

(1) Afghan Govt. ...

militant sway -- a 700,000-person increase over the last six months."

SIGAR also noted the UN claim that civilian casualties from US/Afghan air strikes had risen by 52 percent in the first nine months of 2017 as compared to the same period in 2016.

The Afghan Air Force (AAF), the watchdog said, continued to see little increase in its aircrew numbers and aircraft availability. Strengthening AAF capabilities should be a top US priority, it stressed.

On the positive side, Afghan police saw an approximately 2,700-person increase and the Afghan National Army a roughly 750-person increase.

"Considering that the units are those most responsible for holding territory, this is good news. The Afghan government's provision of medical care to its military personnel is also improving."

The ramping up of US military activity in Afghanistan represents another positive development. Between January and September 2017, US air strikes were at the highest level since 2014.

While 10 US service personnel were killed in action between January and August (twice the rate during the same periods in 2016 and 2015), casualties are far lower than in every other year since 2001.

"Afghanistan's rapid population growth, estimated at 3 percent per year, is outpacing its licit economic growth. Afghanistan's labor market is unable to absorb what the World Bank estimates are 400,000 people entering the workforce every year.

"Consequently, more than 23 percent of Afghanistan's labor force was unemployed in 2016-2017, according to the most recent reporting."

SIGAR warned unless the international community could do more to help Afghanistan develop its economy and attract new investment, insurgents and terrorists would be the beneficiaries. (Pajhwok)

(2) 8 Killed in Fuel ...

16 people wounded in the incident have been sent to Kabul for treatment.

The incident happened just after 7pm on Wednesday night.

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the incident. (Tolonews)

(3) Wolesi Jirga's ...

tribe in computerised identity cards after the president approved the proposed law in September 2014.

On March 2, 2016, following protests, the president okayed amendment to Article 6 of the law about the distribution of electronic ID cards. Based on the decree, nationality and tribe were mentioned in identity cards.

A number of JPA supporters opposed the Wolesi Jirga's decision of rejecting the presidential legislative decree. Around 200 supporters of the party took part in the demonstration in front of the Parliament building.

The protesters were chanting slogans 'death to traitor representatives, those selling our identity are not our representatives, we would never take identity cards that lack our nationality, we would add the word "Afghan" in our ID cards by force, it is our red line.'

Bakhtyar Padshah, a member of the JPA who took part in the protest, told Pajhwok Afghan News they staged the protest against the Wolesi Jirga's decision.

He said the lower house's decision was against public demand and the Constitution.

"Addition of our identity in electronic ID cards is our red line, those who voted against the public demand are traitors and we would never accept them as our representatives," he said.

Maria Totakhel, another protestor, said Wolesi Jirga members rejected the presidential decree in order to secure their own interests. (Pajhwok)

(4) Ghani Meets Russia's ...

plan is needed for a unified strategy. Ghani said Afghanistan is at the forefront of the fight against insurgency, and government forces are pursuing the fight against them.

Meanwhile, Russia's national security adviser said his country wants a stable Afghanistan and is ready for any kind of cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

Patrushev stated that Russia also wants to expand its economic cooperation with Afghanistan.

Patrushev also met with Afghan National Security Adviser Haneef Atmar.

Atmar and Patrushev discussed issues related to bilateral cooperation and the desire to improve and expand cooperation between the two countries.

According to Afghanistan's National Security Council's statement the two sides also held detailed discussions over regional security and stability and the threats facing the two countries and the region. (Tolonews)

(5) Pakistan Has Had ...

I think, to think about their longer-term stability and their future by changing that relationship with these organisations," the senior US diplomat said at the hearing. Pakistan was ready to crack down on terrorists if provided with information, Tillerson said, indicating the US planned to provide

it the opportunity to prove its willingness.

Asked by Senator John Barrasso to share with the committee the outcome of his last week's visit to Islamabad, the secretary replied: "Pakistanis have indicated if we provide them information they will act.

"We're going to have to test that, give them an opportunity to do so. So, we are going to enter into an effort to have greater sharing of certain intelligence information," Tillerson added.

Cutting its long-standing relationships with certain terrorist organisations would be in the interest of Pakistan, Tillerson was quoted as saying by Dawn. (Pajhwok)

(6) Bills Go Unpaid...

