

UK, Norway, Iceland Agrees on Citizens' Rights If No-Deal Brexit

OSLO - Britain and the so-called EEA EFTA countries, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, have reached an agreement on citizens' rights should Britain leave the EU without a withdrawal agreement, Iceland's government said on Friday.

"The agreement protects the rights of EEA EFTA citizens living in the UK and British citizens living in the EEA EFTA states, providing certainty that they can continue to do so in the event of a no-deal Brexit," the Icelandic government said in a statement.

"This means that citizens' resi-

dence rights have been secured regardless of the outcome of the negotiations between the EU and the UK," Iceland, an EU outsider, said.

Norway's government said earlier on Friday that it had proposed legislation to secure the rights of Norwegians living in Britain and of Britons living in Norway in the case of a no-deal Brexit.

Britain and Norway agreed last year to apply the principles of a Brexit agreement in their bilateral relationship, but the new legislation will also cover a no-deal scenario.

(1) Election Law...

On February 2, the office of the Second Vice President said government leaders are working on amending the law and that President Ghani will issue a legislative decree in the near future to approve the outline for amending the law.

Government has said that the amending will include changes in the leadership of the election commission as well as procedures of the electoral bodies.

"Reforms include all these sections. Changes will happen in employees of the commissions, structure of the commissions and the elections rules and procedures," said Mohammad Hedayat, an advisor to Second Vice President.

The election commission has said that the commissioners of the commissions have been appointed based on the law and that the law should be respected in removing them as well.

The electoral complaint commission also has said that the amending the elections law in the current situation is not logical. (Tolo news)

(2) Afghan Youths...

should be discussed with the youths," said Kanishka Nasiri, a civil society activist.

"The Afghan youths are seeking peace through any possible way," said Mohammad Fardin, an activist.

Women at the gathering said their rights should be reserved in the peace process.

"A peace should be established which will help women to work in all sectors; not a peace which sidelines women," said Husna, a women's rights activist.

"Women's place will be at home again and their rights will be violated if deals are made (on peace)," said Mastoora Arzo, an activist. (Tolo news)

(3) Moscow Talks...

the first time that Taliban held direct talks with Afghanistan's influential politicians.

"It was a political and academic debate about peace. The declaration which was released at the end of this meeting was the summary of this meeting and will not have any practical and executive outcomes on the peace process," said Haroon Chakhansuri, President Ashraf Ghani's spokesman.

"The executive power of this meeting is not huge. But the extraordinary thing is that some headline opponents sit and shared their views," said Sayed Eshaq Gailani, head of Nahzat-e-Hambastagi-e-Milli Afghanistan party.

"All parties agreed that to determine lasting peace in Afghanistan, the following points are important: the complete withdrawal

of foreign forces from the country, asking all countries to avoid interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs, providing assurance to the international community that Afghanistan will not be used against any other nation, protection of social, economic, political and educational rights of the Afghan women in line with Islamic principles, protection of political and social rights of the entire people of Afghanistan and protection of freedom of speech in line with Islamic principles, undertaking efforts for attracting international assistance for the reconstruction of Afghanistan's infrastructure," an excerpt from the declaration reads.

"Until the time there is no solid guarantee for it, we can not trust these words under any situation and we can not describe it as progress, because, just a day before, they (Taliban) torched a school in Farah," said MP Raihana Azad.

Taliban and other delegates also agreed to undertake reforms in Afghanistan's security and military institutions once a peace deal is reached.

"All parties have agreed that systematic reforms be put in place in all national institutions including the security sector after a peace deal is signed," reads the declaration.

This comes after former head of Taliban's Qatar office, Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai who also serves as the group's chief negotiator had said that the Afghan National Army (ANA) would be dissolved after a peace deal.

But Stanikzai, on Wednesday night rejected reports of having said the Afghan army would be dissolved once US forces had withdrawn.

In a written message to TOLONews, Stanikzai said "some parts of my interview with the Nunn Taki Asia wrongly rationalized".

He said he did not mean the army would be dissolved but he "meant that this army was created when the foreigners came".

"At that time, they mandated to fight the Taliban instead of defending the honor of the nation and the borders.

"You better know, we mentioned repeatedly that while withdrawing your troops, you've to leave all military equipments/tools as we're looking forward to have a well-equipped army in the future," he stated.

Among critics of Moscow talks is Amrullah Saleh, former head of Afghanistan's intelligence service - National Directorate of Security (NDS) - who is now running as first vice president to Ghani in the next elections.

