

### (1) Constitutional...

victorious until they were united, but failed after losing unity because it was the Afghans' unity that defeated the Soviets forces.

What happened after the Soviet forces' withdrawal from Afghanistan was the outcome of selfishness and prejudice for others, but it did not mean putting a question mark on the value and respect for jihad, he said.

"Today we are facing the same situation, what we learned since the jihad and after until today, we should concentrate on our national and political unity and avoid mistakes."

Danish said Afghanistan made many achievements during the past 18 years from conveying the *loya jirga* to approve the constitution to the reestablishment of the three pillars of state --- the executive, legislature and the judiciary --- and raising security and defense forces.

The vice president said they supported the intensified efforts for peace in Afghanistan but all Afghans wanted a lasting and dignified peace.

"There are some concerns, not about the coming of peace but other things and the first among them is the system and formation of government, any peace deal should not be drafted in a way that forces a retreat tomorrow, takes us back to the point zero."

He rejected the idea of an interim government and asked the Taliban to show which article of the Afghanistan's constitution was in conflict with Islam.

He said every law needed changes for improvement but if changes were to be brought to the Constitution, they should come from a legal perspective instead of granting leverage to the Taliban.

Danish said no peace bid could produce desired results if the Afghan government was missing from it, therefore it was essential to include the past 18 years achievements, human and women's rights in the peace talks.

About draft amendments to the electoral law the president signed recently, Danish said the changes had been consulted with all presidential candidates, political parties, civil society institutes and foreign countries.

"We acknowledge that the amendments should not have come at this particular time, but it was done so avoid a possible crisis in the upcoming election," Danish said.

HIA leader Arghandiwal said the Afghan jihad not only gifted freedom to Afghanistan but to several central Asian countries. (Pajhwok)

### (2) Uzbekistan Fully...

In response, President Ghani thanked the Uzbekistan leadership for extending him best wishes and called Afghanistan and Uzbekistan as two strategic and regional partners.

Ghani said the Tashkent conference provided a clear mechanism for regional cooperation and practical steps were being taken to further improve relations between the two countries.

The president said peace in Afghanistan would result into increased development works and regional connectivity projects, in which the role of European Union, regional countries, particularly Uzbekistan, would be significant. (Pajhwok)

### (3) Afghans Paid...

lost their lives, millions more wounded and displaced, but in return they gained freedom and the Soviet Union led to a breakup in 1991.

"This day is not only a moment of pride for the Afghans, but it has lessons for the today's invaders to learn and leave before they meet the fate of the former Soviet Union." (Pajhwok)

### (4) US Vows to Work...

by NATO allies that rely on American air and logistic support.

NATO's top military officer, US General Curtis Scaparrotti, said that he has not been asked to plan for any withdrawal.

"I don't have the direction to do it, or the guidance to do it, or the decision to drive it," he told reporters.

About half of US forces are part of the NATO Resolute Support mission which mainly advises and trains Afghan forces. The NATO mission includes about 8,000 troops from 38 other countries.

The other half of US forces are involved in "counterterrorism" missions. Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as

ISIS) are both present in Afghanistan. When requested, US troops assist Afghan forces with air power or in battles with the Taliban, who carry out near-daily assaults on Afghan soldiers and police.

The Taliban control, influence or hold sway over nearly half the country more than 17 years after they were overthrown by a US-led coalition.

In his State of the Union address last week, US President Donald Trump said progress in negotiations with the Taliban would allow a reduction in the approximately 14,000 US troops currently in Afghanistan and a renewed "focus on counterterrorism".

Taliban negotiators will meet US officials on February 18 in Pakistan's capital Islamabad.

Talks in Doha would follow a week later on February 25, a Taliban statement said on Wednesday. (AFP)

### (5) Election...

hastily dismissed him and the other six commissioners.

He said that government leaders who edge close to the end of their tenure do not have legal authority to dismiss commissioners.

