

(1) Pakistan Refrains...

The spokesman noted that Pakistan has arranged the ongoing U.S.-Taliban talks by bringing the insurgent group to the negotiating table. "This has been acknowledged by the U.S.," he added. Islamabad has long maintained that continued use of military force against the Taliban or attempts to treat the insurgent group as a "non-Afghan entity" would not help find a political settlement to years of bloodshed in Afghanistan.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, while testifying before a Congressional committee last week, defended the Trump administration's dialogue with the Taliban.

"With respect to why we are talking to the Taliban, they control a significant amount of resources. And to get the reconciliation we need, to take down the violence level, the Taliban are going to have a say," Pompeo said.

U.S. and Afghan officials have until recently blamed Pakistan alone for covertly sheltering Taliban leaders and helping them in sustaining cross-border insurgent activities in Afghanistan — charges Islamabad denies. In recent years, however, Moscow, Beijing, Doha and neighboring Iran have increased their contacts with the Taliban. Afghan officials have also regularly accused Tehran in recent years of arming the insurgent group.

Russia hosted an international conference last November where it also invited Taliban delegates and representatives of the Afghan government. Moscow claimed the event as a major success for its diplomacy because it was the first time insurgent officials appeared in a public gathering since a U.S.-led foreign military coalition ousted the Taliban from power in 2001. (VoA)

(2) Ex-President...

after a falling out over who should attend. It would have marked the first time that Taliban and Kabul government officials sat together.

The talks, which were to start Friday in Doha, where the Taliban maintain an office, were considered a significant first step toward finding a negotiated end to the war in Afghanistan, America's longest conflict, and the eventual withdrawal of U.S. troops from the country.

The Taliban had previously refused to hold direct talks with the Afghan government, calling it a puppet of the U.S. They subsequently gave in to pressure and agreed to talks that included Kabul representatives, though they said they would recognize them only as ordinary Afghans, rather than government officials or ministers.

On Thursday, however, Qatar's Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies, which sponsors the talks, announced the postponement, saying "this is unfortunately necessary to further build consensus as to who should participate in the conference."

In an interview with The Associated Press, Karzai would not blame either side for the cancellation, instead urging the United States to "put force behind it to make it (talks) happen."

He also praised Washington's peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad as "the very best person for the job" of resolving the Afghan crisis.

"I believe the United States wants some sort of settlement in Afghanistan," Karzai told The Associated Press. "I do believe that, but I want the U.S. to be much clearer about its roadmap... to do everything it can to make the process move forward."

Plans for the talks went awry when the Qatari hosts said the government side could bring 243 people to the talks. Their lists differed from Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's list of 250 people, which included many more women, according to a senior government official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media. (AA)

(3) IEC to Use...

The use of biometric system in voter registration process has been mentioned in the amended election law in order to provide the ground for transparent elections.

Ibrahimi said the election commission has not made any attempt to supply more biometric devices for the upcoming polls.

"If organizations or companies have the ability to make available internet connections in all parts of the country, we will be able to use biometric technology online," said Ibrahimi.

Changing the electoral system from the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) to Single Transferable Vote (STV) is another commitment made by the election commission to the government and the people.

Members of two electoral monitoring organizations said they doubt the IEC's ability to deliver promises on use of biometric system and other activities related to the presidential elections — scheduled for September 28.

"The amendments made to the election law cannot be implemented by the commission," said Marwa Amini, a spokesperson for Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan. "The (election) commission does not have the capacity to hold elections in six months' time using multi-dimensional representative (MDR) system."

"The duty of the election commissions is to work on electoral affairs in accordance with the election law and have better preparation for holding transparent elections," said Naem Ayubzada, CEO of Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan. (Tolo news)

(4) Ashgabat, Kabul...

"The leaders of the countries express satisfaction with the beginning of the implementation of the five-sided agreement between Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey and Turkmenistan on transit and transport cooperation dated November 15, 2017 (the Lazurit, or Lapis Lazuli Corridor Agreement)," the statement says.

The parties also reaffirmed support for the proposal to hold a meeting of transport ministers and heads of the customs services of the state parties to the Agreement concluded in Ashgabat in May 2019.

