

Quote of the Day

Education is the best provision for old age
Aristotle

Reconstruction Effort in Afghanistan is in a Perilous State: John F. Sopko

WASHINGTON - Reconstruction effort in Afghanistan is in a perilous state despite the US Congress having appropriated \$113 billion for this purpose since 2002, John F. Sopko, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) said Thursday.

"The reconstruction effort in Afghanistan is in a perilous state. Afghanistan has had the lead responsibility for its own security for more than a year now, and is struggling with a four-season insurgency, high attrition, and capability challenges," Sopko said in his address to the Harvard University.

Sopko said since fiscal year



2002, the US Congress has appropriated more than \$113 billion to reconstruct Afghanistan. The \$113 billion appropriated so far, when adjusted for inflation,

exceeds the total spending under the Marshall Plan that helped rebuild Western Europe after the Second World War, he said.

"Conditions are not, to put it

mildly, what we would hope to see 15 years into a counterinsurgency and nation-building campaign," he said adding that large parts of Afghanistan are effectively

off-limits to foreign personnel, whether they are managing projects or responsible for oversight functions.

Other consequences of insecurity are less headline-grabbing, but are still evil omens for the future of a desperately poor and largely illiterate country. Last month, a spokesman for the Afghan Ministry of Education was quoted as saying 714 schools have been closed and more than 2.5 million children were being denied schooling, mainly because of the war, he said.

"Bombings, raids, ambushes, land mines, and temporary seizures of key points can all serve to undermine the government's credibility ... (More on P4)...(1)

ADB Official TAPI Gas Pipeline through Afghanistan 'Doable'



KABUL - The Asian Development Bank (ADB) hopes to overcome by 2020 the challenges of building a \$10-billion gas pipeline through Afghanistan's most violent areas, by making sure it benefits Afghan contractors and communities, a bank official said.

Shareholders of the Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Paki-

stan and India (TAPI) project agreed on Thursday to invest \$200 million in studies and engineering for the pipeline, looking to link gas-rich Turkmenistan with eager markets in Pakistan and India. Originating at the giant Galkynsh gas field in Turkmenistan, the TAPI pipeline, which involves the four ... (More on P4)...(2)

US-Afghan Partnership Agreement to be Assessed this Week



KABUL - US-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement was scheduled to be assessed by a bilateral commission during meeting in the ongoing week, an official said on Friday.

A deputy presidential spokesman, Dawa Khan Minapal, told Pajhwok Afghan News the US delegation was expected to arrive in Kabul on Saturday. Both US and Afghan teams would jointly work to assess the contents of the Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America, he said adding such meetings would be conducted on ambassadors and foreign ministers level.

Meanwhile, a US Embassy spokesperson in Kabul said "we are working closely with our Afghan counterparts to prepare for the Afghanistan-United States Bilateral Commission and we are looking forward to a productive dialogue." The meetings of the Bilateral Commission are held ... (More on P4)...(3)

Afghan Air Power Developed after Security Agreement: MoD



KABUL - Ministry of Defense (MoD) has said that the Afghan Air Force (AAF) was better equipped following the signing of Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) between Kabul-Washington, an agreement allowing US forces to stay in Afghanistan post-2014.

The Afghan air force has been given a number of military choppers and fighter aircraft, the MoD said in a statement on Thursday.

"There was a lack of equipment, but we succeeded in overcoming the issues during 2015. They (US) provided support to our ... (More on P4)...(6)

Hindus, Sikhs in Nangarhar Claim to be Sidelined

KABUL - A number of Hindus and Sikhs in Jalalabad city, in Nangarhar province, claim that powerful figures have usurped their land. They said this is the latest in a string of problems for them.

In addition to having their land grabbed, they said they are also struggling to ensure an education for their children.

"People grab our lands and there is no one to look after us and address our problems," said one local Sikh resident.

"In the past there were many of us in the province but now our numbers have decreased and our problems have increased. Government does also not keep its promises to us," said another Sikh.

Meanwhile Nangarhar provincial council has called on the respective institutions ... (More on P4)...(7)

HIA Negotiator Optimistic of Dialogue with Government

KABUL - The Gulbadin Hekmatyar-led Hezb-Islami Afghanistan says it has no preconditions for peace parleys with government, but will never compromise Islamic principles.

In an exclusive interview with Q Afghan News, the HIA delegation's chief, Eng. Mohammad Amin Karim, sounded optimistic about the outcome of peace talks.

But he also spoke of pressures on President Ashraf Ghani, saying some individuals were trying to create hurdles to the reconciliation effort. Karim particularly questioned



the silence of Prof. Abdul Rab Rassoul Sayyaf.

The HIA leader said they had found President Ashraf Ghani fully committed to, and genuinely interested in, the peace dialogue -- a goal shared by his Chief Executive Of-

ficer (CEO), Dr. Abdullah Abdullah.

While ruling out compromise on the country's core interests, he hoped the HIA would achieve its goal -- national sovereignty and defence of people's rights -- through

political talks. It should be a goal, not a condition, he explained.

About guarantee of the execution of a possible agreement with the government, Karim said that the UN, friendly countries like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the High Pace Council and the Ulema Council could play a key role in trust-building. From the HIA point of view, he said, there should be no role for Pakistan in the intra-Afghans peace parleys.