"The process of character assassination should end. President made us take our exam and then we started our jobs," said Sayyad.

"If there is a system of a jungle, then everything is possible in this country and so far it has gone on in this way. But I am sure that the nation will wake up," IECC chief Azizullah Aryaee said. All the commissioners of the two commissions were dismissed on Monday after the election law was amended.

The government has appointed the commissions secretariats to manage the commissions until new commissioners are appointed.

The former chiefs of the commissions said government's move of handing over the management of the commissions to secretariats is illegal.

The chiefs also accused government of interfering in the affairs of the commissions.

They said instead of dismissing them, government should have dismissed secretariats of the commissions and also provincial chiefs of the commissions.

"Yesterday without paying any attention to security problems, our weapons were taken. I am a Mujahid, I stood against Russia and had the ability to stand against an army, but I respected the law," said Sayyad.

Following the dismissal of the commissioners, the Attorney General's Office slapped a travel ban on the commissioners, because they are accused of corruption.

IEC has seven commissioners and the IECC has five. (Tolo news)

### (6) CEO Claims...

Wahid Muzhda, an Afghan political activist meanwhile said some of the Taliban members who will attend the Islamabad meeting are not members of the Taliban's Qatar office.

"For this meeting, some individuals are named who are not members of Qatar office. Mr Amir Khan Muttaqi, head of Mullah Haibatullah's office; Mawlawi Abdul Latif Mansur and son of Mawlawi Khalis are the people who have recently been added to the team and they are down to attend the meeting," said Muzhda.

Meanwhile, a week after the Moscow talks were held, between a number of Afghan politicians and Taliban representatives, the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS) discussed the talks with a number of Moscow representatives, Russia's deputy ambassador in Kabul and officials from Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA).

Russian deputy ambassador to Afghanistan Albert Khorev criticized the Afghan government for lodging a complaint with the UN over Taliban members traveling to Moscow.

Khorev said the Taliban delegation was in Moscow three months before the talks and they were in Abu Dhabi one and half months before the talks, but the Afghan government did not react on either of those occasions.

"(Afghan government) has sent a complaint letter to the UN about the presence of Taliban at the Moscow meeting. Three months ago, the delegation was in Moscow and one and a half months ago were in Abu Dhabi and the government did not react," said Khorev. Afghanistan's deputy foreign minister

Nasir Ahmad Andisha said in response that it is up to Afghanistan when to lodge such a complaint.

"This is a sovereign right of a state when to object and when not to and no one can ask why we did not object (in the past)," said Andisha.

Khorev meanwhile said he did not know how Taliban members entered Russia.

"We do not have any information about Taliban's visas, who had given them visas or where they entered Moscow," said Khorev.

One delegate who attended the Moscow talks, Fawzia Kofi, said Taliban had an interesting stance about women and rejected reports that she had said they had a "good stance".

"Nowhere did I say they had a good stance against women, but said interesting stance and there are differences between good and interesting. And it was interesting because they said when girls mature, then they have the right to choose their husbands, even without the agreement of their families," said Kofi.

Following the Moscow talks in which the participants issued a nine article declaration, the Afghan government complained to the UN that some members of the group's delegation were on the UN blacklist - and therefore prohibited to travel.

Meanwhile, the foreign ministry said they had not received any official invitation letter regarding the Taliban and Khalilzad's next round of meetings in Qatar, scheduled for February 25. (Tolo news)

### (7) Russian Diplomat...

Albert Khorev said the Russian government supported the Moscow conference and provided technical support and issued visas to the participants and then welcomed the joint declaration.

He said Kabul should have positively viewed the coming closer of Russia and the US and efforts and initiatives for peace, but it was wondering that Kabul complained.

He said the Afghanistan government had in written complained to the UN asking how blacklisted Taliban leaders travelled to Moscow.

He said the same Taliban's team was in Moscow three months back and in Abu Dhabi one and a half months ago but there had been no such reaction from the Afghan government.

