

Russian UN Envoy Warns of Unpredictable Results If U.S. Destroys Arms Control System

MOSCOW - The dismantling of an arms control system by the United States might result in unpredictable consequences, Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzya has said.

"Look what is going on in the disarmament field. The Americans tend to totally dismantle the arms control system which will evolve into an absolutely unpredictable scenario," Nebenzya was quoted by Tass news agency as saying in an interview with Russian TV Channel One on Saturday.

He said that Washington is working on "an uncontrolled buildup of their weapons," which ratchets up the threat of an unexpected conflict.

"It is extremely incomprehensible how this will end up," Nebenzya said.

The diplomat noted that the

world still faces disagreements stemming from the Cold War era, and that is one of the main reasons the West is disappointed that Russia has started to implement an independent foreign policy.

"They cannot, like back in the 1990s, come to the Kremlin through the backdoor and dictate how we must behave and what we must do," Nebenzya said. (Xinhua)

are not taking the election commission serious. Can you find any government official without a problem?" asked IEC chief Abdul Badi Sayyad.

"Whatever is said about the commissions, they are nothing except a conspiracy against this nation and against the credibility of the system," said IEC Chief Abdul Aziz Aryaee.

This comes after the Presidential Palace said in a statement on Friday that a draft amendment of the election law will be finalized within the next two days.

President Ashraf Ghani on Friday said the amendment to the election law was necessary and had been called for by almost all stakeholders.

"The draft amendment has been prepared. After taking the opinions of all concerned people into consideration, the law will be amended based on the draft," said Ghani.

On February 2, the office of the Second Vice President Mohammad Sarwar Danish said government leaders were working on an amended election law and that Ghani will issue a legislative decree in the near future to approve the draft.

The draft amendment indicates that reforms have been considered in at least 20 articles and items of the election law. Two possible amendments are on how the head of the election commissions and their members are appointed and on what their authorities of the election commissions are. (Tolo news)

taken over by a private company just three weeks before the attack. (Tolo news)

(9) Govt 'Ready' to...

Taliban has reached the conclusion that it is not possible to fight forever. And the fact that they said that they are not seeking monopolization of power and that everyone should come together and establish a new system in Afghanistan; this means that Taliban is not in favor of the past experience that monopolization of power cannot help bring peace to Afghanistan," said Wahid Muzhda, a delegate who attended Moscow talks.

Political affairs analyst Nazar Mohammad Motmaen, who also attended the talks, said other key points to come out of the meeting was that the Afghan politicians saw a "flexibility" in Taliban's views towards women and the social and political role they play.

"They did not have problems about women's education, business and a role in government if Islamic principles and Afghan values are considered. This was the issue on which the women delegates there (in Moscow talks) were convinced about it," Motmaen said.

Despite skepticism by government about the Moscow talks, an official from Afghanistan's High Peace Council said some parts of the Moscow resolution will be added to their agenda.

"The High Peace Council is studying the resolution issued at Moscow talks. The parts of the resolution which are in favor of Afghans will be considered in daily activities of the council," said Sayed Ehsan Taheri, spokesman for the High Peace Council.

The withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan, support to Doha talks, removing Taliban members' names from the UN blacklist, the release of their prisoners and legitimizing Taliban's Qatar office are part of the agreements made at the Moscow talks.

The US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad said last month that they had agreed on a draft for peace when he held six-day talks with Taliban members in Doha late last month. (Tolo news)

Louvre Abu Dhabi Introduces Rembrandt, Vermeer

ABU DHABI - The Louvre Abu Dhabi, the first museum to carry the famed name outside of France, announced Sunday it will roll out works by Dutch masters Rembrandt and Vermeer this month. Works by the two artists are part of the gallery's first exhibition this year, entitled "Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from The Leiden collection and the Musee du Louvre".

The exhibit, on display in the United Arab Emirates capital from February 14 to May 18, is dedicated to Rembrandt, Vermeer and the famed "fijnschilders" -- fine painters known for their detailed work -- of the Netherlands.

"Rembrandt is a master of the Golden Age," museum head Manuel Rabate told AFP.

"He's a universal genius, he's connected to the world." (AFP)

(1) 'Complete Consensus...

Afghanistan hold transparent and inclusive future elections.

However, some political outfits and presidential candidates had called the proposed draft incomplete and voiced concerns at the suggestions about the independence of the poll panels. (Pajhwok)

(2) Govt Plans to...

When asked about a possible plan of government on adding to the number of provinces, two Herat residents said it would be better if Shindand district, in south of Herat, is promoted to a province.

