

(1) Talks Continue...

held extensive rounds of meetings with the high-ranking officials of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and United Arab Emirates in Abu Dhabi. Talks revolved around withdrawal of occupation forces from Afghanistan, ending the oppression being carried out by the United States and its allies and views were exchanged with the mentioned countries about peace and reconstruction of Afghanistan," the statement said.

"Moreover, preliminary talks were held with the said countries along with the State Department's Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad at the end of the day. And meetings in this negotiations process shall continue today," it said. The Afghan government said that the Afghan negotiating team led by chief negotiator Abdul Salam Rahimi has arrived in Abu Dhabi to begin proximity dialogue with the Taliban delegation and to prepare for a face-to-face meeting between the two sides.

The head of the Afghan negotiating team, Abdul Salam Rahimi, met with the US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and will meet the UAE and Saudi Arabia teams this week, Presidential Palace said in a statement.

Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman Mohammad Faisal said Pakistan is committed to peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan along with int'l community and other stakeholders. In a tweet, he said they hope the UAE talks will help end bloodshed in Afghanistan and bring peace to the region.

When asked about the talks, a State Department spokesperson told VOA Monday that the meetings are part of US efforts to promote an intra-Afghan dialogue toward ending the conflict.

"We welcome any actions the Pakistani government takes to advance security, stability and cooperation in South Asia, including the fostering of negotiations between the Taliban, the Afghan government and other Afghans, the spokesperson said.

The spokesperson also said a recent letter from US President Donald Trump to Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan "emphasized that Pakistan's assistance with the Afghan peace process is fundamental to building an enduring US-Pakistan partnership."

Trump administration officials have hardened the US position on Pakistan in recent months, suspending hundreds of millions of dollars in aid for what the officials say is Islamabad's unwillingness to act decisively against the Taliban. (Tolo news)

(2) Iran Stresses...

100 foreign reporters are working in them, he said.

Voicing readiness for boosting media interaction between the two countries, Soltanifar stressed the need for regular exchanges between the two countries' media, saying that Afghan media outlets can apply for establishing representative office in Iran.

Noting that the two countries' interests should not be sacrificed for political currents, he called for setting up a joint working group between Iran and Afghan media. (IRNA)

(3) UNAMA Head...

towards a peaceful settlement, he hoped. He urged countries in the region to contribute to the creation of an environment conducive to peace talks, allowing the people of Afghanistan to resolve their internal differences through negotiations. The top UN diplomat insisted: "All international efforts, including those by regional actors and neighbours, need to be in concert and aligned with the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace efforts."

He also mentioned the October parliamentary elections, the continuing high numbers of civilian casualties and the need to implement anti-corruption reforms in the interest of economic development.

Participating in the debate, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Executive Director Yuri Fedetov highlighted the importance of combating corruption and controlling illicit narcotics.

Even though the area under opium cultivation and the quantity of opium being produced fell overall, largely due to drought, production levels were still high, resulting in increased rates of drugs.

He said: "This poses a grave threat to public health and safety and hinders peace-building, economic growth and stability. Balanced responses to drug supply and demand are therefore critical." (Pajhwok)

(4) Senators Urge...

the government and the Taliban, this should not be in a manner where other individuals and groups join him (Mullah Rasul) and war and insecurity continues in Afghanistan," said Rahmatullah Achakzai, a senator.

"It should be a globally recognized peace, it shouldn't be a peace where only one country has a role and other countries remain away," said Muhayuddin Musnef, another senator.

The senators also said details of the peace talks must be shared with the Afghan people and that the nation's red lines must be crossed in the peace negotiation talks with the Taliban.

"Our government should be involved in the process... any decision which is taken through (Zalmay) Khalilzad (The US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation) will be harmful to Afghanistan's national interest and sovereignty," said senator Zalmay Zabuli.

"Let the government peace delegation negotiate, at least for once, and bring in the views of Pakistan, US and the Taliban," said senate chief Fazel Hadi Muslimyar.

The government has said it will share all aspects of the peace talks with the people. "The Afghan government is committed to inform the people of Afghanistan, the political parties and movements, step by step of the progress on the peace process," said Omid Maisam, deputy spokesman for CEO Abdullah Abdullah. (Tolo news)

(5) UN Secretary...