"It is a MUST that an Afghan nation state represent the country within & abroad. Afghans who agree to attend chaotic foreign

conferences, knowingly or unknowingly, reinforce the narrative of the enemy next door that we are a web of tribes & not a state. Don't be "Useful Idiots"," Saleh said in a tweet.

But, Ershad Ahmadi, who attended the Moscow talks responded to Saleh and said: "Those loafing around in the lobbies of Abu Dhabi hotels in the hope of catching a selfie with Taliban, and as such, destroyed the gravitas of our state, are now insulting those who proudly defending the state and its achievements in Moscow. This is no time 4 electoral rhetoric."

He further said that any agreement to resolve the 17-year-old conflict in Afghanistan would ensure Paki-

stan's 'equities'.

In light of the recent efforts between Pakistan, the US, and Afghanistan to hold talks with the Taliban, the top US military official lauded Pakistan's cooperation with the State Department's Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad.

"If Pakistan plays a positive role in achieving a settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan, the US will have opportunity and motive to help Pakistan fulfil that role, as peace in the region is the most important mutual priority for the US

and Pakistan," he said.

General Joseph further said that Afghanistan's uncertain political situation is the greatest risk to the stability in the region and the US hopes that Pakistan among other countries will play a constructive role in achieving peace.

"Our posture with Pakistan involves supporting our colleagues at the Department of State as they pursue a diplomatic solution with Islamabad to end the conflict in Afghanistan while ensuring that Pakistan's equities are acknowledged and addressed in any future agreement," he added. (Agencies)

Both sides said last month they have built a framework for a possible agreement. (Monitoring Desk)

(7) Govt Lodges...

of this meeting was the summary of this meeting and will not have any practical or executive outcomes on the peace process," said Chakhansuri. (Tolo news)

(8) 18 Militant Killed...

The ministry said five prisoners were released as a result of security forces' raid on a Taliban prison in the Charhar Dara district of Kunduz province. Four rebels were killed. (Pajhwok)

(9) Karzai Calls...

jirga, "proper" measures should be taken in this regard to fix its date and that thereafter, the decisions should be accepted.

The two-day Moscow meeting between the Taliban and Afghan oppositions was ended on Wednesday. The delegates issued a joint declaration in which they outlined a nine-point approach to promote intra-Afghan dialogue to reach into a political settlement in Afghanistan.

In reaction, the Afghan government said that the Moscow meeting was not about peace talks but a political and academic debate on peace.

"A statement issued at the end of this meeting is the summary of the two-day talks and has not executive outcome on peace [process]," President Ghani's spokesman said in a tweet. (ATN)

(10) Pakistan Activists'...

"The Afghan government has serious concerns about the violence perpetrated against peaceful protesters and civil activists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan," Ghani, himself a Pashtun, wrote in a tweet.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi rejected Ghani's comment. "Such irresponsible statements are only gross interference," he said in a tweet, adding that Ghani should focus on the "longstanding grievances of the Afghan people".

Tuesday's protests followed the death of PTM regional leader Arman Loni in southwestern Balochistan province which the group blamed on police.

Mohsin Dawar, a member of parliament and founding member of PTM, said police had singled Loni out and beat him to death.

A police spokesman said Loni died of a heart attack after clashes between protesters and police.

PTM leader and member of parliament Ali Wazir told Reuters that 18 activists were still in custody after one of those detained was released this week.

Rights group Amnesty International issued a statement saying authorities "must immediately and unconditionally release pro-

Pakistan Will 'Always be Country of Importance to US': Centcom Chief

ISLAMABAD - Commander of US Central Command General Joseph Votel has said that Pakistan will always be a "country of importance" for the United States.

General Joseph made the comment while testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee and said, "As a state possessing nuclear weapons that sits at the nexus of Russian, Chinese, Indian, Iranian, and US geopolitical interests, Pakistan will always retain its importance to the US."

He further said that any agreement to resolve the 17-year-old conflict in Afghanistan would ensure Paki-

stan's 'equities'.

In light of the recent efforts between Pakistan, the US, and Afghanistan to hold talks with the Taliban, the top US military official lauded Pakistan's cooperation with the State Department's Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad.

"If Pakistan plays a positive role in achieving a settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan, the US will have opportunity and motive to help Pakistan fulfil that role, as peace in the region is the most important mutual priority for the US

and Pakistan," he said.

