

(1) SIGAR Report...

SIGAR reported. While TFBSO spent \$215 million on 11 extractive programs, it "left with nearly all of its extractive projects incomplete," the SIGAR report said. One of the three efforts considered a technical success based on objectives was the construction of a natural gas station. However, SIGAR reported in October 2015 that the project, which cost US taxpayers \$43 million, could have been built for approximately \$300,000. A lack of suitable roads is one of the fundamental infrastructure problems preventing further mining development in Afghanistan. Of the mines in operation, many are illegal and benefiting the country's insurgents and Taliban, the SIGAR report said. In addition, the Pentagon task force spent \$46.5 million lobbying companies to come and develop the "extractives," but did not end up with a single signed contract to show for it. SIGAR estimated that the \$122 million spent by the TFBSO had rendered "mixed results."

The Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support is scheduled to hold a hearing on the TFBSO on January 20. Composed mostly of civilian experts, the Pentagon task force is expected to face questions over its bizarre and extravagant demands, as well as its treatment of whistleblower Colonel John C. Hope, who claims he was punished for speaking out against wasteful spending in Afghanistan. In response to the report, USAID said the criticisms of its efforts "need to be substantially tempered by the reality that mining is a long-term endeavor," according to Pro Publica.

At the end of the SIGAR report, the inspector general wrote, "DOD did not comment on the findings or other contents of the draft report and instead directed us to a RAND Corporation lessons learned study of TFBSO that does not address the issues discussed by this audit. USAID concurred with both recommendations." (ToloneWS)

(2) Govt. Launches ...

However, a large percentage of the Afghan population does not have access to the internet. In line with this, Abdullah said internet cafes would be able to provide people with access. However, he added that these cafes would need to be monitored. This new system is expected to ease the process as currently passport offices are besieged with applicants on a daily basis. Meanwhile, Noorul Haq Ulomi, the minister of interior said: "The digitalization process promoted here is likely unique in the region, the move is aimed to take Afghanistan to world standards and enable Afghan citizens to travel abroad by holding a passport which could determine the demands of the current situations. Still we live in a third world country and we must come out of this situation." (ToloneWS)

(3) U.S. Completes ...

weapons and munitions to the mission. The A-29 is a multi-role, fixed-wing aircraft that will provide the Afghan air force with an indigenous air-to-ground capability and aerial reconnaissance capabilities to support the country's counterinsurgency operations. Eight Afghan Air Force pilots completed their training late last year and graduated from a program hosted by the 81st Fighter Squadron at Moody Air Force Base in United States and will return to Afghanistan for combat. The Afghan Air Force (AAF) officials are also optimistic to receive additional close-air support combat choppers and fixed-wing close-air support aircraft during the year. According to the Afghan Air Force (AAF) will receive a total of 28 MD-530F helicopters that would be outfitted with military equipment. (KP)

(4) MPs Urge ...

job of the Selection Committee of the election commissioners - while Ghani defends the stance to reform the election law. The statements come at a time that concerns have been heightened in recent weeks that the credibility and legitimacy of the election process can not be restored until the present officials

of Afghanistan's election management bodies - the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan (IEC) and the Electoral Reform Commission (ECC) - continue their jobs as election commissioners.

Last year's presidential elections entered into crisis after reports surfaced of major fraud and vote-rigging. The election crisis resulted in the demand for a comprehensive reform process in the election law with the international community also calling for key reforms to be considered in the election law. (ToloneWS)

(5) Second Quadrilateral...

about peace talks. "Now that China and Russia has pledged to support the Afghan peace talks, we welcome this move of the two countries," he added.

Government has intensified its efforts to bring the Taliban militants to the negotiation table. Leaders of the National Unity Government (NUG) - President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah - are availing themselves at every opportunity to talk about peace talks. Abdullah on Thursday, while talking at a gathering at the Passport Department, said that he sincerely supports the peace process. He added that the Afghan government, with the support of people, is committed to fighting terrorism under any title or name including Daesh, Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Peace talks and seeking cooperation of Islamabad in this regard has been a priority for Kabul over the past few years. In most cases, Islamabad's dishonesty has led to Afghanistan's disappointment. However, this time it is believed that Pakistan, under pressure from the international community, will be compelled to sincerely cooperate in the peace process of Afghanistan. (ToloneWS)

(6) Islamabad Talks...