He said the president had approved DABS suggestion to introduce to judicial organs individuals who owed high amount of money in power bills and impose travel ban on them.

About load-shedding in winter, he said outages in capital Kabul during winter resulted from increased consumption and extension of power networks, a process currently underway.

He said two thermal power stations with the capacity of 140 megawatts would be activated soon and their costs would be paid by the High Economic Council. Load-shedding would decrease with activation of these stations, he added. (Pajhwok)

(7) Civilian Casualties ...

armed attacks, explosions and other terrorist attacks.

CPAG members express deep concern at the rising civilian casualties, requesting all communities to raise their voices to protest against warring parties fighting inside their villages. CPAG, which is comprised of 20 civil society group, urged the government and militants to observe international law and avoid civilian casualties.

Although the government has been trying to reduce the level of civilian casualties, in some areas, Afghan police and army have been accused of killing ordinary people. For example, seven members of a family were killed by a mortar shell in the Ghanikhel district of Nangarhar province at 12th of October. (Pajhwok)

(8) 3-Day 'Rural...

Mohammad Qadir Akbari, sales manager of the exhibition, told Pajhwok Afghan News their aim was to pave the way for economic development of small women investors.

He said they sold products worth more than 700,000 afghanis during the three-day exhibition.

The expo was attended by businesswomen from different districts of Bamyan province and showcased their products, he said.

"Despite a small market and limited sales, such programs motivate Bamyan women to participate in national and international exhibitions", Akbari said.

Hawa Gul, manager of Milad Production, who displayed agricultural products such as dried curd, honey and butter, told Pajhwok Afghan News it was her first time participating in an exhibition. She was satisfied with her sales.

She said she earned 5,000 afghanis in the exhibition and hoped more such events would take place in future. (Pajhwok)

(9) Ismail Khan...

person.

The provincial governor of northern Balkh province and chief executive of Jamiat-e-Islami Ata Mohammad Noor had also participated in the gathering.

He said efforts are underway to interfere in the upcoming elections and urged the government to take immediate steps to change the formation of the elections commission and bring necessary reforms.

Noor further added that they cannot expect transparency in the elections if the government and the elections commission continue to their work with a similar approach they have adopted now.

He said immediate steps should be taken and the people should decide to force the government for reforms otherwise it would be better that the government collapse. (KP)

(10) Women's Situation...

so had bad (dispute settlement) marriages, Oryakhel said. "Improvement can be seen in women's lives. Women are not treated violently." It, however, is not the case in all areas. She said the basic point in an improved or happy life was good economic condition. "We are trying to help those women who are in a vulnerable financial situation. (Pajhwok)

(11) Traders Urge ...

more than \$4 billion. Government and independent estimates suggest that cross border or undocumented trade between the two neighbors is around \$2.5 billion. The first and foremost step, Motiwala suggested, is to build trust between Kabul and Islamabad. "Lack of trust, which is at highest level in recent decades, has crumbled the bilateral trade," he added.

Rationalization of customs duty is another step, which could boost depreciating trade between the two neighbors, he said.

"I have personally told President Ashraf Ghani during a recent meeting that irrational customs duties are badly affecting trade between the two countries, which need to

be addressed.

"He [Ghani] agreed to my suggestion and a committee representing both sides was formed to address the issue, but said know what, not even a single meeting of that committee has so far been held," he maintained.

'Colossal financial losses'

A strict visa regime, sporadic closure of crossings and absence of strong mediation and arbitration points in both countries are other factors, which demand immediate solution, Motiwala said.

"Security comes first, there is no doubt about that. But when you close crossings after every one or two months in the name of terrorist, who by the way, never use gates to infiltrate, then the confidence of traders from both sides is shattered," Motiwala added, referring to closure of borders by Islamabad in recent months following a spate of terrorism in the country, for which it blames Afghanistan-based militant groups.

Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) Vice President Khan Jan Alakozay agrees the rift between Islamabad and Kabul is detrimental to bilateral trade, business community and common people in both countries.

"Globally, it is a known fact that trade between neighbors is always the easiest and cheapest, but unfortunately trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan is on downward trajectory," Alakozay told Anadolu Agency, urging Kabul and Islamabad to relax the tariff regime and adopt friendly postures.

Atif Ikram, head of regional trade committee of Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FPCCI) -- a central body of Pakistani businessmen and traders, agreed with Motiwala.