General Joseph further said that Afghanistan's uncertain political situation is the greatest risk to the stability in the region and the US hopes that Pakistan among other countries will play a constructive role in achieving peace.

"Our posture with Pakistan involves supporting our colleagues at the Department of State as they pursue a diplomatic solution with Islamabad to end the conflict in Afghanistan while ensuring that Pakistan's equities are acknowledged and addressed in any future agreement," he added. (Agencies)

Both sides said last month they have built a framework for a possible agreement. (Monitoring Desk)

(7) Govt Lodges...

of this meeting was the summary of this meeting and will not have any practical or executive outcomes on the peace process," said Chakhansuri. (Tolo news)

The ministry said five prisoners were released as a result of security forces' raid on a Taliban prison in the Charhar Dara district of Kunduz province. Four rebels were killed. (Pajhwok)

(9) Karzai Calls...

jirga, "proper" measures should be taken in this regard to fix its date and that thereafter, the decisions should be accepted.

The two-day Moscow meeting between the Taliban and Afghan oppositions was ended on Wednesday. The delegates issued a joint declaration in which they outlined a nine-point approach to promote intra-Afghan dialogue to reach into a political settlement in Afghanistan.

In reaction, the Afghan government said that the Moscow meeting was not about peace talks but a political and academic debate on peace.

"A statement issued at the end of this meeting is the summary of the two-day talks and has not executive outcome on peace [process]," President Ghani's spokesman said in a tweet. (ATN)

"The Afghan government has serious concerns about the violence perpetrated against peaceful protesters and civil activists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan," Ghani, himself a Pashtun, wrote in a tweet.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi rejected Ghani's comment. "Such irresponsible statements are only gross interference," he said in a tweet, adding that Ghani should focus on the "longstanding grievances of the Afghan people".

Tuesday's protests followed the death of PTM regional leader Arman Loni in southwestern Balochistan province which the group blamed on police.

Mohsin Dawar, a member of parliament and founding member of PTM, said police had singled Loni out and beat him to death.

A police spokesman said Loni died of a heart attack after clashes between protesters and police.

PTM leader and member of parliament Ali Wazir told Reuters that 18 activists were still in custody after one of those detained was released this week.

Rights group Amnesty International issued a statement saying authorities "must immediately and unconditionally release pro-

testers belonging to the peaceful Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement".

"It is shocking that the Pakistani authorities have resorted to such heavy-handed methods," Amnesty South Asia researcher Rabia Mehmood said.

PTM blames the military and other state agencies for what it says are forced disappearances resulting in thousands of missing persons' cases, mainly from the Pashtun region bordering Afghanistan.

The group is viewed with deep suspicion by the military which says it undermines Pakistan. The army has said it does not detain individuals without evidence.

The arrest last month of senior PTM leader Alamzeb Mehsud in Karachi drew an outcry on social media. He was charged under anti-terrorism and public order laws, but his supporters say he was arrested for protesting against abuses by the military.

Following a series of nationwide protests last year, hundreds of PTM activists were arrested and detained across the country in a large-scale crackdown.

Dawar and Wazir, founding PTM members, were elected to parliament in July from the Pashtun majority Waziristan region bordering Afghanistan, highlighting the group's growing appeal among Pakistan's 35 million Pashtuns. (Reuters)

(11) Afghan Products...

corridor, and from there, they are sent to Italy and Germany.

The Lapis Lazuli Corridor The Lapis Lazuli Coeditor's agreement was signed on November 15, 2017, and it was inaugurated in Afghanistan by President Ghani in December 2018.

The route is aimed at enhancing regional economic integration and trade-based connectivity between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey.

The Lapis Lazuli Corridor begins from Aqina Port in northern Faryab province and Torghundi in western Herat province of Afghanistan.

It continues to Turkmenbashi port in Turkmenistan. After passing the Caspian Sea, the route continues on to Baku, capital of Azerbaijan, and then connects onward to Tbilisi, capital of Georgia, as well as the Georgian ports of Poti and Batumi.

Finally, the corridor connects to the cities of Kars and Istanbul, Turkey, at the entrance of Europe.

The name "Lapis Lazuli" is derived from the historic route that Afghanistan's lapis lazuli and other semiprecious stones were exported along, over 2,000 years ago, to the Caucasus, Russia, the Balkans, Europe, and North Africa. (Tolo news)