On the humanitarian situation the report said: "The humanitarian situation remained A/73/624 S/2018/1092 2/16 18-20408 grave, characterized by high levels of displacement, an increase in conflict-related trauma cases, and drought conditions causing food insecurity for millions of Afghans. The return of refugees from the Islamic Republic of Iran continued at high levels, placing further pressure on resources in western Afghanistan."

Political developments

Based on the report, the political sphere was dominated by electoral preparations for the parliamentary elections on October 20. In the months before the election, the IEC advanced technical preparations, including the recruitment of polling center staff, the compilation of polling center-based voter lists and the accreditation of electoral observers. In cooperation with the Electoral Complaints Commission, the IEC also held provincial electoral forums in 33 provinces to raise awareness among voters and improve buy-in among electoral stakeholders. The official campaign period started on September 28, galvanizing political parties and candidates, who began mobilizing support at the provincial and district levels. Electoral preparations were further complicated by significant security threats against the electoral process by the Taliban, which issued statements warning voters and electoral staff not to participate in the elections and threatening security personnel charged with protecting election personnel and sites. A total of nine candidates were assassinated in the pre-election period, with the Taliban claiming responsibility for two of the attacks. Public confidence was shaken by the assassination of the Chief of Police of Kandahar province, Abdul Razziq, in an attack claimed by the Taliban. In the aftermath, it was decided to postpone parliamentary elections in Kandahar Province until October 27.

On the voting turnout the report said: "Out of 8.5 million registered voters, an estimated 35 percent were women, an increase of eight percentage points compared with the 2014 presidential election. On election day, female voter turnout was estimated at around 30 percent of the electorate. Polling stations for women numbered 7,429 compared with 11,667 for men. Some 13,000 Afghan women reportedly participated as election observers across Afghanistan."

The peace process:

"The pursuit by Afghanistan of a negotiated peace settlement received additional impetus on September 21, when the United States appointed Zalmay Khalilzad as its Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation. From October 4 to 14, Mr Khalilzad visited Afghanistan, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in an effort to generate regional support for the Afghan peace process. During his visit to Afghanistan, Mr Khalilzad met with President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah, representatives of the High Peace Council and members of the political opposition. In the meetings, Mr Khalilzad emphasized the necessity of Afghan ownership of the peace process and, in a subsequent press conference, called on the government and the Taliban to form negotiating teams to engage in direct talks. On November 5, President Ghani announced that a national consultation board on the peace process would be formed with representatives nominated by civilian and military authorities in all 34 provinces. On October 13, the Taliban announced that Mr Khalilzad had met with the Taliban Political Commission in Qatar the previous day. According to the statement by the Taliban, the meeting was construc-

tive, with A/73/624 S/2018/1092 18-20408 5/16 discussions revolving around the withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan and finding a solution to the Afghan conflict. On October 30, the Taliban announced the appointment of five senior officials, formerly imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay, to its Political Commission. On November 10, Mr Khalilzad visited Afghanistan again, meeting with government officials and members of the political opposition to discuss his plans for future regional engagement. This was followed by visits to other countries in the region, including Qatar, where Mr Khalilzad again met with the Taliban Political Commission," reads the report.

On November 9, the Russian Federation hosted a conference on Afghanistan in Moscow, with representatives from China, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and from the High Peace Council of Afghanistan and the Taliban Political Commission. An embassy official from the United States joined as well. Speaking at the conference, the Taliban representative reiterated the Taliban's position that the presence of international military forces was the main obstacle to peace in Afghanistan, adding that other issues, including mutual recognition between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban, constitutional amendments and women's rights, could be negotiated once the issue of foreign troops had been resolved. Following the conference, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement in which it welcomed all efforts towards a peace process in Afghanistan, but warned against allowing the Taliban to instrumentalize regional processes.

Volatile security:

"The security situation remained volatile, with incidents continuing at consistently high levels. While the number of security incidents in some categories decreased slightly, the overall number of casualties rose owing to an increase in the severity of certain attacks. The two contrasting exceptions to this trend were the Eid al-Adha holiday period and the first day of parliamentary elections on October 20, which recorded exceptionally low and high incident levels, respectively. Between August 16 and November 15, UNAMA recorded a total of 5,854 security incidents, a 2 percent decrease compared with the same period in 2017. The southern region saw the highest number of incidents followed by the eastern and south-eastern regions. Armed clashes continued to comprise the largest number of security incidents, recording 63 percent of the total, although the number was 5 percent lower compared with the same period in 2017. Suicide attacks decreased by 37 percent, possibly reflecting successful interdiction efforts in Kabul and Jalalabad cities, while air strikes by the Afghan Air Force and international military forces increased by 25 percent compared with the same period in 2017," said the report.

