

**(1) IEC Announces...**

(voter) registration process and provide facilities for political parties, civil society organizations and international observers to monitor the election process," the statement read.

"President Ghani made it clear at the meeting that any outside influence, by anyone, including government employees, in the election process will be considered a crime and action will take," read the statement.

CEO Abdullah Abdullah also said at last week's Council of Ministers meeting that the IEC has been asked to announce the date for next year's polls. He said "there should be no uncertainty over the will of the NUG for holding of elections." (Tolo news)

**(2) Zakhilwal...**

progress and improvement and give a realistic picture of the situation in the important province," the ambassador said.

He would share the issue with President Ghani after thoroughly assessing the situation in the province. He would underline the need for serious steps to ensure the stability of Nangarhar. (Pajhwok)

**(3) IECC Refuses to...**

named Ibrahim who worked in police in Jalga district, were killed by Jabbar, a bodyguard and supporter of Imaq.

The female protestor, who carried her son's (Islamuddin) photograph, said, "We came here from a very remote area in order our voice is heard, no one in Baghlan hears our voice, I raised Islamuddin in backbreaking poverty but he was killed by Jabbar."

The three people asked officials concerned to hear their complaints regarding those killed by Jabbar.

They tried to register their complaint with the IECC, but the commission refused to do so and said the time for complaints registration had expired.

Pajhwok tried to seek comment from Imaq and Jabbar about the complaints, but a contact could not be established with them. (Pajhwok)

**(4) Kabul Yet to...**

unchanged from last quarter. On the other hand, the militants lost control or influence in three districts.

Afghan forces may have grown in size since last quarter to 314,242 personnel, but they have lost 8,500 personnel since April 2017 and 5,353 since April 2016, SIGAR said. (Pajhwok)

**(5) Roadside Bomb...**

district at 4:30 am, Mehri told AFP.

Around a dozen of the wounded -- mostly members of the Hazara ethnic group who tend to follow Shiite Islam in the Sunni-dominated country -- were taken to hospital in Herat.

Among them was Mohammad Zahir, 40, who had been travelling with his newly married daughter to visit relatives in Kabul.

"The bus was driving on the main road when I heard a big bang," Zahir told AFP.

"When I woke up I found myself in the hospital. I still don't know what's happened to my daughter."

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani condemned the attack.

"Harming civilians, especially scholars, children and women, is against the Ulema Council's (Afghanistan's top religious leaders) fatwa," Ghani said in a statement, referring to the group's proclamation in June that suicide

attacks and explosions were "haram" or prohibited in Islam.

The Farah explosion came after 22 passengers travelling on a Kabul-bound bus in the eastern province of Paktia were kidnapped by gunmen on Monday night, according to provincial police chief Raz Mohammad Mandozai.

Mandozai blamed the Taliban for the kidnapping and said a rescue operation had been launched.

A photo posted on social media purportedly of the bus in Farah showed the vehicle's blackened shell and dozens of men at the scene.

Some were peering inside while others were walking through the wreckage. A number of emergency vehicles could be seen.

Civilians have borne the brunt of the 17-year conflict and improvised explosive devices, such as remotely detonated or pressure-plate bombs, are one of the main cause of casualties.

Such IEDs caused 877 civilian casualties in the first half of 2018 -- 232 deaths and 645 wounded -- accounting for 17 percent of overall civilian casualties, the latest UN figures show.

A total of 1,692 civilians were killed in the conflict during the first six months of this year. Another 3,430 were wounded.

That was the highest number of civilian fatalities for the period since the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan began keeping records in 2009.

Militant attacks and suicide bombs were the leading causes of death.

The Taliban has a strong presence across western Afghanistan, particularly in Farah. It launched a major attempt to take over the provincial capital in May, triggering intense fighting with US and Afghan forces.

After a day-long battle the Taliban fighters were forced to the outskirts of the city. (AFP)

**(6) Watchdogs...**

will be announced by next week. IECC chief Abdul Aziz Aryayee last week said the commission has so far received over 200 complaints relating to candidates having ties with armed groups. He said the names of candidates proven to have these links will be dropped from the election list within a week.

