

**(1) Govt Strives to...**

Salam Rahimi, President Ghani's Chief of Staff; Education Minister Mirwais Balkhi; Hasina Safi, Minister of Information and Culture; Dr Alem, Deputy Minister of Refugees and Repatriation; Abdul Tawab Balakarzai, Deputy Minister of Higher Education; Gen. Ebadullah Ebad a senior official of the NDS; Abdullah Attai, member of the Supreme Court; MP Shahgul Rezaee; Ulema Council member Attaullah Ludin; Paktia Governor Shamin Katawzi, and Tooryalai Ghiasi, Head of Cultural Affairs at Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since last September, Khalilzad has met with all sides involved in the Afghan conflict in an attempt to end America's longest war in which the US has lost over 2,400 soldiers.

Preserving the past years' achievements, particularly in human rights, in the peace process has been the main issue raised by critics and human rights activists.

"The Afghan government should create a team in which forces from the outside government are also involved in it so that we can sit with the Taliban for peace talks from a united front," said Sima Samar, Chairperson of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

Other critics said the peace negotiating team needs to be inclusive and that it should involve those politicians who attended the Moscow talks - earlier this month.

"Numerous politicians gathered in Moscow talks. The expectation is that such people are included in the structure of the team," said Nazar Mohammad Mutmaen, a political affairs analyst.

"The Afghan government needs to establish a national and inclusive team ahead of the Doha talks," said Bilal Ahmad Niazi, an analyst.

This comes a week after President Ashraf Ghani called for a grand consultative Jirga, a traditional assembly, on the peace process in the country. Ghani said the Jirga will be convened within a month. (Tolo news)

**(2) Afghans Need...**

that when the ceasefire will be announced, I want a broad-based ceasefire to be announced as soon as possible. Secondly, there is a need for discussions and consultations among Afghans including the [Afghan] government to start soon."

In response to a question about progress on the intra-Afghan dialogue and ceasefire, Khalilzad said he did not have direct contacts with the Taliban since his last meeting with them in Doha, Qatar, last month, and that the Taliban delegation said at the time that they will talk about these issues with their leadership.

"We have not been in direct contacts with the Taliban regarding these issues [ceasefire and intra-Afghan dialogue] since our last meeting," Khalilzad said. "In the previous meeting, they [Taliban] said they do not have the authority to talk about these issues which include a ceasefire and intra-Afghan dialogue and they asked for time to talk about it with their leadership. Let's see what they will have to say about it in the next meeting, so far I don't have any information about their decision." The Taliban has persistently rejected the call to engage in direct talks with the Afghan government.

Khalilzad called on Afghans to put aside their differences and unite for peace. However, he blamed the group and their supporters for the ongoing war and bloodshed in the country.

"The Taliban and their supporters so far have refused to talk with the legitimate Afghan government and reach on an agreement for finding a solution to the problem if the Taliban are really serious about peace. The Taliban say that they want peace and I am confident that yes the Taliban wants peace. But the issue is what kind of peace? Because it needs unity, consensus, and agreement between Afghans, inside and outside the government, including the Taliban. It can be counted as progress if the Afghans come together and reach on a political agreement on a roadmap for ending the war," said the envoy, when asked whether the Taliban is serious about peace.

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Khalilzad, who is trying to facilitate direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban - said there is a need for a "strong national team"

under the Afghan government's umbrella.

"We need a team where government's leadership is respected," Khalilzad said. "At the same time, the participation of other political elements is also a must."

The US envoy said his message to the Afghan government and Afghan elders is that "the time has reached that they sit together and agree on a team" in order to prevent a repeat of another Moscow talks.

Khalilzad said Khalilzad the US is not against "a positive role" of Russia and other countries in the Afghan peace process, adding that it would be better if a national team, representing Afghanistan, will attend a possible next round of talks in Moscow.

According to him, the Moscow talks will be a positive step if they result in forming a "national team" -- for peace. Khalilzad said that he had productive meetings with President Ghani and politicians in Kabul, but he refused to give the details of the meeting as mentioned that the details were "private".

The US envoy said that he is holding talks with four circles which include the Afghan government, the Afghan politicians, the regional countries, and the Taliban. (Tolo news)

**(3) Islamabad...**

initiatives in the context of stabilising Afghanistan, the statement added.

The two sides affirmed their common positions on a range of regional, security and international issues, including the challenges being faced by the Islamic Ummah, inter-faith harmony and counterterrorism.

The Saudi crown prince also met Army Chief General Qamar Jawed Bajwa on Monday. "Pakistan's initiatives on the ongoing peace talks between the US and Taliban were discussed." (Pajhwok)

**(4) First Import...**

Afghan TIR International Transport, said the corridor has provided a good opportunities for transit of Afghan goods to Turkey and other countries.