The overall level of violence decreased significantly during the Eid al-Adha holiday from August 20 to 24. Over the holiday week, UNAMA recorded a total of 227 incidents, the lowest level of violence in a one-week period since early 2013. This reduction in violence occurred despite the Taliban's lack of acknowledgement of President Ghani's offer, on August 19, of a three-month conditional ceasefire. Mirroring the security dynamics witnessed around the Eid al-Fitr holiday in June, the A/73/624 S/2018/1092 6/16 18-20408 number of Taliban-initiated attacks after Eid al-Adha quickly returned to the 2018 weekly average of 433 incidents.

Regional cooperation:

"Afghanistan and Pakistan continued efforts to improve their bilateral relations following the inauguration in August of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan. On September 15, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, visited Kabul, meeting with President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, Salahuddin Rabbani. Discussions addressed security, regional peace and stability, counter-terrorism and the implementation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity. The visit was Minister Qureshi's first official trip after his appointment and was viewed as a signal of Pakistan's prioritization of the bilateral relationship. On October 22, President Ghani publicly stated that the assassination of the Kandahar Chief of Police had been planned in Pakistan. The allegation prompted a strong response from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, which issued a statement on October 24 rejecting the claims as unfounded and calling on Afghan officials to channel discussions of security concerns through the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for

Peace and Solidarity mechanism," according to the report.

Efforts to improve international cooperation on the Afghan peace process expanded. On September 11, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) convened a meeting of permanent representatives in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, attended by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan. The Secretary General of OIC called on participants to encourage all parties concerned to engage in peace talks. On October 4 and 5, Chief Executive Abdullah visited Jakarta, meeting with the President of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, who called on the Taliban to come to the negotiating table. On November 3 and 4, a delegation from Indonesia's Ulema Council visiting Kabul reiterated support for the peace process and proposed following up on the trilateral meeting of Afghan, Pakistani and Indonesian Ulema held in Jakarta in May 2018. Multilateral cooperation continued under the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, with a meeting of senior officials in New York on September 28 and regional technical group meetings on culture and education in the Islamic Republic of Iran on August 20; counter-terrorism in Kabul on September 15; trade, commerce and industry in New Delhi on October 20; and counter-narcotics in Moscow on October 31. (Tolo news)

Human rights:

On October 10, UNAMA released its 2018 third-quarter update on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The Mission documented 8,050 civilian casualties (2,798 people killed and 5,252 injured) between January 1 and September 30, 2018, the highest number of civilian deaths recorded in the first nine months of the year since 2014. UNAMA attributed 65 percent of all civilian casualties to anti-government elements (35 percent to the Taliban, 25 percent to Daesh and 5 percent to unidentified anti-government elements, including self-proclaimed Daesh), 22 percent to pro-government forces (16 percent to Afghan national security forces, 5 percent to international military forces and 1 percent to pro-government armed groups), 10 percent to unattributed crossfire during ground engagements between anti-government elements and pro-government forces and 3 percent to other incidents, including explosive remnants of war and cross-border shelling.

Humanitarian assistance and refugees:

Between August 16 and 31 October 31, 38,558 people were newly displaced by the conflict, bringing the total number of displaced persons to 289,866 in 2018 (60,720 women, 167,342 children and 61,804 men). Although conflict-related displacement is down by more than two thirds compared with the same period in 2017, many displaced families continue to have no immediate prospect of returning to their areas of origin in safety and dignity. During the reporting period, humanitarian partners provided food and other life-saving assistance to 165,759 people displaced by conflict.