"The recent closure of borders has not only caused colossal financial losses to traders from both sides, but it has allowed India, Iran, and China to replace Pakistani products in Afghan markets," Ikram told Anadolu Agency. (VoA)

(12) Trust Deficit Hurting ...

depends on Pakistan.

"But, unfortunately, we are not exploiting this potential."

The actual trade potential between the two countries, according to Motiwala, is over \$10 billion but because of multiple hurdles, which are very much addressable, bilateral trade -- documented and undocumented -- is not more than \$4 billion.

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"Our policymakers want to improve trade with countries which are thousands of miles away but continue to ignore neighboring nations which is surprising.

"Imports from Afghanistan do not require foreign exchange because many Afghan traders happily accept rupee which should be exploited."

After Iran, Pakistan was Afghanistan's sec-

ond-largest trade partner for long but China has recently replaced Islamabad while the U.K. and Germany have also improved their trade with the war-stricken country, he added.

Ikram further said Pakistan had not been able to improve trading points -- northwest-Torkham and southwestern Chaman -- and operationalize Ghulam Khan crossing, which had facilitated trade between Kabul and Tehran.

According to ACCI, Afghanistan had long been importing hundreds of containers via Pakistan's Karachi port annually but that has now fallen considerably with Kabul developing alternate routes such as Iran's Chabahar port and growing trade with Iran, Central Asia and Turkey.

Need for mutual understanding

Pakistan's longtime rival India has recently launched its air-cargo service for Afghanistan, which would help it reduce border issues with Islamabad.

Islamabad allows only Afghan exports to India through its northeastern Wagha border but it does not permit exports from India meant for Afghanistan.

Making things further complicated, Afghan President last week in New Delhi announced that his country would not provide road access to Pakistan for trade with Central Asian states unless it was given trade access to India by Islamabad.

The Afghan government has also imposed regulatory duties on various Pakistan products which helped similar Iranian and Indian goods to replace Pakistani items.

Islamabad and Kabul have recently imposed ban on entry of each others' goods transport to their respective territories following the expiry of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade Agreement (APTA).

Enjoying the trade volume heavily in its favor with a ratio of 80-20, Pakistan exports rice, petroleum products, cement, flour, pharmaceutical products, vegetables, leather products, plastic articles, chemical products, transport equipment, textiles and wheat. While, it imports fruits -- pomegranates and grapes -- and hand-knitted carpets from the landlocked country.

The recent diplomatic stand-off and increase in import duty have badly affected Afghan fruits exports to Pakistan as well.

Fruit sellers from southern Kandahar province last week announced they would stop exporting fresh fruits to Pakistan in protest against hike in import duty.

Afghanistan was earning up to \$2 billion per annum from transit trade services provided to Pakistan for the Central Asian states, but the Kabul government believes the losses it sustains because of Pakistani government not allowing Afghan trucks bring goods from India are greater than this profit.

"The way forward is mutual understanding; Pakistan has fruits such as mango, banana and other items for which Afghanistan and the Central Asia are main markets.

"Similarly, for Afghanistan's grapes, pomegranates, marble and other items Pakistan is the nearest and most easily accessible market," Alakozay said.

*Shadi Khan Saif contributed to this story from Kabul, Afghanistan. (VoA)

(13) Drug Addiction ...

the counter narcotics minister to provide a special protection department for addicted women separate from their families so they should be trained in vocational skills.

Abdul Majid Samim, a resident of Shiberghan city, accused the government of negligence in controlling poppy cultivation. He said the government in the past distributed fertilizers and improved seeds to farmers but it stopped doing so in recent years.

At the end of the meeting, the counter-narcotics minister said: "We would set up poultry farms for 100 women as well as build 200 green houses for growing non-seasonal vegetables in Jawzjan next year."

Creating 100 grape gardens in Jawzjan is part of the ministry's program for the next year, she said.

"If the governor's house allocates us land for building a shelter for drug addicts, we are ready to work on this project," she said.

"We do not rely only on our and our partners' efforts, therefore we would do more for farmers and those affected by drugs," she said.

Zarghona Hashemi, provincial counter-narcotics director, told Pajhwok Afghan News that the new building for the department was constructed in 1/4 acre of land and the project cost 11 million afghanis.

