

(1) Khalilzad to...

Javed Bajwa and discussed issues around regional security and the ongoing peace efforts in Afghanistan, Pakistani media reported.

"During the meeting overall regional security situation with particular reference to ongoing Afghan reconciliation process were discussed. The visiting dignitary appreciated Pakistan's efforts towards peace process, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a press release on Friday, April 6.

Khalilzad who visited Islamabad as part of his multi-nation trip on Afghan peace also met with Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that Ambassador Khalilzad briefed the Foreign Minister on the outcome of Doha talks and his recent engagements in the region, Pakistan's Foreign Ministry and that he also shared updates on his meetings in Afghanistan and the dynamics of the intra-Afghan dialogue.

Qureshi, while appreciating his efforts, reiterated Pakistan's commitment to the peace process.

He said that intra-Afghan dialogue is a vital component of the reconciliation process.

Qureshi said that Pakistan wishes well for the peace and stability in Afghanistan which would directly benefit Pakistan's own vision for economic and human development.

Khalilzad also had delegation level talks with Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua. He was accompanied by an interagency delegation. Janjua was assisted by senior officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense. According to the statement, Janjua briefed Khalilzad about a telephonic conversation between Qureshi and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

She informed about their mutual interest in further progress on Afghanistan peace efforts and that they agreed to remain engaged to pursue the reconciliation process.

This comes as Khalilzad, during his five-day stay in Kabul, met with Afghan leaders, politicians, civil society members, youths, women and tribal elders where they exchanged views on Afghanistan's peace process.

A day before his trip to Pakistan, Khalilzad said Pakistan should change its policy towards Afghanistan; otherwise, "Islamabad and Washington's ties will not improve".

He said made the remarks while talking to a number of youths from Bamiyan, Jawzjan and Parwan provinces in a video conference. (Tolo news)

(2) Daudzai Casts...

A special technical and budgetary team has been proposed and approved by the president but there might be changes within the team.

Twenty-five hundred representatives from political parties, families of martyrs, ulema, youth, artists, civil society activists, Afghan refugees and provinces would participate in the jirga, including 30 percent women, said Daudzai.

Provincial council members and winning Wolesi Jirga candidates who had been awarded acknowledgment certificates by the Election Commission would be among the participants.

"It is president's order that no Afghan should be deprived of the Peace Loya Jirga, being Afghans the Taliban would be also invited but there would more discussion on this subject due its political angle," he said.

Referring his meeting with US Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation Process Zalmay Khalilzad, he said some questions regarding the ongoing talks had been settled during the meeting but insisted some questions and ambiguities remained.

Referring to his meeting with political parties, Daudzai said all recommendations and objections of the political parties would be considered. (Pajhwok)

(3) Afghan Hindus...

13 of them, including Afghan Sikh leader Avtar Singh Khalsa.

"My father who headed the Afghan Sikhs and Hindus Council and was a teacher lost his life in that incident. Our representatives from Ghazni, our elders and prominent young people

were killed in that incident," said Narender Singh Khalsa, son of Avtar Singh Khalsa.

Khalsa was the only candidate for parliamentary elections from the Hindus and Sikhs community. His son ran for parliamentary elections after his father's death.

Royender Singh Khalsa, daughter of Khalsa, said they are not only faced with insecurity but they are suffering from injustices in society.

She said they want a peaceful life and that they support peace efforts.

"My two sisters were killed in the past and my uncle was killed when the Kochis attacked our Dharamshala. What has remained for us in this city that we should love it and live for it? Nothing has left for us, our elders have been killed and now only widows and orphans have remained," Royender said.

Yusuf Pashtun, an advisor to President Ashraf Ghani, said at the ceremony that the Hindus and Sikhs have been living in Afghanistan for long time and that they have deep roots here.

"There is no doubt that we accepted Islam, but we are from one tribe, we are brother and we should continue this brotherhood," said Pashtun.

An investigation by TOLONews from last June shows that close to 99 percent of former Hindu and Sikh citizens of Afghanistan have left the country over the past three decades.

The investigation revealed that the Sikh and Hindu population number was 220,000 in the 1980s. That number dropped sharply to 15,000 when the mujahedeen were in power during the 1990s and remained at that level during the Taliban regime. It is now estimated that only 1,350 Hindus and Sikhs remain in the country.

According to the findings, the main reasons behind their departure include religious discrimination and government's neglect of the minority group, during the Taliban era in particular.

The TOLONews findings indicate that where Hindus and Sikhs were once very active in business within the country, they are now faced with increasing poverty.

The findings also show that Hindus and Sikhs had suffered huge setbacks after the Taliban regime collapsed in 2001. This forced a large number of them to leave the countryside and to migrate to Kabul for a living. As a result, there are no Sikh or Hindu citizens living in Helmand and Kandahar provinces.

Despite their problems, remaining Hindu and Sikh residents have said they are trying to continue with their lives in Afghanistan as they are optimistic about the country's future. (Tolo news)

(4) US Eyes Reducing...