The Lapis Lazuli transit project envisions construction of railways and highways connecting the city of Torghundi in Afghanistan's Herat Province with Ashgabat, and further with the Caspian port of Turkmenbashi. The corridor will continue to Baku, then go through Tbilisi to Ankara with branches in Poti and Batumi, and continue from Ankara to Istanbul.

The budget of the project, which aims to facilitate transit logistics and simplify customs procedures, is estimated at \$2 billion. The large-scale project is designed to increase the economic integration of the region and the volume of trade. (Trend)

(5) U.S. Envoy...

to seize the moment and put things back on track by agreeing to a participant list that speaks for all Afghans."

The collapse of the meeting before it had even started, described as a "fiasco" by one senior Western official, laid bare the tensions that have hampered moves towards opening formal peace negotiations.

Khalilzad, a veteran Afghan-born diplomat, has held a series of meetings with Taliban representatives but the insurgents have so far refused to talk to the Western-backed government in Kabul, which they dismiss as a "puppet" regime.

The Doha meeting was intended to prepare the ground for possible future talks by building familiarity among Taliban officials and representatives of the Afghan state created after the U.S.-led campaign that toppled the Taliban government in 2001. A similar encounter was held in Moscow in February.

President Ashraf Ghani's office blamed Qatari authorities for the cancellation, saying they had authorized a list of participants that differed from the one proposed by Kabul, "which meant disrespect for the national will of the Afghans."

"This act is not acceptable for the people of Afghanistan," it said in a statement on Friday.

Sultan Barakat, director of the Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies in Qatar, which had been facilitating the meeting, said there was no disagreement about the agenda.

"Rather, there is insufficient agreement around participation and representation to enable the conference to be a success," he tweeted.

Preparations had already been undermined by disagreements on the government side about who should attend, as well as by suspicions among rival politicians ahead of presidential elections scheduled for September.

The Taliban derided the agreed list of 250 participants as a "wedding party". Some senior opposition figures who had been included refused to attend.

The Taliban also objected to Ghani's comments to a meeting of delegates that they would be representing the Afghan nation and the Afghan government, a statement that went against the insurgents' refusal to deal with the Kabul administration. (Reuters)

(6) Putin, Rahmon...

Russian president is hailing a decision to hold another meeting between the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Afghanistan in Bishkek on April 18-19.

Putin and Rahmon also announced plans to further boost the military cooperation between the two nations.

Rahmon promised his country would continue to provide necessary assistance for implementation of a 2012 agreement between Russian and Tajikistan on the status of a Russian military base on Tajikistan's territory. (Pajhwok)

(7) 47pc of...

Herat, Nangarhar, Balkh and Kunduz). They asked both mandatory and optional questions but 19 were main questions.

War The findings of the report show 55 percent of people believe the country's ongoing affairs were moving in a wrong direction, 33 percent said things were moving in the right direction while 12 percent declined to comment in this regard.

More than 34 percent of the interviewees said insecurity would increase in the country, 31 percent said security would improve, over 23 percent said the situation would remain the same and nearly 12 percent others did not comment.

Nearly 66 percent of people did not feel safe in their areas, over 71 percent believed foreign forces were the cause of insecurity and civilian casualties and 81 percent others did not feel safe from criminal incidents.

Hekmatullah Zaland, a researcher with CSRS, said peace was essential for putting an end to conflict related problems.

"The aim of this investigative report is to inform the country's policymakers about the country's situation and make an effective policy for peace and war in the future."

Zaland said the survey was not a fundamental scrutiny of the situation, but it was conducted for collecting figures and the level of public opinions.

He said the conflict had intensified and casualties among the warring sides and civilians had increased under the national unity government.

"More than 10,000 civilians have suffered casualties each year after 2014, according to registered figures, 43,866 people suffered casualties from 2015 until late 2018, of these figures, 14,285 people were killed and 29,581 others wounded," he said.

He said the Afghan government did not provide an accurate report of the Afghan forces casualties. The national unity government had requested Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) to keep Afghan forces casualties secret, he added. Zaland said their findings showed around 22,000 Afghan soldiers had been killed until 2014. But according to President Ashraf Ghani, more than 45,000 Afghan soldiers lost their lives under the national unity government.

