually exceeds available resources from development partners and domestic fiscal resources for new investment are limited.

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. In 2018, it made commitments of new loans and grants amounting to \$21.6 billion. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region. (Monitoring Desk)

(2) Stoltenberg...

to add \$100 billion more to their defence budgets by the end of next year. The Secretary General is in Washington D.C. for the meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers to mark the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Alliance.

It is worth mentioning that NATO is heading Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan as part of the alliance commitment to fight against terrorism and create condition for peace in the war-ravaged country.

NATO mission include the training and advice to Afghan security forces. (Pajhwok)

(3) Afghans Still...

children are witnessing the Jirga proceedings.

The Jirgas are mostly organized in open places under the chairmanship of a tribal elder and in some cases the Jirgas are presided by several elders from several tribes.

"Over the course of history, the decisions which are taken by our ancestors are still in its place. So these tribes still abide by those decisions," said Malik Jahid, a tribal elder in

Dand Aw Patan.

The decision which is taken by the Jirgas are resolute and no party is allowed to violate the decisions. If someone is found guilty of violating the Jirga verdicts, they will face fine or punishment. But sometimes, the issues are not settled in one Jirga meeting.

"In Paktia, government or Sharia (Islamic law) decisions are not important as much as Jirgas' decisions," said Mohammad Amir, a tribal elder in Paktia.

"These Jirgas bring peace among those tribes who fight each other, they help to end bloodsheds. There is no corruption in these Jirgas," said Khan Mohammad, a tribal elder in Paktia.

Since long times, residents of distant parts of Afghanistan, as well as former rulers, have seen Jirgas as a symbol of their authority and the spread of ties with the people.

Even today, the governments prefer to hold Jirgas when it comes to creating consensus on some major important national issues.

As a recent instance, the Afghan government is all set to hold a Jirga of 2,500 delegates from around the country to determine the path towards peace in Afghanistan. (Tolo news)

(4) Women's Role...

"The written test is carried out electronically," said one candidate for civil service Matiurrahman Karimi. Saadia Barez, a job applicant who has been called for an interview after 45 days, said the appointment process is transparent.

"I don't know about other candidates, but I am fully satisfied with my written test," said Barez.

Afghanistan has 62 civil service institutions with 424,000 employees. (Tolo news)

(5) Ghani Insists on...

of inter-governmental organizations in the process.

A statement from the Presidential Palace received by Pajhwok Afghan News said that President Ashraf Ghani also delivered his speech at the concluding session of the conference on Tuesday evening and told the audience, "Your presence and resolution letter prove that the Constitution is not only on paper but it is in our hearts and minds."

He said peace was not marginal but was part of a national dialogue. He said peace was not a word but dimensions which should be considered so that a sustainable peace could lead to a stable Afghanistan.

"The goal and the tool should be distinguished, peace is a tool and the goal is political stability through a legal and democratic system", Ghani said.

Ignoring the Constitution would not take them to survival or national interest. "It is the Constitution which keeps our national sovereignty", he said.

"We cannot surrender to anyone and we will strongly defend our territory unless the peace process reaches fruition," he said.

About the management of war, he said, "We emphasis on ceasefire and conditions made for a comprehensive peace dialogue."

He said peace talks were without any conditions but agreeing on peace needed conditions which should be defined by the Afghan people. "If we come under pressure for illegal action, that is not acceptable to us," he said.

Ghani said the national unity government had prepared conditions for peace based on the pains Afghans were suffering from. (Pajhwok)

(6) Afghan Politicians...

the statement said.

President Ghani tweeted: "Today, I had a candid discussion with a group of prominent Afghan leaders along with US special envoy Khalilzad, US ambassador John Bass, NATO commander (Scott) Miller."

"Our discussions were focused on

the peace efforts, including the next steps in the process, in order to end the bloodshed in Afghanistan," Ghani continued.