US diplomats posted in Kabul in 2020, according to three US officials familiar with internal deliberations as quoted by Foreign Policy.

It may also advance plans to reduce the number of diplomats posted to the US Embassy in Iraq, the report said.

This comes as the US and Taliban agreed in draft during the Qatar talks in mid-March on foreign forces withdrawal and counterterrorism assurances.

According to the report, in February, NPR reported on a leaked internal document from the US Embassy in Kabul that called the outpost too big and urged a "comprehensive review" of its size, though the document did not outline the scale of the proposed cuts.

"We are regularly hearing from Africa that we are outnumbered by the Chinese diplomats working on economic or other issues 4 or 5 to 1," Foreign Policy quoted a senior State Department official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "We cannot continue to concentrate all that money in Afghanistan and Iraq."

It's a matter of "where can we best deploy our very limited resources to avoid losing further ground to major competitors who are rising at a speed that we can barely comprehend," the official said as quoted by Foreign Policy.

The Foreign Policy report says that the State Department does not publicly discuss precise numbers of personnel at embassies or consulates for security reasons, according to a State Depart-

ment spokesperson.

"The Department regularly reviews our presence at our overseas missions to reflect changing circumstances and our policy goals. While we do not discuss personnel numbers, our embassies engage in regular reviews to ensure that they are appropriately staffed," quoted by Foreign Policy the spokesperson said in an email response to questions on proposed cuts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The US Embassy in Afghanistan is not a traditional embassy. Reducing the size of the embassy would be a complicated logistical undertaking with significant security considerations, the report said.

"You have to think of the embassy in Afghanistan not just as a place people go to work but more like a college campus ... in a very insecure environment," said Laurel Miller, a former US diplomat who worked on Afghanistan and is now at the International Crisis Group, as quoted by Foreign Policy.

"The embassy is going to have to be ahead of the curve on a military drawdown, not behind the curve on a military drawdown," she added.

Late last year, conflicting reports emerged about Trump's decision to withdraw a significant number of troops from Afghanistan. However, the US military officials and diplomats later said they have not received any order to withdraw troops from Afghanistan.

US has 14,000 troops in Afghanistan as part of the NATO's Resolute Support mission which includes training, advising and assisting the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces in their fight against militants. (Tolo news)

(5) Imran Says...

you as our brothers. I raise my hand and pray to Allah that people of Afghanistan get peace. The kind of devastation that has been going on in Afghanistan since 40 years, forget I am a Pakistani or a Muslim, I am a human being, and I seek peace for them," Khan said referring to war and problems faced by the people of Afghanistan.

"I said, when elections took place in Pakistan in 1977 and the people did not accept polls, so as a brother I am saying, if you want to bring peace by way of elections then our experience says that you should get the elections done by such an interim government whom they can consider a neutral empire, so that they are capable of accepting their decision," he said.

"If post the election they don't accept the elections, then problems would arise, and the loss would be that of the people of Afghanistan and we here in Pakistan would be saddened too. This is why I am giving you a brotherly suggestion. If you don't want to take it, don't," he said. (Pajhwok)

(6) Taliban 'Suffer...

"The Afghan Defense and Security Forces are carrying out clearance and air operations led by the First Deputy Minister of Defense Yasin Zia in Bala Murghab and Ab Kamari districts in Badghis which have inflicted heavy losses to the enemy," said Qais Mangal, spokesman for Ministry of Defense.

He said the operations are ongoing and will continue until the areas are cleared of militants.

This is the second time in a month that Bala Murghab comes under attack by militants. Last time, the district came under Taliban attack early in March and was under siege for more than two weeks, leaving more than two dozen security forces dead and almost 28 of them gone missing.

This comes as the conflicts have intensified in different parts of the country with the arrival of the spring season - which is deemed as a usual fighting season for insurgents fighting the Afghan government forces.

President Ashraf Ghani on April 2 approved the annual security plan which encompasses boosting security and fighting insurgents. (Tolo news)

(7) Consultative Peace...

comprise of 23 sections to represent political parties, civil society, tribal elders, and members of the national

council.

In the meantime, a number of political elders and residents of the country have urged the government leaders to consider transparency in expenditure of the budget of Jirga and respect its outcome regarding reconciliation process. (KP)

(8) 3 Killed, 19 Wounded...

A 22-year-old girl, a woman and a third individual were killed and 19 others, including four women and two children, were wounded.

According to Khogyani, the injured also included five men, two traffic policemen, three border policemen and three National Directorate of Security (NDS) personnel.

The injured were evacuated to the zonal hospital and two of them were said to be in critical condition, he added.

Eyewitnesses said the first blast happened near a police check-point and the second occurred when more police arrived in the area.

Bahram Khan, a resident of Khewa district and a rickshaw driver, said he was taking two women on the road when the blast took place. One woman was killed and the second wounded and Bahram were injured.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the twin blasts. (Pajhwok)

(9) Residents Cooperate...

security forces stationed in Dand Aw Patan said the Astia village has better security compared with other villages in the district.