He said 75 foreign troops were killed in 2014 while 77 were killed and 328 others wounded in the conflict during the entire period of the national unity government in Afghanistan.

No organs has registered the exact figures of casualties of Afghan and foreign forces.

He said according to the Afghan government security institutions, in the first year of the National Unity Government, 7,212 militants were killed and around 4397 others injured.

Overall, the aggressive strategy of the National Unity Government and political, religious and other types of pressures on the Taliban did not help curtail the ongoing fight and instead turned it bloodiest.

Peace According to the report, 47 percent of the participants believed a peace deal between the government and the Taliban would be possible while 39 percent did not believe a peace deal would be possible.

In addition, nearly 70 percent participants said the government was not taking sincere steps towards peace and reconciliation, 22 percent believed the government was making sincere effort for peace while nine percent shared different views. (Pajhwok)

(8) Afghanistan...

in a single day, the RSF says in a report on its website.

Many others were constantly threatened by the various parties to the conflict. The war imposed by the Taliban and Daesh and constant abuses by warlords and corrupt political officials constitutes a permanent threat to journalists, the media and press freedom in Afghanistan.

According to RSF, Women journalists are a favorite target and are especially vulnerable in those regions where fundamentalist propaganda is heeded. The concern is growing that basic freedoms, including press freedom, could be sacrificed in the course of the international efforts to restore peace in Af-

ghanistan, the RSF says, adding that in response to this threat, the RSF-backed Centre for the Protection of Afghan Women Journalists has launched several campaigns for the protection of the rights of women journalists as a precondition for peace.

The experience of the past 17 years confirms that peace and security are what the Afghan people want most, but they cannot be achieved and guaranteed without free and independent media and without guarantees for journalists' safety, the RSF says. (Tolo news)

(9) We Need to...

"Mr. Karzai's team and I myself want to emphasize that we need to send an inclusive national united team which will include the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, but from a united position, but negotiating teams in the world has never been too large, but they included a limited number of people with expertise to engage in political talks which we can differentiate," said Spanta.

But, NATO's civilian representative to Afghanistan Nicolas Kay has said that the meeting in Qatar would be a good opportunity for peace in Afghanistan.

"I believe that Doha Institute conference is a very important opportunity for Afghans from all walks of life, political actors, but civil society, women as well to sit together with the Taliban and at least establish some communications and some understanding on the issues that will need to be solved. The Doha Institute is not a negotiation, it is a conference, it is an opportunity for people to get together and exchange views and look to the future and make some recommendations. It is not a negotiation, so I do hope that before very long there will be a delegation going from Afghanistan to Doha," said Kay at the sideline of a lecture session on the European Union's Role in Supporting Afghan Peace Process which it was organized by the Afghan Institute of Strategic Studies (AISS).

Meanwhile, the EU Ambassador to Afghanistan Pierre Mayaudon said that meetings such as Qatar and Moscow are not a peace process, but he said that the EU is ready to cooperate in paving the way for peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

"It is not a peace process until it is a direct talk with the Afghan people and the government," said Mayaudon. "The Afghan peace process has most probably reached critical moment and we believe that it can be a moment also for Europe to bring progress and to facilitate the conclusion for peace agreement."

He said that the EU will not show flexibility towards making a deal on the gains Afghanistan has made over the past 18 years, especially, in areas of human rights, women's rights, the rights of the youths and minority rights.

This comes hours after the Afghan delegation's trip to Doha, Qatar, for talks with the Taliban was delayed for issues around the 250-member team's formation, sources confirmed. (Tolo news)

(10) Khalid, Andarabi...

security in Ghazni, adding that security situation had deteriorated and the Taliban suffered heavy losses in recent clashes. (Pajhwok)

(11) Taliban-Daesh...

arrived and we could not do anything but leave everything and seek a safer place," he said.

"I left the area with my other brothers. We were displaced due to Daesh clashes," said Shin Gul, a Kunar resident. Meanwhile, Kunar official said they have helped at least 2,000 families who have been displaced due to the conflicts between Taliban and Daesh.