"The previous list in a way was not accepted, it was decided that information must be gathered regarding the individuals from the concerned institutions and take decisions based on the information," said Rouhani.

The IECC is expected to disqualify candidates who are involved in security issues, coordinated crimes, drug smuggling, and misuse of public and private assets.

The IECC is scheduled to wrap up its assessment of complaints filed against the candidates by August 2.

The committee will be led by the head of the IECC Abdul Aziz Aryayee, and members of the commission will be from the Ministry of Interior (MoI), Ministry of Defense (MoD), National Directorate of Security (NDS) and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), said Ali Reza Rouhani, the IECC's spokesman.

Meanwhile, a video has gone viral on social media that shows Mullah Tarakhkhal, a nominee for parliament from Kabul, on a phone call reportedly with Masoom Stanekzai, the head of the National Directorate of Security (NDS). In the video he warns that he will resist if his name is dropped from the list of candidates.

Tarakhkhal said: "The people decided to close roads so that government employees could not attend work. But I told the people that I will not (condone) that. This is our government and our system, and these people have gathered in Shash Darak to hold talks with you," he said.

The IECC tasked to investigate reports of links between some candidates and illegal armed groups has called on security institutions to submit their information within 24 hours about the candidates against whom complaints have been lodged. (Tolo news)

**(7) US Warns...**

of up to \$12 billion.

An IMF spokeswoman said: "We can confirm that we have so far not received a request for a Fund arrangement from Pakistan and that we have not had discussions with the authorities about any possible intentions."

Pakistan is struggling to avert a currency crisis that has presented the new government with its biggest challenge. Many analysts and business leaders expect that another IMF bailout, the second in five years, will be needed to plug an external financing gap.

Pakistan, which already has around \$5 billion in loans from China and its banks to fund major infrastructure projects, had sought another \$1 billion in loans to stabilize its plummeting foreign currency reserves.

Officials in the Trump administration, including US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, have criticized China's infrastructure lending to developing countries, arguing that this has saddled them with unsustainable debt.

The \$57 China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a series of port and rail improvements associated with China's One Belt One Road infrastructure push, has led to massive imports of Chinese equipment and materials, swelling Pakistan's current account deficit.

Pakistan has had 14 IMF financing programs since 1980, according to fund data, including a \$6.7 billion three-year loan program in 2013. (Reuters)

**(8) President Praises...**

plan for creation of a separate school and tasked Abdul Wahid Qatali, head of the Presidential Administrative Affairs, Nadema-Sahar, head of the technical and professional studies and Javed Rasouli, head of the Central Statistical Organization, to cooperate in provision of required technology for the school.

The president hailed the robotics team's performance and added more science schools needed would be built in provinces.

The Afghan girls robotics team took home a top prize at Robotex, Europe's largest robotics festival and placed 114th overall (higher than the teams from the US and UK) in competitions in the US and received a medal for "courageous achievement." (Pajhwok)

**(9) Helmand's Melon...**

support in return.

"I cultivated melon on 4.5 acres, spending a lot of money. But today, I transported only 300 melons to the market," he said.

"I had to sell the produce at an all-time low rate for two reasons: One, the fruit was about to rot, Two, there isn't any storage facility in the market," he complained. He had to be content with 15,000 afghanis,

Syed Gul, another farmer, said: "This year, the crops were damaged by a drought and most of watermelon and melon orchards didn't do well and were parched

due to the drought," he said.

(Pajhwok)

**(10) Artists Promote...**

a show about a man who had lost a family member in an attack but still hoped for peace.

In Kabul city, where security threats are high, people rarely participate at events in crowded areas. However, this week's exhibition, "On the Way to Fly" drew an impressive crowd.

An amateur painter, Omid Noor, who is also a medical student, said he really enjoyed seeing the paintings as they "spoke a thousand words about people's passion and desire for peace and stability."

"I want to bring a smile to the faces of people through my paintings," Noor said.

Seeing people's responses, one organizer of the event said they will continue their efforts to hold more cultural events aimed at passing on happiness to the people.

