

(1) Pence Reassure ...

sacrifices in war against terrorism and its continued support to Afghanistan. The two dignitaries termed 2017 a successful year for Afghan security forces, eradication of drugs and stressed over the timely conduct of upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections.

The president said US-Afghanistan relation have been based on joint strategic goals and had become more strengthened compared to the past. Ghani termed US strategy vital for regional peace and stability and stressed over its implantation.

The president said peace in Afghanistan was vital for the region. He recalled government's achievements in area of anti-corruption, implementation of reforms and regional cooperation.

The leadership of Unity Government was present during the meeting, according to the statement.

A separate statement from US embassy in Kabul said Vice President Mike Pence met with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah, and other senior Afghan leaders at the Presidential Palace in Kabul on December 21.

Vice President Pence and President Ghani were accompanied by U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan John R. Bass and Resolute Support and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan Commander General John W. Nicholson, Jr. in talks highlighting President Trump's South Asia strategy and its positive effects on Afghanistan's security situation.

They also focused on prospects for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan, the need for the Afghan government's continued progress on reforms, and the importance of preparing for timely parliamentary and presidential elections, according to the statement. During the visit, Vice President Pence reaffirmed U.S. support for Afghanistan's Government of National Unity, as well as U.S. support to the Afghan people in the areas of peace, security, and economic development.

Vice President Pence also met with the leadership of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan and greeted the soldiers serving here. (Pajhwok)

(2) Pence Warns Pakistan ...

clear earlier this year that we are with you, we are joined in resolve. We have both sacrificed much in this fight. But I hope my presence here is tangible evidence that the leadership of President Trump, our administration and the armed forces that we are here to see this through," Pence told the two leaders

Pence said they believe that they are now on a path to achieve a lasting victory for freedom and security in Afghanistan. "We are grateful for your leadership and partnership in that effort," he said.

Responding to reporters questions later Pence said it's important for the American people to know that the decision the president made this August was as much about tactics and strategies on the ground as about military personnel.

"We have authorized additional military personnel on the ground, but the president's decision was to put, essentially, American military personnel in a better position to support the Afghan army as they take the fight to them. Now, our objective here is to not fight the war against terrorists for the people of Afghanistan," he said.

"It's to support them more effectively with air power, with the extraordinary expertise of the most powerful military in the world, to come along beside them in that respect... It's also to send a message to those who would threaten the people of the United States from Afghanistan and those who would threaten the peace and security of the people of Afghanistan. We're here to stay. We're here to stay until they're defeated, until freedom wins," Pence said.

At the UN headquarters in New York, the Pakistani Ambassador Maleeha Lodhi said that there are no safe havens in her country. "There are no such safe havens. The only havens that exist for the insurgents -and for Daesh and other terrorists -are within the 40 percent of Afghan territory, which is outside the control of the Afghan Govern-

ment," Lodhi said in her address to an open debate of the Security Council on Afghanistan. (Pajhwok)

(3) Afghanistan Issues...

front soon," he said adding that Afghanistan looks forward to the upcoming trilateral meeting in Beijing next week between the Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China. Saikal said terrorists have failed to make any notable gains on the ground and have suffered heavy losses in terms of manpower and morale. Pressured militarily, they have desperately resorted to soft target attacks in urban areas, he said adding that Afghan security forces have proven their effectiveness in countering terrorist elements in independently conducted operations.

"We continue to clear territory in different parts of Afghanistan from the presence of the Taliban, Daesh and other terrorist groups," he said.

"As of late, a significant number of senior Taliban and Daesh figures have been eliminated and captured, including financiers, planners and recruiters, while scores of attacks were prevented and subverted," he said.

"Alongside these gains, we are now working to double the size of our Special Forces and triple the size of our air force, with support from our international partners," Saikal said. (Pajhwok)

(4) JI Coordination...

former governor of northern Balkh province, last Monday and appointed Eng. Mohammad Daud as his replacement, according to a statement.

The JI party leadership on Wednesday rejected the approval of Noor's resignation as and slammed president's decision. Noor is the Chief Executive of JI.

A statement from the Presidential Palace on Friday said the president met members of the JI Coordination Council on Thursday evening.

Syed Ikramuddin, Qazi Raz Mohammad Daleli, Prof. Rahim Baig Yaqoubi and Lawmaker Ghulam Farooq Majroh spoke on the behalf of the council members during the meeting.

They said JI rendered sacrifices for the security and stability of the country throughout the history and would cooperate for the stability of incumbent system.

They said JI was a nation-wide party where people from every ethnic community existed.

"The self-proclaimed power centres within and outside the government were threat for the security and stability and demanded the president to eradicate them and the JI will support government efforts in this regard," the JI Coordination Council members said. They supported government efforts in areas of introducing reforms, eradication of corruption and implementation of mega economic projects.

The president in reply said he had huge respect for JI as it was a nation-wide and inter-Afghan political party.

He said the country lived for forty years in crisis and would be pulled out of the existing crisis within two years with the fresh opportunity available in the Afghanistan interest.