"Shindand is the biggest district in Afghanistan," Herat resident Abdul Rauf Yaqubi said.

"Our demand from Mr. President is that Shindand should be promoted to a province," said Hamidullah Afghan, a Herat resident.

In recent years, calls for such a move have gathered momentum. Afghanistan is made up of 34 provinces. The provinces are the primary administrative divisions. Each province encompasses a number of districts or usually over 1,000 villages.

Provincial governments are led by a governor who is appointed by president of the country. (Tolo news)

(3) Traders at...

sector and all businesspeople of the country were optimistic about their commercial transactions.

But some traders are complaining about the high export fares through the railway line.

Syed Abdul Jabar Agha, a businessman, told Pajhwok that exports via the railway line from Afghanistan to Uzbekistan was too costly for Afghan traders.

However, he thanked the Afghan government for opening the trade route with Uzbekistan and acknowledged there was no big issue except the high train fare.

"A wagon from Aqina to Turkmenistan on the railway track, which is 1,400km long, costs \$22 but the same distance between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan costs \$52," he explained. He urged the government to solve the issue of high fare for exports.

Meanwhile, Eng. Mohammad Hssan Ansari, provincial chamber of commerce and industry president, said trade relations between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan had recently expanded.

He explained imports and exports through Hairatan port continued normally and there was no serious problem that could harm the interest of businessmen.

Dozens of wagons carrying commercial goods were imported to Afghanistan from Uzbekistan through the railway link on a daily basis, he said. He added previously there had been some issues in export area but after continued efforts by the government, the problems were resolved.

According to Ansari, the Balkh chamber of commerce has proposed to some firms to export their goods through the rail road.

Regarding high fare for exports via the railway, he said the issue was as much serious because the fare was lower than charged by cars and containers.

Two years ago, the Afghan government signed about 20 trade agreements with Uzbekistan and now bilateral trade between the two countries has reached a high level. (Pajhwok)

(4) Herat Activists...

to the country," said Mohammad Rafe, a civil society activist in Herat.

Peace efforts have, over the past four months, gathered momentum. During this time, US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad has held four rounds of talks with Taliban representatives.

There are concerns however about whether achievements made regarding women's rights will be maintained following a possible peace agreement with the Taliban.

Drawing attention to this on Sunday, female activists in Herat spoke out and said they were worried that women's rights would be compromised in a peace deal.

"Women need to play a bigger role in this process. They make up half of society therefore they should have an active role in this regard," said Shila Shaheedzada, an activist from Herat.

Another Herat activist, Nargis Jamshedi, meanwhile said: "We call on the Taliban to join peace. Afghans are tired of bloodshed."

Some religious scholars who attended the Herat gathering said the fight against Afghan security forces is "forbidden" and that the current war by the Taliban should not be called "Jihad".

"There is no legitimacy in the war against Afghan forces. They are killed in the name of Islam but Taliban are seeking help from Westerners, as we have seen recently," said Saifuddin Sayyaf, a religious scholar from Herat.

Critics have been skeptical about the protection of achievements made in the past 18 years, which include those relating to women's rights, press freedom and freedom of expression.

This comes after two delegates at the Moscow talks said it appears as if the Taliban are willing to end the war through peaceful means. (Tolo news)

(5) Security Forces...

Meanwhile, provincial intelligence chief Brig Gen. Abdul Samad Shams told Pajhwok the road had reopened for passengers and security of the highway had been ensured.

Abdul Karim, a government official, expressed his happiness over the highway's reopening after a long time. (Pajhwok)

(6) Kabul Police use...

protestors, alleged massive corruption, fraud and rigging had happened in the October 20 polls and said he had evidence to prove his claims.

The protestors wanted to erect a protest tent in the Pashunistan Watt, but security forces did not allow them and finally police sprayed water to disperse them.

Police spokesman Basir Mujahid said the protestors without informing police had closed the Pashunistan square for traffic and wanted to erect a tent which was not allowed by police. (Pajhwok)

(7) IEC Under...

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(8) NDS Arrests...

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The source said that three of the guilty parties were sentenced to 20 years in prison and five to 22 years in prison. A group of insurgents stormed the Intercontinental Hotel in Bagh-e-Bala area in Kabul city on 28 January last year which resulted in the death of at least 29 people. At the time however, one source said the death toll could have been as high as 43.

Fourteen foreign nationals were among the dead.

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The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack and said five attackers had been involved in the siege.

Eyewitnesses at the time said there had been an engagement party at the hotel when the attack happened and that gunmen opened fire on guests.

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