Jalal Sarhadi, member of the Afghan Border Police, said he has had missions in different parts of Paktia but according to him, maintaining security in Astia village is easy compared with other remote parts in the province.

"I have not seen the empathy, love and the cooperation that they have with us in anywhere else and all these make me very emotional," said Sarhadi. (Tolo news)

(10) 33 Taliban...

Syee areas of Ghazni City, the provincial capital, on Friday night.

In the ensuing clash, four policemen and seven insurgents were killed and six policemen and three militants were wounded, he said.

Noori added separately around 20 militants were killed and their 50 different types of landmines recovered and defused during a Special Forces' raid in Gilan district.

In Kandahar, three Taliban insurgents were killed and three others wounded during a firefight in Makwan area of Zheri district, the governor's spokesman said.

Aziz Ahmad Azizi told Pajhwok that three policemen were also wounded during the overnight clash.

In Zabul, three militants were killed and a fourth wounded when a foreign forces drone targeted their vehicle, the governor's spokesman, Gul Salam Sial, said.

The Taliban have not yet commented about these clashes. (Pajhwok)

(11) Policeman Kills...

committed the crime due to family violence while police had launched manhunt to arrest him.

Gul Mohammad, the resident of locality, said Policeman Zarwar Jan on Friday evening killed his wife and niece by firing bullet on them. After committing the crime, he joined the Taliban.

The resident of Husainkhel village who wished to go unnamed said the Taliban arrested Jan in connection to the killing of family members.

The Taliban have not yet commented about the incident. (Pajhwok)

(12) Qatar Wins, Regional...

It brings Qatar closer to FIFA decision-making for the first time since 2011, when Mohamed bin Hammam was suspended - and later banned for life - for financial wrongdoing months after the gas-rich emirate won its World Cup hosting rights.

Saturday's results continue Qatar's winning run in 2019, after its national team was the surprise winner of the Asian Cup in February, beating Saudi Arabia and host nation UAE before lifting the trophy in Abu Dhabi.

Saudi Arabia and UAE have led a diplomatic and logistical boycott of Qa-

tar for almost two years. The political standoff has included exerting pressure on Qatar to share some World Cup games, likely with Kuwait and Oman, in an expanded 48-team tournament.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino told AFC members Saturday that the world soccer body and Qatar are still analyzing the prospect of adding another 16 teams.

"It will be a nice achievement if the first World Cup with 48 teams is played in Asia," said Infantino, who has argued that extra teams will accelerate soccer development worldwide. He will preside over a June 3 FIFA Council meeting and June 5 congress of 211 member federations in Paris to decide.

FIFA has consistently said Qatar must agree to any tournament expansion, and Al Mohammadi can represent his country's expected opposition in the council discussions. The main business in Kuala Lumpur was for the AFC to re-elect its president Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa of Bahrain - in his absence - for four more years unopposed after Al Mohammadi and a candidate from the UAE withdrew last month. Sheikh Salman, who is also the senior vice-president of FIFA, could not attend after the death of his mother this week. Infantino led delegates in observing a few minutes of silence to mourn and show that "we are with him." Speaking on behalf of the Bahraini royal, newly-elected FIFA Council member Praful Patel said: "I am sure that with your continued support and solidarity, we can all take Asian football to even greater heights." (Fox News)

(13) Is America Losing...

claiming Beijing could capture any data transferred through Huawei devices "at will." But both Germany and the UK refused to bar Huawei from participating in tenders, with Berlin publicly rebuking Washington by saying that it has its "own security standards."

The impact will be massive: the super-fast network will power not just telephones and computers, but likely any piece of sophisticated electronic equipment in your home for years to come. Did Washington fail because the case made by its officials appeared to be based entirely on evidence-free hypotheses, to follow other red scares of various hues? Or was it because the US has no 5G provider of its own to match up with the might of Huawei, on which countries around the world have become increasingly reliant? (RT)

(14) Love, Death & Robots...

Certainly, Obama has been much better than his successor at buttering up the German leader, giving her a Presidential Medal of Honor in 2011 - while Trump famously chucked Starburst candies in her direction during a G7 summit. What did they really talk about during their meeting? Obama could have congratulated Merkel on finally admitting that the US was running its drone warfare operations out of Ramstein Airbase - how brilliant of her to drop that bombshell during Trump's term and thus focus popular anger on him, as if the drones hadn't been coming and going for over a decade. Or perhaps he just advised her on how to relax and learn to love Germany being swamped with refugees created by the wars his administration began or continued. (RT)

(15) Erdogan Accuses US...

said "free and fair elections are essential for any democracy, and this means acceptance of legitimate election results are essential" during a briefing on Tuesday.

EU spokeswoman Maja Kocijancic on Monday said Brussels expected elected local representatives to be able "to exercise their mandate freely and in line with the principles of the Council of Europe (rights group) to which Turkey is of course party."

Andrew Dawson, head of a delegation from the Council of Europe in Turkey to observe the vote, said on Monday his team was "not fully convinced that Turkey currently has the free and fair electoral environment which is necessary for genuinely democratic elections in line with European values and principles." (AFP)