The president said: "All we agree on one agenda which is reforms." (Pajhwok)

(5) Tadamichi Calls ...

of the region to help create an environment conducive to peace in Afghanistan and the region. We must use the upcoming winter months, when conflict levels tend to decrease, to advance on this issue before the cycle of violence is renewed next spring," he said. The envoy called on the Taliban to express a clear willingness to begin negotiations towards a political settlement, and to start the initial dialogue.

He said The Kabul Process meeting planned for February 1 would offer an opportunity. At the meeting, the Government of Afghanistan was expected to present its strategic concept for reaching a political settlement with the armed opposition, and seek the support of the international community. He added the Government and the international partners must focus on how levels of violence could be reduced next year. "We must also seek commencement of a structured dialogue for peace." (Pajhwok)

(6) Trade Links to Help ...

and Pakistan," he reiterated, saying cordial Kabul-Islamabad relations could pave the ground for greater regional connectivity.

Marastial recently took charge as Afghan consul-general in Peshawar, replacing Abdul Waheed Poyan. Before his assignment in Peshawar, he served as associate professor at Kabul University.

America, China, Iran, India and other countries were safeguarding their own interests in the region, the envoy noted. By the same token, Pakistan and Afghanistan should also promote their interests, he argued.

Afghanistan would never allow any group or country to use its soil against Pakistan, the diplomat promised. Marastial said Afghanistan's stability was in the best interest of Pakistan. "People from both sides should support their governments to bring stability and maintain peace in the region."

He called for sincere measures to overcome the trust deficit between the neighbours. Escalating political tensions would have a negative impact on bilateral trade and economic relations, Marastial warned.

More than three million Afghan refugees were still residing in different parts of Pakistan, he said, voicing satisfaction with the registration process. Kabul has undertaken measures for the resettlement and rehabilitation of returning refugees. (Pajhwok)

(7) World Bank ...

community to overcome the endemic corruption in finance organizations and revenue collection.

"This money from the World Bank should be spent on infrastructural projects before they are spent on reforms plans," said Abdullah Darman, a university lecturer.

According to an agreement signed between World Bank and the Ministry of Finance last year, the bank will pay \$900 million USD by the end of 2018 in order to encourage reforms in the key government institution. (Tolonews)

(8) Afghanistan, China, ...

diplomacy, the three countries agreed to establish the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' trilateral dialogue mechanism, which will serve as a platform for enhancing the dialogue and cooperation among the three countries.

Afghanistan envoy to the UN Mahmood Saikal hoped the trilateral meeting would have positive results. (Pajhwok)

(9) Kazakhstan Willing ...

discussed between the ministry of agriculture and with the Kazakh side," said Lotfullah Rashid, a spokesman for MAIL.

Economic commentators have said that if warehouses are established along the borders, the Afghan government will be able to decrease its expenditure on the importation of wheat and that it will also help with Afghanistan's food safety programs.

"From one perspective, the establishment of strategic reserve facilities for wheat by the friendly country of Kazakhstan will be helpful in the future if God helps us to increase our wheat production in the long term," said economic analyst Shabir Bashiri.

Afghanistan needs six million tons of wheat annually and of this, 4.5 million comes from domestic sources and another 1.5 million from abroad. (Tolonews)

(10) Kabul Municipality ...

of the council.

"We hope that all plans are standard and we want a change in the city. We saw that Silo Road in Kabul was constructed twice despite the pressure that was on the mayor. But a good quality road was finally build," said Daud Yaqubi, a member of the council. (Tolonews)

(11) LPG Storage ...

winter season."

Mohammad Kazim Ahmadi, another official of the Petroleum Department, hoped with the facilities launched, many sale points would be established in the provincial capital to provide gas at a reasonable rate.

"There will be gas distribution centres in districts as well. For them, we have fixed the price of gas at 49 afs a kilo.

They will sell it for 54 afs per kilo," he added.

After Kabul, Badakhshan is the second province where LPG storage facilities have been built. The storage facilities would help reduce the cost of LPG in the market, he believed.

Ahmadi asked Faizabad inhabitants, civil society activists and gas consumers to cooperate with the LPG strategic facilities' department to prevent fraud and unreasonably high prices.

Currently, a kilogram of LPG in Faizabad is sold for 70 afs, and as the weather gets colder, prices are likely to surge. (Pajhwok)

(12) India Mulls ...

earlier said the United States welcome additional support by the Indian government to Afghanistan, noting the country's contribution to the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

In its latest report, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, Pentagon said Pentagon called India as Afghanistan's most reliable regional partner and the largest contributor of development assistance in the region.

The report further adds that this assistance includes civil development projects such as the Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam and the Afghan parliament building.

According to Pentagon, India provides significant training opportunities for Afghan officers and enlisted personnel and has frequently offered to increase its burden sharing for Afghanistan. Approximately 130 Afghans travel to India each year to attend various military academy and commissioning programs. (KP)

(13) Iran Daily Deports ...

point remained closed for nine months but was opened for returnees three months back. "Everyday nearly 1,500 people are deported through the border into Herat."