"Three countries including Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey provide good markets for Afghanistan's vegetables and fruits. We tell farmers that their products will not remain unsold from now on," Rahimi said.

Herat residents said the inauguration of the Lapis Lazuli corridor was a "tremendous achievement" for Afghans and that it will prevent Afghanistan from relying on other trade routes for sending Afghan goods.

"Through this corridor, we are connected to Europe and many other countries," Herat Governor Abdul Qayum Rahimi said.

From the nine trucks which went to Turkey through the Lapis Lazuli corridor, five trucks have returned to Herat while four others have entered the country through Aqina Port in northern Faryab province, officials said.

The Lapis Lazuli Route agreement was signed in October 2017 between Afghanistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The corridor was inaugurated by President Ghani last year in December.

The route begins in Afghanistan's northern Aqina port in Faryab province and Torghandi in western Herat province and will run through to Turkmenbashi in Turkmenistan.

From there it will cross the Caspian Sea and will link the Azerbaijani capital Baku to Tbilisi and Georgia's Black Sea ports of Batumi and Poti.

It will then connect with Kars in eastern Turkey before linking to Istanbul and Europe.

The Lapis Lazuli Route agreement was finalized after three years of talks and was signed during the 7th Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA VII) in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.

The first shipment that will be sent through the route on Thursday includes more than 175 tons of cotton, dried fruit and sesame.

According to ACCI statistics, Afghanistan's annual import volume from Europe and Turkey through Iran is \$900 million but the country's exports to European nations totals \$6 million a year.

The Lapis Lazuli corridor connects Afghanistan through Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia to the Black Sea and ultimately through Turkey to the Mediterranean Sea and Europe. The Lapis Lazuli corridor is a historic corridor. Almost 2,000 years ago, lapis lazuli stone was exported from Badakhshan in northeastern Afghanistan through this route to Europe. (Tolo

news)

**(5) Calls Mount for...**

experience of the applicants in electoral process and it should be found that they are not having any role in corruption," said Naeem Asghari, CEO of Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan. "Those who are appointed in the posts should be trusted by the people."

According to the special task team for new commissioners' selection, at least 13 individuals have so far applied for the posts on behalf of political parties. The five-member team is reviewing 150 applications at this stage, officials said. Among those who have applied for the posts are Abdul Rahim Nawakhtyar, former head of Foreign Relations Department of the IEC, Abdul Aziz Samim, former deputy head of the IEC secretariat, Sayed Ibrahim Sadat, incumbent head of IEC's IT Department and some journalists as well as government employees.

"There are names of former and incumbent employees from both the election commissions," said Khalil Raufi, one member of the task team. "We deal with the issue based on the criteria that we have already worked out. We are considering those issues which are defined in the Article 12 of the Election Law."

Article 12 of the Election Law says that members of the election commissions shall be Afghan citizen, shall have higher education and experience in the relevant field and should be above 35 years old.

The election commissioners were removed from their posts after President Ghani approved new amendment to the electoral law last week. According to Ghani's decree, the two commissions are run by heads of secretariats of the electoral bodies.

On Monday, the Election Support Group, which is comprised of election donor countries, in a statement, called on the Afghan government to continue with the transparent selection of members of the election commissions. (Tolo news)

**(6) Kunar Residents...**

a group of eight protestors left Helmand on foot for Kabul.

The activists walked through towns and villages, crossed provinces and met with local residents along the way. For 38 days, they walked and as they progressed, so their numbers grew.

About 700kms later, the group of eight had grown to an estimated 100. They arrived in Kabul on June 18, 2018 and handed over demands for a ceasefire and peace to both the Afghan government and the Taliban.

The group gave the Taliban three days in which to answer and said if they failed to do so, they would embark on sit in protests outside diplomatic offices and missions in the capital.

The Taliban's deadline passed without any response. The activists then held a three-day sit-in protest outside UNAMA's office in Kabul. They sent a letter to the UN Secretary General António Guterres in which they asked him not to remain indifferent towards ending the ongoing war in Afghanistan.

From there, they moved on to the US embassy - where they stayed for nine days. The activists sent a letter to the American people, asking them to put pressure on the US government to end the war in Afghanistan.

The activists, whose ages ranged from 17 to 65, come from all walks of life and included students, athletes and farmers among others.

The activists also established sit-in protest camp in front of Iranian, Pakistan, Russian and British embassies as well as the office of the European Union in Kabul.

The movement called on Afghan allies to put pressure on Pakistan to stop its interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. (Tolo news)

**(7) Taliban-US...**

Taliban and the US could reach a settlement as a result of their direct talks by building trust and offering strong guarantees.