The exhibition was organized by the Afghanistan National Gallery and the Garden of Peace, a cultural organization in Kabul. (Tolo news)

### Iran's Rouhani Says It's Up to Europe to Save Nuclear Deal

LONDON - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Tuesday the U.S. withdrawal from a nuclear deal was "illegal" and it was up to Europe to preserve the landmark accord with Tehran.

In May, the United States pulled out of the 2015 deal between world powers and Tehran under which international sanctions were lifted in return for curbs on its nuclear program.

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Monday he would be willing to meet Iran's leader without preconditions to discuss how to improve ties.

Iran and other signatories, especially European powers, have been working to find a way to salvage the nuclear agreement despite the withdrawal of the United States.

"After the U.S. illegal withdrawal from the nuclear deal, the ball is in Europe's court now," Rouhani was quoted as saying by his official website in a meeting with British Ambassador to Tehran Rob Macaire.

"The Islamic Republic has never sought tension in the region and does not want any trouble in global waterways, but it will not easily give up on its rights to export oil," Rouhani said.

Rouhani and some senior military commanders have threatened to disrupt oil shipments from Gulf countries through the Strait of Hormuz if Washington tries to strangle Tehran's oil exports. (Reuters)

### EU Slaps Sanctions on Six Russian Groups over Crimea Bridge

BRUSSELS - The European Union has imposed asset freezes on six Russian firms for their involvement in the construction of a new road-and-rail bridge linking Russia to the annexed Crimean peninsula, which the bloc says is illegal.

Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 after Ukraine's pro-Russian president was toppled in an uprising. The West condemned the seizure as an illegal annexation and imposed sanctions on Moscow.

After the annexation, the Kremlin ordered the building of a \$3.6 billion bridge to link the peninsula

to Russia.

The bridge, part of which was unveiled by Russian President Vladimir Putin in May, has drawn strong rebukes from the EU which says it is a further violation of Ukraine's sovereignty.

A statement from the EU Council, which sets the bloc's foreign and security policy, named six firms that will have their assets in the EU frozen. EU persons and entities will not be able to make funds available to them, it said.

The companies include three firms -- PJSC Mostotrest, SGM and Stroygazmontazh Most OOO -- controlled by billionaire Arkady Rotenberg, President Vladimir Putin's former judo sparring partner. Construction firm CJSC VAD, engineering firm GPSM and the Zaliv Shipyard were also named.

"Through their actions they supported the consolidation of Russia's control over the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula, which in turn further undermines the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine," the Council said.

Ukraine's foreign minister Pavlo Klimkin said he welcomed the additional sanctions.

"Important warning also for European businesses not to go down same slippery slope," Klimkin wrote on Twitter.

Russia criticized the sanctions, saying they targeted people living on the peninsula.

"This is a policy of undermining, directed against Crimea's residents," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova was quoted as saying by TASS news agency.

Rotenberg brushed aside the sanctions in a social media post, saying work was underway to complete the railway section of the bridge.

"We're all proud of our work and if someone doesn't like it that's not our problem," a spokesman for Rotenberg quoted him on the Telegram messaging service as saying. (Reuters)

### Britain's May to Meet Macron in France on Friday

PARIS - French President Emmanuel Macron will host Theresa May on Friday, the Elysee Palace said Tuesday, as the British prime minister races to secure support for a deal on her country's exit from the European Union.

The two leaders will hold a working meeting and private dinner at the presidential retreat at Bregancon, where Macron and his wife Brigitte will be spending their summer holidays.

May, who will attend with her husband Philip, will be the first foreign leader invited to the fort at Bregancon, perched on a small peninsula on the Mediterranean coast.

Macron's office did not note any specific agenda items, but an agreement on Britain's divorce from the EU -- set for March 29, 2019 -- must be forged in principle before a European summit in mid-October.

The EU's chief negotiator Michel Barnier last week rejected May's proposal to keep the land frontier between the UK and EU member Ireland open and without a "hard border" that could severely hamper trade.

May's visit comes after Britain's new foreign minister Jeremy Hunt met his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian in Paris on Tuesday, one of several top British officials being dispatched by May to help drum up support amid difficult Brexit negotiations.