insisted the Afghan-origin American diplomat. He said if Pakistan did not act against groups not taking the path of peace, the peace process would produce no results. Khalilzad said he had been hoping for such a move from Pakistan during the Islamabad talks, but that did not happen. "My worry is that the peace process would be prolonged, creating the false impression that there is a serious peace process but in fact it is a cover for continuing (Taliban) military operation and the next fighting season would be more intense," Khalilzad said. (Pajhwok)

(7) Protest ...

with ethnic views and for their illegal interests, are trying to hijack the law," said Asar Hakimi, another cultural activist. The protesters, angry at having been stopped from marching to the Presidential Palace, said that the protest was a civil move, but security forces' action shows despotism by government. "This despotism will not stop us and we will move forward. Our move is legal and we support the law. We don't have any fear because we have the law on our side," said Ahmad Zaki, a civil society activist. AinuddinBek, another activist, said that the Presidential Palace should be a supporter of the law, not a violator.

"Hindering the law that has been approved by lawmakers and signed by the president is like playing with fire," he added. The demonstrators said that their protests will continue, adding that the public's patience has worn out. (ToloneWS)

(8) Heavy ...

on the ground and the Taliban are trying to take away the bodies.

"It has been five days that we are fighting. We have defeated them. In every fighting, 10 to 12 militants are being killed. They (the Taliban) cannot stand against us," he added.

The fighting has forced scores of families to leave their houses in the district. The displaced families seek humanitarian assistance. (ToloneWS)

(9) Security Council...

clear direction. "Instead of stirring confrontation, we should firmly advance the goal of denuclearization; instead of causing chaos on the

peninsula, we should look for ways to maintain the long-term stability and security; instead of going towards the opposite directions, we should push all parties back to the six-party talks," Wang said. (Xinhua)

(10) Tajikistan Suspends...

insecurity. "Tajikistan's consul called me and said that for some security reasons, his country has decided to temporarily close down the consulate," he added. Acting Governor of Kunduz province, Hamdullah Daneshi, said militant groups were posing a serious threat to the Central Asian countries, particularly Tajikistan. As such, he urged regional countries to cooperate with Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism.

"Terrorism doesn't know borders; it poses a serious threat to Central Asia, particularly Tajikistan. To get rid of militancy, these countries should join hands with Afghanistan in fighting terrorism," he said. In addition, Dawat-e-Islami Foundation of Afghanistan Ulama said that Tajikistan had also wanted to close its consulate in Mazar-e Sharif, the capital of northern Balkh province. However, it said that local officials assured the Tajik government its foreign mission in the province would be secure.

A number of political experts believe that mounting insecurity, political pressure and political games by Russia have prompted Tajikistan to close down its consulates.

Nasrullah Stankzai, a professor at Kabul University, said one of the reasons behind the closure can be insecurity and another reason is that Tajikistan by closing its foreign missions in Afghanistan wants to protest to Kabul in the face of insecurity.

Tajikistan has constantly said that Afghanistan is like a door to the sea for Tajikistan - and that a peaceful Afghanistan is in the interests of Tajikistan.

Trade between the two countries has increased by 50 percent over the past five years and Kabul and Dushanbe have signed about 80 cooperation agreements to date. (Asia-Plus)

(11) Ahadi Launches...

new party is the second political party after the National Congress Party, led by Abdul Latif Pedram, to take on an opposition role. Ahadi served as Finance Minister under ex-president Hamid Karzai and supported Ghani during his pre-election campaign in 2014. He said that he is tired of government's unfulfilled promises.

"The incumbent government is a failure. It is incompetent and dishonest. The New National Front of Afghanistan believes that based on the constitution, elections should be held so as to replace the current government. We are an opposition party; we are not trying to be part of the government," Ahadi said.

He added that only transparent elections can rescue the country. The party, despite taking on an opposition role, does however, lend its support to the system, he said.

Ahadi believes that widespread poverty and the migration crisis are results of differences from within government. As such he called on the international community not to put pressure on the NUG to continue its work.

"The fear of a worse future should not deter us from our demands. I call on donors to restrain from coming up with the reason of no alternative to the current government. People want a change in the government and our constitution allows us to hold early elections and no one can argue that this is a legal government," Ahadi added. Maulavi Qalamuddin, one of the founders of the party sent a message to Ghani and said he will lose the nation's support if he does not turn things around. "Who will stay beside you? Who will you rule? He, who doesn't have people around, cannot be called president," he said.

Sayed Jawad Husaini, another leader of the party, said opposition parties serve as a voice of nations and monitor government's activities. "The troubles that we are currently experiencing are because we don't have a strong opposition," he added.