The government of Afghanistan was committed to resolving knotty issues in the peace process with the US, he added. (Pajhwok)

Official Calls for More Economic Exchanges with Iran



KERMAN - Brotherhood and neighborhood between Iran and Afghanistan necessitate more exchanges in political, economic and other fields between the two countries, Afghan Deputy Chief Executive Officer said Thursday.

Addressing a session on ways to expand bilateral economic cooperation, Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq regretted that Iran-

Afghanistan bilateral relations are not optimal. However, he noted that the situation has been caused by regional developments and the international sanctions against Iran.

He stressed the need to introduce Afghan products in Iranian markets adding that the opening of Chahbahar port, in southern Iran, can provide ... (More on P4)...(4)

Russian, Indian Envoys Call on Atmar in Kabul



KABUL - National Security (NSA) Advisor Mohammad Hanif Atmar on Thursday held separate meetings with Indian and Russian ambassadors in capital Kabul.

Russia's economic and security assistance with Afghanistan came under discussion between Atmar and Russian top diplomat in Kabul Alexander Mantytskiy, a statement from the NSA's office said.

Atmar said Afghanistan needed Russia's continued assistance for durable stability and improvement in the country's law and order situation.

Indian Ambassador Manpreet Vohra also called on Atmar and both discussed Salma Dam in western Herat province and Afghanistan's economic and security situations. The two also ... (More on P4)...(8)

Rula Commends Increasing Awareness Among Women

KABUL - Afghanistan's first lady says extremist movements have got nothing to do with religion, but look much more like cults.

In an interview published in the New York Times on Thursday, Rula Ghani regretted the killing of a young woman by a mob bang in the middle of Kabul.

In December 2015, Farkhunda Malikzada was beaten to death by a crowd after she was falsely accused by a cleric of burning the Holy Quran. While calling her death "extremely unfortunate", the first lady noted the incident had triggered an angry protest from determined women.

In a rare assertion of their role, Kabul's women carried the victim's coffin



and laid her to rest with their own hands, refusing to let men do the job. "Traditionally, women don't even go to the cemetery. They really showed their determination," Rula said, adding the women had started asking imams about Islamic teaching on the treatment of women. She praised her husband ... (More on P4)...(5)

No Political Motive behind Merging of AISA: ARG

KABUL - The Presidential Palace (ARG) said on Thursday there was no political motive behind merging Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA) with the Ministry of Commerce and Industries (MoCI). Shah Hussain Murtazawi, the deputy spokesman for President Ashraf Ghani, said the move was aimed at encouraging investment.

"The plan of merging AISA doesn't have a political motive, but it is aimed at easing the process of giving licenses to investors," Murtazawi

added. Ghani recently ordered the MoCI to prepare a specific plan for the merging of AISA with the ministry within a week. AISA officials showed strong reaction to this move by the president. Qurban Ali Haqjo, chief of AISA, said that this will create hurdles in their bid to attract investors. He said the move will also undermine the legitimacy of the government. A number of officials at the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) and traders expressed ... (More on P4)...(9)

Mullah Zakir Proposes Taliban to Negotiate with US, Afghan Government

KABUL - A senior Taliban commander proposed a new strategy for the Taliban group including their talks with Afghan government, US and its western allies.

In a letter, Mullah Abdul Qayum Zakir calls on the Taliban leadership to negotiate with the US and Western governments and the leadership of the movement must embrace new internal and external policies.

According to Al Jazeera's report, the proposals of the senior official included negotiations with Afghan government and the international community, the implementation of Islamic law, and improving military strategy and coordination within the group.

However, a Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid said that they have not received the proposal so far.

"We don't know anything about the new strategy, but I will keep saying that we are not going to negotiate with foreign governments and will only focus on bringing back Sharia [Islamic] law," Mujahid told Al Jazeera.

Zakir had stayed away from last year's meeting that elected Mullah Mansoor as successor to Mullah Muhammad Omar, whose death was announced in August 2015. But, last month, Zakir -- former head of Taliban's military commission -- pledged allegiance to Mansoor in a hand-written letter (Pajhwok)

Afghan Envoy Taliban Believes in War, Not Peace Talks

ISLAMABAD - Afghan Ambassador to Pakistan Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal has said the Taliban has chosen war over peace talks with Afghanistan as the group believes this will help



them reach their goals.

He said: "Taliban believes in war and they [Taliban] think by continuing the war they can reach their goals in Afghanistan, especially in the upcoming war season, which is a big hindrance to peace," said Zakhilwal.

His comments come after Pakistan's national security advisor, Sartaj Aziz, recently voiced concern over the rejection of peace talks by the Taliban. He said Pakistan can play a vital role in Afghanistan's peace process but cannot directly order the Taliban to join the negotiations.

In reaction to Aziz's remarks the Afghan government said if the Taliban does not join the peace talks the group will face the full wrath of the security forces.

"Our request from Pakistan is that on the basis of agreements bring Taliban to the table and if this does not happen we, on the basis of quadrilateral meeting agreements, have fully prepared ourselves for military operations against the Taliban," said President Ashraf Ghani's deputy spokesman Dawa Khan Menapal.

However, there are still skeptics who claim Pakistan is not being honest in its dealings with Kabul.

"Afghanistan also reaches the conclusion that waiting for Pakistan's ... (More on P4)...(10)