Counter-narcotics. The government, supported by international partners, continued its counter-narcotics operations. From August 16 to October 31, law enforcement authorities conducted a total of 835 operations leading to seizures of 2,646 kg of heroin, 9,060 kg of morphine, 12,578 kg of opium, 941 kg of methamphetamine, 4,040 kg of hashish, 16,256 kg of cannabis, 11,787 tablets of 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA), 4,417 kg of solid precursor chemicals and 14,344 liters of liquid precursor chemicals. In total, eight heroin manufacturing laboratories were dismantled; 1,017 suspects were arrested; and 86 vehicles, 140 weapons, 341 mobile telephones and five radios were seized. One officer of the Afghan Counter-Narcotics Police was killed while carrying out operations. The 2018 report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on opium cultivation and production in Afghanistan was finalized and released in November. Its findings show a moderate decrease in opium cultivation and production compared with 2017, with significant decreases in cultivation and production noted in the northern and western regions owing to the drought. In a joint initiative by the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, the Ministry of Counter Narcotics and UNODC, a two-day national conference on the role of agricultural extension in the promotion of alternative development in Afghanistan was held on October 1 and 2 in Kabul City. The event was attended by 150 farmers and extension workers and showcased agricultural inputs and techno-

logical advances by the private sector, as well marketing opportunities for crop and livestock products.

The high and rising cost of the conflict in civilian lives is a stark reminder that ending the conflict through peace negotiations must remain the foremost imperative guiding all efforts in Afghanistan. In keeping with the principle of Afghan ownership, I encourage the government to strengthen the inclusivity of the peace process, ensuring that a diverse range of views is taken into account at every stage. Noting the recent expansion in contact between the Taliban and members of the international community, I underline the necessity for the Taliban to engage in direct talks with the Government of Afghanistan with a view to reaching a solution to the conflict. The United Nations stands ready to support all peace efforts through any available means. (Tolonews)

(6) War is Main...

is a priority and one of the main tasks for the government.

"In addition to other challenges and priorities we have, such as security, military issues, economic development and growth of Afghanistan economy, considering and paying attention to the migration phenomenon and migrants, returnees and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, is our main duty," said Abdullah.

Officials indicate that more than 6.5 million Afghans are living outside the country, of whom almost four million are migrants and nearly three million are asylum seekers.

Refugees and Repatriation Minister Sayed Alemi Balkhi, also speaking at the event, said, "Addressing the needs, offering legal and humanitarian services to the returnees is one of our important priorities."

Statistics show in the last four years, more than three million Afghans have returned to Afghanistan and most of them were legal and illegal migrants who have returned from Pakistan and Iran.

Toby Lanzer, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan, meanwhile said, "Just this year we have had 750,000 people of Afghan origin return to Afghanistan from Iran. And that poses challenges for communities in Afghanistan, but also poses challenges for Iran itself."

In addition to the sharp increase in Afghan migrants, human trafficking has increased in the country during recent years. Relevant government departments have said they are trying to legalize these migrations and in their efforts have disbanded about 100 human trafficking groups while some remain under surveillance.

Statistics show more than 68 million people in the world live outside their original countries as migrants. (Tolo news)

(7) Balkh Candidates...

masses fully participated in the Oct 21 polls despite many problems and challenges, but unfortunately their vote was not respected.

Another candidate Dr. Matin also accused the IEC of fraud and rigging and said people would not recognize candidates who used illegal means to be their representatives in the lower house.

"We are not here because we failed to make it to the Wolesi Jirga but have assembled because it is the question of transparency and fairness of election," he said.

He demanded prosecution of individuals who harmed the election process by committing fraud.

Matin said individuals who never served the province in the past eight years while in power had once again succeeded to the lower house.

He added 800 complaints had been registered on the election day but the complaints commission was yet to address them.

Sorya Bawar, another candidate who is also not among the winners, alleged bribe and political deals marred the Wolesi Jirga elections in Balkh. She said the people should come forward and defend their clean votes.

Balkh IEC head Ezzatullah Arman pledged to resolve all issues raised by the protesting candidates. (Pajhwok)

(8) 31 Killed or Wounded...

fall to Taliban and a disaster would happen if the central government paid no attention," he added.

Mulavi Hamidullah Danish, the Taliban's shadow district chief for Garzewan, told Pajhwok that Afghan forces attacked them in Baharak village of the district on Monday night but government forces suffered heavy losses in Taliban fighters' response.

He said that four soldiers killed in the battle were handed over to local elders. Two Taliban were also injured but one of them succumbed this morning, he concluded. (Pajhwok)