"People are in fear. They fear that Taliban and Daesh will start another fighting. I want to assure them that we will end this war and our clearance operations are ongoing and we will provide them the ground to return to their homes and we will try to prevent people from being displaced," said Gul Mohammad Baidar, deputy governor of Kunar. A United Nations report from December 2018 shows that a chaotic and unpredictable security situation, combined with a severe drought, has prompted an almost doubling in the number of people in need compared to this time last year, newly displacing more than 550,000 civilians and pushing 3.3 million into emergency levels of food insecurity.

The report said that 6.3 million people require some form of humanitarian and protection assistance including 3.7 million in severe and major need due to a convergence of factors arising from exposure to escalating violence, forced displacement, the loss of essential livelihoods and limited access to basic services. (Tolo news)

(12) Mafia Groups to...

activities," the governor said. During the past two months, major security operations were conducted in Lalpura and Sherzad districts, he said, adding the Lalpura district had been completely cleared of insurgents and the operation in Sherzad was still underway.

After the armed opposition was suppressed, they resorted to magnetic bomb attacks, but security forces were able to arrest eight Daesh and Taliban men in connection with the blasts.

Miakhel said so far no mafia group or powerful individuals had created problems towards measures being taken by his administration but warned if anyone did so they would be dealt with sternly. (Pajhwok)

(13) Ecuador Turns...

that Interpol issue a Red Notice on the former foreign minister — who'd served under president Rafael Correa — which asks foreign countries to locate and provisionally arrest the fugitive, pending extradition. Known for his criticism of the Moreno government, the 64-year-old was especially vocal over the suspension of Assange's asylum at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, which resulted in his immediate arrest by the UK police. "Worldwide shame," he tweeted, after Assange's brutal arrest last week, accusing Moreno of violating the constitution and international law with his "betrayal" of the whistleblower. "We are victims of a fierce persecution that is carried out to hide the corruption of Moreno and his close circle," the renegade politician said in a twitter statement. "We are going to fight, to continue fighting, with our heads held high." (RT)

(14) Japan Using...

arranging for Trump to watch the final day of a sumo wrestling tournament on May 26 so he can present a trophy to the winner. Trump may also travel to a Japanese naval base in Yokosuka west of Tokyo to see a destroyer that has been refitted as Japan's first postwar aircraft carrier, Japanese officials and media reports said. Abe, experts say, is taking every opportunity to court Trump as Japan tries to stay out of the U.S. leader's crosshairs, unlike some other world leaders who have upset him on trade and other issues. (AP)

(15) Brunei Ranked...

and upload speeds however fell two ranks to 98th globally.

The sultanate recorded speeds of 16.51 Mbps and 11.40 Mbps for mobile downloads and uploads respectively, compared to the global average of 26.12 Mbps and 10.26 Mbps.

According to Speedtest.net, data for the index is compiled from hundreds of millions of tests taken by real people using Speedtest every month. (Xinhua)

(16) Thai King Confers...

They will travel to Chiang Rai and return to the Tham Luang cave on Monday to meet the boys and their coach.

"That's really exciting for us to go and see them and make sure they're well and see how they're doing after the rescue," Harris said.

Harris, a physician specializing in anesthesia, was responsible for sedating the boys before they were brought out one-by-one on a rescue stretcher through flooded tunnels. The pair were in January named Australians of the Year, one of Australia's highest honors.

King Vajiralongkorn has conferred various honors on 187 people in connection with the rescue, 113 of them foreigners including Tesla Inc Chief Executive Elon Musk, who were involved in the effort, according to the Royal Gazette in March. A former Thai navy diver died during the rescue. (Reuters)

(17) Ukraine Election...

himself isn't helping. He recently boasted that Poroshenko is his puppet, and "will do whatever he is told." It was probably just Kolomoysky's way of celebrating the court decision to return to his previously-nationalized Privat-Bank to him — but that certainly snarls up the already tangled puppet strings. Reality TV surrealism

Those were just the latest numbers in the gripping performance that the past 20 days have been for Ukrainian politics. They were jam-packed with scandalous gestures and flashy insults almost from day one — starting with Zelensky challenging Poroshenko to hold tonight's debate in the country's largest stadium, instead of a TV studio. Then they both took a doping test, having their blood checked for drugs and alcohol, which triggered a wave of outrage about Zelensky's choice of laboratory and sample-taker — a person who played a medic on one of the comedian's TV shows. (RT)