The front also lashed out at government for not appointing an attorney general and other senior government officials and criticized the president for constantly

issuing decrees. (ToloneWS)

(12) EU Ready to...

programme was purely for peaceful purposes. The EU chaired the talks between Iran and the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany. (AFP)

(13) Tough Times ...

an Iranian company, was quoted as saying. Meanwhile, a government decree prohibiting refugees from residing in the capital. Local activist organisations have tried unsuccessfully to overturn the decree, which was approved 16 years ago. (Agencies)

(14) Analysts...

the one we had [on Monday] with Pakistan's national security adviser is very promising and they said strictly those government oppositions, Taliban or whoever they are, if they want peace we welcome them and those who do not want peace we will suppress them and they said it is our government's policy," said Ahmad Sayede an Afghan political analyst.

Politicians however have called on Afghan government officials to take the nation into its confidence before brokering a deal with the Taliban - which has been fighting the government since it was toppled from power in 2001.

"As the government failed in other works it also failed in the peace process," said Anwar ul-HaqAhadi, the chairman of Afghanistan's New National Front party.

While concerns grow over the possibility of a surge in Taliban attacks next summer, political parties have asked government to enter the peace dialogue with the Taliban from a position of strength.

"The government needs to be open with government forces and the people as the people have the right to know about the plan of how peace will come to exist. Because peace is a national process not a government process but so far the government did not do this," said Ahmad WaliMassoud, a former Afghan ambassador to the UK.

This comes after some politicians accused the present government of failing to control the war effectively.

"We will consider these negotiations as a good omen and the government may be ready and this time take steps so the negotiations end in the interests of Afghanistan's people but I don't think the negotiations will end by March or April," said Sayed-dlshaqGilani, National Salvation Party chairman.

Observers monitoring the situation in Afghanistan have been saying that a surge in violence by the Taliban is a push by the group to gain more incentives in future talks. (ToloneWS)

(15) Govt. Supports...

health condition who were taken to Balkh province to receive better care.

This comes a woman gave birth to quadruplets in western Herat province of Afghanistan late in the month of November last year. The woman was reported to be 35-year-old and was in better health condition, according to the provincial public health officials. The officials further added that the quadruplets include one baby boy and three baby girls, who are all in better health condition. (KP)

(16) Gunmen Attack...

discovered 29 bullet casings from the area with the preliminary investigation reports suggesting a sub-machine gun was used by the gunmen.

The incident comes days after a group of heavily armed insurgents attacked the Pakistani consulate in Jalalabad, the provincial capital of eastern Nangarhar province.

The loyalists of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) Khurasan claimed responsibility behind the attack on the consulate compound. (KP)

(17) Taliban ...

Afghan capital of Kabul, the police official added.

Afghan security forces have pressed on clearing the militants in restive provinces as Taliban militants have been attempting to take territory and consolidate their positions during the winter in the Central Asian country.

The Taliban militant group has

yet to make comments. (Xinhua)

(18) British Soldier ...

leave her. I'm sorry," he said, adding that he knew it was wrong and regretted doing it.

Lawrie had been a volunteer helper in the makeshift migrants' camp in Calais known as "the jungle" where Bru and her father lived.

There are around 4,000 migrants at the unofficial camp, which rain often turns into a quagmire. Most want to get to Britain, trying night after night to jump onto trucks or trains or even walk the 31-mile (50-km) undersea tunnel to Britain. At least 16 have died in the attempt.

Britain and France have jointly tightened security around the harbour and railway lines over the past months, but the camp remains.

On Oct. 24, Lawrie had set off in his van with Bru hidden in a compartment over the driver's seat, but French police caught him and returned Bahar to her father in the camp.

Police also found two Eritrean men in the back of the vehicle. Lawrie said he had been unaware of their presence and authorities did not press charges. (Reuters)

(19) European Rights...

circumstances". Referring to the plan to use migrants' assets to pay for their stay in Denmark, he wrote, "I believe that such a measure could amount to an infringement of the human dignity of the persons concerned."

On Thursday, Swiss broadcaster SRF reported that migrants arriving in Switzerland are obliged to give authorities any assets worth over 1,000 Swiss francs (\$995). It showed a photograph of a receipt one refugee received for his cash. (Reuters)

(20) A Decade Later, ...

leader Mullah Naqib, a member of the same tribe and a staunchly anti-Taliban ally for the Canadians.

The documents - dating from 2006 to 2010 and obtained by The Canadian Press under the Access to Information Act - show officials getting increasingly exasperated with the Afghan government's lack of interest in investigating the crime.