On a multination trip to facilitate intra-Afghan peace talks, Khalilzad arrived in the Afghan capital on Monday and met several officials before travelling to southern Kandahar province. (Pajhwok)

(7) Corrupt Election...

the government began overhauling the electoral bodies, something impossible without amending the electoral law.

He pledged to reform the election commission by fighting corruption, appointing patriotic and honest people to regain public trust.

He said one of the steps towards reforms and revamping of the commission would be dismissal of corrupt persons.

"Some employees in higher, middle and lower ranks who pushed the last year election into crisis would be removed and their contracts would not be renewed," he said.

Nang pledged to appoint committed and qualified persons instead of corrupt individuals.

Biometric system

Nang said using biometric system in the election process was seriously considered in amending the electoral law. "It is obvious to all that using biometric system in the last election was not effective and it instead created more problems."

He said efforts were underway for preparing a comprehensive plan to ensure biometric system was effectively used for transparency in the election process.

About attendance of election workers, Nang said the workers' attendance was recently made electronic based as part of administrative reforms for better performance and workers' identification.

He said the electronic attendance system had been installed at eight points which scanned workers eyes, fingers and bodies before allowing them entry into the IEC.

Nang called observation of election process as important for its credibility and said, "We want the media and election oversight institutes not to publish rumors that confuse the public and if they need any documents for evidence based work, we can provide that."

The results of Wolesi Jirga elections. In response to a question about the delay in the Wolesi Jirga election results announcement and its consequences for the next presidential elections, Nang said, "The delay in announcement of Wolesi Jirga election results directly affect the presidential election," he said.

He said the IECC had been requested to share its review of complaints with the IEC as soon as possible so the IEC would finalize its decision and announce the results.

The IECC has promised to share its review results from provinces with the IEC until April 14, he said.

The IEC has so far revealed final Wolesi Jirga results from Laghman, Daikundi, Samangan, Jawzjan, Bamyan, Parwan, Uruzgan, Zabul, Nimroz, Kapisa, Panjshir, Sar-i-Pul, Daikundi, Farah, Ghor, Balkh, Paktika, Herat and Takhar provinces as well as from the Hindu minority.

However, the results of nine provinces and Kuchis (nomads) electoral districts are yet to be announced. Suggested budget for next presidential election

Habib Rahman Nang said the next presidential election was estimated to cost \$192 million but the budget had not been final and the technical team was still working on it.

In response to a question about the 2014 elections that cost \$127 million, he said, "In 2014 we had two elections but in 2019 we have four elections which need more budget."

Pointing to the election schedule, Nang said work on preparing the schedule was ongoing and it would be announced 120 days ahead of the

Election Day according to the law.

The article 71 of the election law says, "The Commission shall announce the election date at least (180) days before the Election Day. Conducting by elections shall be an exception to this provision. (2) The Commission shall publish the Electoral Calendar at least (120) days before the Election Day,"

Independency of the IEC

About the independency of the IEC members, Nang said, "I can assure people that there is no pressure from the Presidential Palace, the CEO and other politicians since the last one month; we do our work according to the law."

He said he would do his work according to the law no matter he was in the job for one day or years. (Pajhwok)

(8) Keep Border...

Afghanistan's vegetables, which were in demand in the neighbouring country, would not get rotten if the crossing remained open round the clock, he argued.

Under the Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Agreement (APTA), he added, five percent goods of Afghan businessmen should go through checks at the Karachi Port.

But Pakistani authorities, he alleged, checked all goods. Because of the stringent checks, the business leader complained, reloading the items consumed a lot of time.

When ships landed at the Pakistani port, goods belonging to Afghan traders are unloaded -- an issue in itself.

Haji Abdullah, head of the Dry Fruits Association, said Pakistani truckers smuggled Afghan goods in their vehicles and brought a bad name to Afghan businessmen.

He said all goods exported from Afghanistan to Pakistan and India were checked by the Pakistani authorities in Chaman. When exports pass through the Kogak area of Chaman, Pakistani officials loaded trucks with smuggled items.