Also present on the occasion was Foreign Ministry official Mohammad Nasir Andesha who replied to the Russian diplomat by saying every country enjoyed a legitimate system and national sovereignty which should be respected and Russia considered itself as champion of these rights.

He said Russia should not use the word 'Kabul government' but the Afghan government because the same word was used by the opponents and it was not expected from a friendly country to use it.

He also said there was nothing wrong in complaining to the UN because it was the Afghan government's right and no one could challenge the timing of the complaint.

Waheed Muzhda, a political affairs expert, on the occasion said the Moscow meeting was important because it brought together former armed rivals to share their visions.

He said the Taliban had assured the political parties in the Moscow talks that the past would be repeated and they were against monopoly on power. Fauzia Kofi, who participated in the Moscow talks, said the Moscow gathering was intra-Afghan and important because Taliban, politicians and civil society activists sat together. (Pajhwok)

### (8) German Mission...

Washington was making an effort to find a political solution quickly in order to pave the ground for a military withdrawal, said the strategy paper.

Signed off by Angela Merkel's office, the Defense Ministry and the Foreign Ministry, the document added: "Should the US withdraw its military engagement significantly, the government will thoroughly reassess its actions in Afghanistan."

But Foreign Ministry spokesman Rainer Breul discounted the 11-page dossier, insisting the US had not yet shared any clear withdrawal plans.

He said: "This is not a document about the USA, it's about Afghanistan, our thoughts for a peace process and how

we can support it, either militarily, or on a civilian level, or on development cooperation."

About 55 German soldiers lost their lives in the first 13 years of the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan. (Pajhwok)

### (9) Women Recall...

that became one factor leading to the unraveling of the Soviet Union.

Rybalchenko, who worked as a nurse at a military hospital in Gardez, was stunned by the many casualties - men missing limbs or riddled with shrapnel. But there was so much work that she found herself shutting off her emotions.

"At the end, I did not feel anything anymore. I was like a stone," Rybalchenko said, shedding her normally perky persona.

Friendships helped, and she befriended a young reconnaissance officer, Vladimir Vshivtsev.

He once confided to her that he was not afraid of losing a limb, but he would not be able to live with an injury to his eyes. She recalled that he said, "If I lose eyesight, I'll do everything to put an end to it."

In November 1987, the hospital was inundated with casualties from a Soviet offensive to open the road between Gardez and the stronghold of Khost, near the Pakistani border.

One of the wounded was Vshivtsev, and Rybalchenko saw him being wheeled into the ward with bandages wrapped around his head. She unwrapped the dressing and gasped when she saw the gaping wound on his face: "The eyes were not there."

She convinced her superior to let her accompany him to a bigger hospital in Kabul, as part of a suicide watch. She stayed friends with Vshivtsev, and he later became a leading activist in the Russian Society for the Blind. Decades later, he briefly served a stint in the Russian parliament.

Alla Smolina was 30 when she joined the Soviet military prosecutor's office in Jalalabad near the Pakistani border in 1985. It wasn't until 20 years later that Smolina started having nightmares about the war.

"The shelling, running away from bullets and mines whizzing above me - I was literally scared of my own pillow," she said.

She put her memories on paper and contacted other women who were there, telling the stories of those who endured the hardships of war but who are largely absent from the male-dominated narratives.

She is trying to raise awareness of the role the women played in Afghanistan, believing they have been unfairly portrayed in fiction and nonfiction written mostly by men, "where the female personnel were mentioned in a negative light or not at all."

The deaths of Soviet women who held civilian jobs in Afghanistan are not part of the official toll, and Smolina has written about 56 women who lost their lives. Some died when a plane was shot down by the Afghan mujahideen, one was killed when a drunk soldier threw a grenade into her room, and one woman was slain after being raped by a soldier.