He expressed concern over the expulsion of children, saying these children aged between seven to 17 years old. Meanwhile, Toryalai Tahiri, a provincial council member, criticized the forced eviction of Afghan refugee children by Iran, asking the government to resolve the problem via diplomatic channels.

"Although we have received no complaint from the refugees department so far regarding the deported children; but the act is against bilateral promises between the two countries."

However, Jilani Farhad, the Herat governor's spokesman, said the local administration had many times shared the issue of forced expulsion of children with Iranian authorities, but to no avail.

"The matter has been put forward to committees and through diplomatic channels, and we hope the Iranian side will prevent and cease deporting women and children."

Pajhwok tried to seek comment from the Iranian Consulate in Herat; but the officials there refused to talk. (Pajhwok)

(14) Taxed by Govt ...

But we can do nothing" he remarked. Half an acre of a citrus farm is leased out for 2,800 afghanis annually by the government. But the lessee has to pay the Taliban as well to get full control of the farm.

The Taliban receive 5,000 to 6,000 Pakistani rupees on half an acre of the citrus farm because the government has no writ in some of the areas, he said.

Mohammad Amir, another gardener, said the government had access to a gardens on road sides while the rest other gardens were in the Taliban areas, according to the tenant.

Local residents say some of orange gardens are under Taliban's control. The rebels pick the fruit and sell it in the market.

An inhabitant of Ghanikhel district, who wished to go unnamed, says the price of orange sold by militants in Marko and Batikot bazaars is 20 percent higher.

The orange grown in Batikot is supplied to Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar, and other provinces of the country. The Batikot orange being sweeter and cheaper is in high demand.

Gul Akbar, a fresh fruit seller in the Mukhabirat Square of Jalalabad, confirmed people were more interested in buying domestically-grown orange as

it was cheaper than that imported from Pakistan.

Provincial officials confirm militants take away 70 percent of the orange fruit but they say the government's revenue from the farms has increased.

Nangarhar Canalisation Director Ghulam Hazrat Abdur Rahimzai said they had access to all orange gardens and the militants did not create any problems for them.

But the tenants say the Taliban also tax them. "This problem has been shared with senior officials. People complain to us they are charged both by government and Taliban."

He said that they could not collect enough revenue in the past but this year they had got 4.2 million afghanis from leasing land.

The Nangarhar Canalisation Department also owns date, olive and other fruit farms, which have been are less productive due to negligence on the part of the authorities concerned. (Pajhwok)

(15) 50 Rebels Killed,...

Six Daesh insurgents were killed in Nangarhar's Achin and shinwari districts and one wounded.

Seven rebels were killed in Helmand's Nad Ali, three in Zabul's Shajoy, Three in Maidan Wardak Syedabad districts and four more injured in these districts.

Three insurgents were arrested in the Zurmat district of Paktia while planting landmines.

The MoD did not provide information about the casualties of security forces. (Pajhwok)

(16) Suicide Bomber ...

fired to stop it, but the bomber managed to reach the second gate before detonating the explosives," he added.

The Taliban swiftly claimed responsibility for carrying out the attack.

Mohammad acknowledged that Taliban insurgents in recent battlefield attacks in Kandahar and adjoining Helmand province have seized a number of Humvees and are frequently using them in suicide attacks against Afghan forces.

Local police sources, however, said the casualty toll was higher than the officially released figures. (VoA)

(17) 15 Rebels Dead...

soldiers had suffered casualties, he said. The operation features regular police, army and public order police personnel. The security situation in and around Tirkot has been volatile for the past two years and the guerrillas have captured many areas. Thousands of families have been displaced their areas. (Pajhwok)

(18) Afghan Air Force to ...

statement posted online.

The statement further added that the first four Black Hawks arrived in October, with the next group in the build-up scheduled for January, 2018.

This comes as the U.S. Air Force Brigadier General Lance Bunch, the director of the future operations, told reporters last week that the Afghan forces conducted their combat operations through 2017 with the lowest level of support from the coalition forces in the 16-year war here, and yet has had some of the most success they've ever had, showing they are, in fact, leading the fight and we are there to advise and enable them.

He said "Key pieces that you're seeing is that the Afghan Air Force itself, one of the more lethal organizations they have, and one that we're looking to triple in size by 2023, is conducting significantly more air operations in direct support of the ANDSF on the battlefield, to the tune of 500 more sorties this year than they did the year before."

"And so we are currently able to work with and enable the Afghan National Defense Forces as they conduct successful combat operations on the battlefield. We're working with the Afghan Air Force to continue to build their capacity," Gen. Bunch added.

According to Gen. Bunch, the first four UH-60 Black Hawks were delivered to the Afghan Air Force, and the first six pilots have already graduated from training.

"We expect to have eight full crews at the beginning of the fighting season in 2018. And those Black Hawk helicopters are just the first of up to 159 that we're going to provide them," he said. (KP)