Haji Nani, head of the Fresh Fruits Union, demanded exemption of duty on items such as banana, kinnow, pomegranate, grapes and other fresh fruits traded between the two countries.

Afghan Consul General Dost Mohammad Wazir told Pajhwok Afghan News that round the clock operations at Torkham would take some months to begin.

He promised after Torkham, work on keeping the Spin Boldak crossing open round the clock would be launched. Afghan businessmen would be granted permits for free trade activities between Kandahar City and Quetta. (Pajhwok)

(9) Herat Artists...

University, said the quality of the artworks of his students has improved.

"I see lots of improvement in their artworks when I compare them with the artworks which were displayed three years ago," he said. (Tolo news)

(10) Flash Floods...

Reports indicate several people have died in Almar and Khwaja Sabz Posh, while a number of people also remain missing in Khwaja Sabz Posh and Pashtunkot Districts of northern Faryab province.

According to the OCHA's initial reports, up to 450 families were affected in Dawlatabad district and there also reports of damage in Shirin Tagab district. In Qaysar district, 1,200 livestock have reportedly been killed and 10 jerbis (2 hectares) of agricultural land affected by floods.

The report added that there are also reports of damage in Darzab and Qoshtepa districts, which are inaccessible due to security concerns in Sari-e-Pul province, "a joint assessment has so far identified 155 families however road closures have limited access to other villages in the affected areas and numbers may

change."

At the meantime, the Ministry of Public Health has reported that eight people died and nine were injured in six districts of western Herat province following flash flooding, while more than 1,000 families may have been affected.

Initial reports indicate that over 200 families are affected in Qala-e-Naw, Jawand, Balamurghab, Abkamari, Muger districts in western Badghis province.

"This new flooding adds to the impact of the overall flood emergency, with Farah and Kandahar the most affected to date," said the OCHA adding, "Since the beginning of 2019, more than 163,000 people have now been affected by floods, including those in the past week. A total of more than 42,000 people have been displaced."

Meanwhile, the OCHA in warns of possible flash floods during the spring season in the country.

"The conditions for more flooding through the spring remain a concern and humanitarian organizations are planning to ensure they have enough supplies for the remainder of the season," the report noted. (ANT)

(11) Above 2,300...

efforts to control crimes.

A number of other residents held similar views and highly appreciated security forces efforts in this regard. (Pajhwok)

(12) 2 Children...

operations. Miakhel added security forces in plainclothes conducted a raid in the Daman locality of Behsud. The kidnappers were unable to shift Qureshi to another place and were subsequently arrested.

He said one person had been arrested in Kabul. The governor hoped a massive network of abductors would be busted soon. He urged the judiciary to award severe punishment to those involved in abduction and murder of cases.

Miakhel said Rehanullah was another child abducted by Daesh rebels four months earlier. Two kidnappers, arrested by intelligence agents, admitted to abducting Rehanullah and later freed him in Batikot district. He was handed over to his family. (Pajhwok)

(13) U.S. Says will...

upon to promote sustainable, inclusive development, and to maintain stability and a rules-based order.

"We have repeatedly called on China to address these concerns," Palladio added. A person familiar with the matter said Washington was considering sending a lower-level staffer from the U.S. embassy to observe and take notes on the conference but not to participate, though a final decision has not yet been made.

President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative has proven controversial in many Western capitals, particularly Washington, which views it as a means to spread Chinese influence abroad and saddle countries with unsustainable debt through non-transparent projects.

On Saturday, Yang called such criticisms "prejudiced," saying China has never forced debt upon participants and the initiative was to promote joint development.

On Saturday, he did not name the 40 leaders he said would attend, but some of China's closest allies have confirmed they will be there, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen. (Reuters)

(14) EU Waives Visas...

the EU has revived controversy over Spain's long-standing claim on the territory, against the backdrop of Spanish elections.

But with Brexit day looming, and lawmakers rushing to complete preparations, EU leaders acted to elbow aside the British MEP at the head of the justice committee. (AFP)