In an era when the concept of sexual harassment was largely unfamiliar in the Soviet Union, women in the war - usually young and unmarried - often started a relationship to avoid unwanted attention from other soldiers.

"Because if a woman has someone, the whole brigade won't harass you like a pack of wolves," Rybalchenko said. "Sometimes it was reciprocal, sometimes there was no choice." She said she found boyfriends to "protect" her.

While the war grew unpopular at home, Soviet troops and support staff in Afghanistan mostly focused on survival rather than politics. While Afghans largely saw Moscow's involvement as a hostile foreign intervention, the Soviets thought they were doing the right thing. (AP)

### (10) EU Adds Saudi...

The previous list included 16 jurisdictions but the latest additions have increased the number to 23 with Libya, Botswana, Ghana, Samoa, the Bahamas and the four United States territories of American Samoa, U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and Guam being the newcomers to the list.

Afghanistan, North Korea, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Syria,

Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia and Yemen are among the other jurisdictions which have also been included in the list.

The list will be forwarded to 28 EU members for endorsement to be endorsed in a month with the deadline for the endorsement likely to be extended to two months.

According to reports, the Afghanistan Central Bank was notified regarding the inclusion of the jurisdiction of Afghanistan in the list. (KP)

### (11) NATO Chief...

defense ministers meeting which began Wednesday.

The leaders of NATO member states traditionally meet at a summit organized every two years. The member countries held their last summit at NATO headquarters in Brussels last year. (AA)

### (12) Afghan Troops...

the restive province over the period, the statement added.

Five Taliban militants were killed and four others wounded in Sayyad district of northern Sari Pul province. Three militants' vehicles, two motorcycles and a militants' hideout were also destroyed during the above raids, according to the statement.

Two militants were killed in southern Helmand and eastern Laghman provinces while four insurgents were arrested together with much weapons and ammunition in eastern Nangarhar province, the statement added.

The latest operations came as media reports suggested that significant progress had been made during recent negotiation between a U.S. delegation and Taliban representatives in Qatar.

On Thursday, Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, who is attending the Munich Security Conference in Germany, met with U.S. Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad and discussed recent developments on peace in the region, the Afghan Presidential Palace said on Friday.

They talked about next steps in the peace process, including the consultative Loya Jirga or Afghan Ground Assembly aimed at reestablishing consensus among Afghans on the peace process, the statement said.

According to the statement, Khalilzad "reiterated that the U.S. government is committed to playing a facilitative role in the peace process under the umbrella of Afghan government."

"Good meeting with President Ashraf Ghani this afternoon in Munich. He discussed next steps on consultative Loya Jirga and the urgent necessity of an intra-Afghan dialogue, as well as key regional developments. We are united in our pursuit of peace," Khalilzad, who is expected to meet with Taliban representatives later this month in Doha, tweeted.

The Afghan Air Force also launched five airstrikes against militants and conducted 75 supportive flights during the past 24 hours, the Defense Ministry's statement noted.

However, the militants may respond the military operations by armed attacks and roadside bombings.

Earlier this week, three civilians were killed and eight others wounded after mortar shells struck a house during a ground fighting between Taliban and security forces in Takhar province.

"Afghan National Army as the nation's defense forces are ready to give sacrifice to bring lasting peace and security to the people and are determined to eradicate terror groups in Afghanistan," the statement said.

The statement did not say whether any security force member was hurt during the operations. (Xinhua)

### (13) Flash Flood Kills

confirmed Jalil Ahmad's account and said they had received reports about the death of four people.

Mohammad Nasir, a resident of Anar Dara district, said a dozen houses and shops were damaged in flooding in the district on Tuesday night.

Natural Disaster Management director Abdul Qader Elham said a team had been dispatched to Posht Koh district to assess the damage and deliver immediate assistance. He said floods caused damages in Farah City and Khak-i-Safid district as well.

Elsewhere, four people died and six others wounded due to heavy flooding in Injil and Guzra districts of Herat province. (Pajhwok)