She said the new building resolved problems they earlier faced like lack of space. (Pajhwok)

(14) NGO Organizing ...

press would also come under discussion, along with issues like health, education, and human rights.

Pugwash, an international group that touts a tradition of "dialogue across divides" and has received a Nobel Peace Prize in 1995, has previously organized several similar conferences between Taliban and Afghan government and civil society members.

The confusion about Pugwash's involvement was likely the result of interviews in the local media and in VOA's Pashto Service by one of the attendees, Ziaulhaq Am-

arkhel. Amarkhel, who runs a civil society organization called Mili Subac (National Stability), is invited to the upcoming meeting. He has also participated in Pugwash organized meetings in the past.

Safi said APSO was going public with information about the conference, which was previously kept quiet, to counter inaccuracies or misconceptions swirling around the event.

"The organization is in direct contact with all parties of the conflict and no side, including the government, is putting any obstacles in its way," he said in response to rumors in Kabul that the Afghan government did not want the conference to occur and was requesting governments in the Gulf to withhold visas for the attendees.

Such rumors surged when the conference was postponed earlier this month, but APSO says the change in date was due to logistical issues and it plans to move forward with the meeting. (VoA)

(15) Drug Addicted...

drugs for sometimes. The girl said when they had no money to buy drugs; her mother forced her into prostitution and buys the drugs.

She told Pajhwok Afghan News reporter that her mother handed her over to a young man few months back for forced sex against 600 Afghanis and since then she was forced to sleep with a number of men.

"When stranger touches me; my entire body shakes in fear," said Zarmina, who is not the only victim but is among a number of girls who claim to have been forced into prostitution by their own mothers.

Marjan, 12 (not her real name), is another teenager who herself is addicted to drugs for sometimes, says it was her mother who made her addict and often handed her over to men for sex by force.

With her innocent face, Marjan said her dependence to drugs also forced her to compromise for exploitative sexual practices with people. "When for the first time a man took me for sex, he tightened a piece of cloth around my mouth and then tied my legs and hands. I felt unconscious due to the pain and when came to senses, I could not move due to weakness," she recalled.

According to the counter-narcotics department of Herat province, 50,000 to 60,000 people are addicted to drugs in Herat; with a 13 percent of them are women. (Pajhwok)

(16) First All-Women ...

The number of our customers is growing every day," said Shakela, a staff in the restaurant.

Some residents of Balk said they found the restaurant a safe place for women.

"We feel as if we are as safe as at home when we visited this restaurant," said Mubina, a resident of Balkh.

"Women need these places in order to have food in a safe and free place where we can stay happy and enjoy dinner or lunch with our friends," said Farzana, a resident of Balkh.

Working in the community for women has its own headache. Common traditions in society and security threats are the issues that have always been the hindrance ahead of women.

The owner of the restaurant meanwhile said she has plans to open a library at the restaurant in order to help women read their favorite books. (Tolonews)

(17) Khost Governor ...

reference signature of Khairi. Dost said his letter was signed at 9:00am and Malang's at 2:00pm. "The Human Resources Department formally introduced me to the Sports Department," he said.

But Malang said the governor rejected Dost's appointment for some reasons and termed him (Malang) a suitable candidate. Meanwhile, some supporters of Ghulam Dost erected a protest tent in front of the Sports Department, opposing Malang's appointment.

The protestors locked entrance doors to the sports department. (Pajhwok)

(18) Another Faryab ...

Ghor promised the district education director's partners would also be arrested as soon as possible. In the past four months, Akbar becomes the fourth government official to be arrested by the attorney office.

Before Akbar, the provincial education director, provincial human resources head and Kohistan education director have been arrested on corruption and embezzlement charges. (Pajhwok)

(19) Green Zone ...

boy who gained access through an adjacent park, security sources confirmed.

According to the sources, one of the gates that leads to 14th Street, which was always kept locked, was recently opened by guards working in the area who used it as a short cut to the main road.

The Green Zone is a highly fortified area that is enclosed by high T-walls and gun turrets. Limited access points are heavily guarded and only people living and working in the area are allowed to enter.

The area houses numerous embassies, guesthouses for foreigners and some private companies and a few government offices. However, Tuesday's suicide bomber was able to access the area from the main Wazir Akbar Khan road. (Tolonews)