At one point in 2007, diplomats were so fed up that they proposed that Canadian police take a more active role in tracking and supervising the Afghan investigation.

"In view of the lack of progress hitherto in bringing the perpetrators to justice, and recent developments which may complicate the investigation, there is a growing sense that Canada should contribute a more active police role to track the Afghan investigation and determine next steps," said an email from the Canadian embassy to Foreign Affairs headquarters, dated March 28, 2007.

Formal diplomatic notes were sent to the Afghan government expressing Ottawa's growing dissatisfaction, the documents show. "Afghan authorities should be helped to understand that we expect them to lead the investigation into this terrorist bombing in their country," one official wrote in late 2007.

Pressure was applied in both Kabul and Ottawa, where senior officials regularly broached the subject with the Afghan ambassador.

But the protests went largely ignored by the interior minister at the time, Zara Ahmad Moqbil. When the Canadian ambassador, David Sproule, raised the issue with former president Hamid Karzai's chief of staff, he was assured the Afghans "hadn't forgotten about the case."

The documents also reveal that Afghan and Canadian officials tracked the suspect and that he was arrested and released a second time, even though intelligence officers had flagged him as a possible threat.

"Pir Mohammed was arrested a second time on Dec. 13, 2006, after being found in possession of vehicle with a licence plate that matched a watch-list of suspected suicide bombers," said a partially declassified diplomatic memo.

"He spent three months in custody (barring a brief furlong for Eid) before his release this past week."

Mohammed's association with Naqib, whose power and influence was notorious, helped keep him out of jail. That influence was also thought to have played

a part when the first police investigator assigned to the case fled Kandahar, citing death threats.

Some 14 months after the bombing, a second investigation was proposed. But Canadian officials expressed skepticism, noting that the war had been grinding on and that "there may be little reliable evidence to gather" and that "organizers of whatever (improvised explosive device) cell (which) supported and directed the dead bomber have been killed" by special forces.

Valerie Berry did not comment on the trove of government documents, but instead suggested that the family is carrying on. "In a few short weeks we hope to welcome a new member into the family, a baby boy or girl who will hear wonderful stories about his or her granddad," she said. (Monitoring Desk)

(21) Turkey Detains ...

and militants with the outlawed Kurdistan workers' Party (PKK).

It also accused the state of violating human rights and of conducting a "deliberate and planned massacre" of its Kurdish citizens, who have been reportedly subjected to weeks-long curfews in some towns.

On Monday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan took aim at the academics, labeling them "traitors" and a fifth column of foreign powers destined to undermine Turkey's national security. (Xinhua)

(22) US, Kremlin...

discussed the Ukraine crisis by phone earlier this week. The White House said the Russians needed to "live up to the commitments that they made in Minsk -- to end their support for separatists that are destabilising Ukraine right now."

Putin for his part laid the blame for the simmering violence on Kiev, saying the Ukrainian authorities must establish "direct dialogue" with separatists in the east and agree constitutional amendments with them, among other requirements.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko on Thursday said he wanted EU and US help in securing the return of Crimea, annexed by Russia in 2014, and vowed to win back the separatist east this year. (AFP)

(23) Iraqi Force...

also include neighborhoods inside Basra city in the future," said Jabar al-Saadi, head of the security committee at the Basra provincial council. (Reuters)

(24) Severe ...

to deliver aid for the first time since October. UNICEF spokesman Christophe Boulierac told a news briefing in Geneva UNICEF and World Health Organization staff were able to screen 25 children under five for malnutrition and 22 showed signs of moderate to severe malnutrition. All were now receiving treatment. A further 10 children aged from 6 to 18 were screened and six showed signs of severe malnutrition, he said. (Reuters)

(25) ASEAN Condemns...

. "ASEAN fully supports the government of Indonesia in bringing the perpetrators of these heinous acts to justice, and remains united and committed to working with the international community to further intensify its cooperation to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whom so ever it is committed", said the statement. (Xinhua)

(26) Palestinian ...

for the Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza, In early October, a wave of violence broke out between Israel and the Palestinians, in which 159 Palestinians were shot dead by Israeli forces. Meanwhile, more than 25 Israelis were killed in a series of stabbing, shooting and car-ramping attacks carried out by Palestinians.

The violence was triggered by increasing visits of far-right Israelis to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a site in East Jerusalem holy to both Muslims and Jews. The unrest then quickly spread throughout the West Bank, Israel, and the Gaza Strip. (Xinhua)