He said it was the Taliban's right to be assured of non-interference, to have a political office and their real participation in the government once they practically entered the streamline politics. After this, he said, the Taliban should enter the second phase of the national and political process with confidence and power.

For reaching this major goal, Zaeef said, the Taliban should keep in mind some phases. He said the Taliban negotiating team should be fully authorized and trusted by the leadership

which should also draw redlines for the team in order to avoid unnecessary advises from others.

Zaeef said members of the Taliban negotiating team should be taken to the venue of talks with their families in order they could decide without any pressure and mental stress.

He said the Taliban and the US should continue talks without outside interference in order to be successful because regional countries, particularly neighboring countries, wanted to take advantage of the talks in their own favor.

"I believe from the peace and political initiative, the ball is with the Taliban and the countrymen and the international community are waiting to see how the Taliban take this ball to the goal." (Pajhwok)

**(8) Pakistan Warns...**

due to meet U.S. special peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in Qatar on Feb. 25 in the next round of talks to end America's longest war. (Reuters)

**(9) Afghan Exports...**

we've been able to export 2,000 metric tons in horticultural products," he added, referring to King Khan's past participation.

This is the ninth consecutive year that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) supported the participation of Afghan traders at Gulfood. Now in its 24th year, the exhibition comprises one million square feet of exhibition space for 5,000 exhibitors from the food, drink, and hospitality industries. Last year's exhibition saw more than 98,000 visitors from 193 countries. Participation at Gulfood comes on the heels of successful USAID-supported trade shows in New Delhi and Mumbai, India, and Almaty, Kazakhstan. In 2018, Afghan agribusinesses signed \$278 million in contracts for Afghan agricultural products. (PR)

**(10) Hundreds of...**

He accused government of ignoring their plight. "If President Ashraf Ghani doesn't have the power to implement his orders, why did he boast of creating new districts...? We are ruined." Meanwhile, Kabul police spokesman Basir Mujahid told Pajhwok they had taken appropriate security measures to cope with the protest in Company area. (Pajhwok)

**(11) Taliban Charge...**

to act against the Taliban's customs office.

They termed the move as unjust and warned that 150 million afghanis would go to the insurgency annually from the newly established customs office.

Mohammad Sharif, a shopkeeper in Maimana, who exports goods from Balkh province, termed the Taliban's customs office as an unfair step by the Taliban and added this would badly affect common people.

He asked the Taliban if their struggle was to help people, they should remove the customs office they had recently established.

Governor's spokesman Ahmad Javed Baidar, confirmed the Taliban's customs office and said the rebels had now started snatching money from common people after their financiers stopped giving them money.

He said the Taliban received enough money from the customs office and bought weapons and gears for insurgency.

Maulvi Saeed, who introduced himself as a Taliban economic affairs expert, said the decision to establish the customs office was in line with the decision of the Taliban leadership and added the facility had been established since February 8 and everyone was well-informed about custom duties.

About businessmen's concerns, he said 80 percent of Faryab's land was in the Taliban's hands and the government had no right to charge customs duty on businesses. (Pajhwok)

**(12) Snowfall, Rain...**

of Agriculture, irrigation and Livestock but AMA had advanced facilities to do the job.

"The technology allows us to say that several western, northwestern, northern and northwestern parts will see a high-level of rainfall in coming months," he said.

In the solar year 1395, AMA and the Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authority (ACAA) joined the World Meteorological Organisation and several others programmes. (Pajhwok)

**(13) U.S. States...**

Trump announced last week that he will take executive action, including

a national emergency, to obtain funds for his long-promised wall on the southern U.S. border.

Democrat-dominated House declined to fulfill Trump's request for 5.7 billion U.S. dollars to help build the wall that the president promised in his 2016 campaign for presidency.

Demonstrations were held Monday in Washington, New York, Chicago and dozens of other U.S. cities against Trump's move.

In New York City, hundreds of people rallied in Union Square to protest against Trump's declaration and decry Trump's proclamation as "undemocratic and anti-immigrant."

Hundreds of protesters chanted outside the White House on Monday, the annual U.S. Presidents Day holiday, as part of the nationwide demonstrations.

"End the fake emergency now," a banner read. "We stand with immigrants and asylum seekers," another claimed. Hal Ponder, a Washington, D.C. resident and former Congress employee, told Xinhua that he believes "there is no emergency" at the southern border and that the president is "making this up" to get around Congress to push for his signature campaign promise. (Xinhua)

**(14) Vatican Admits...**

The first-of-its-kind, three-day meeting of world bishops will aim to address the issues of responsibility, accountability, and transparency when it comes to child protection and sexual predators within the church. (RT)

**(15) You Too Can...**

Space Adventures was the company that helped organize eight paid space flights to the station starting from 2001, each costing tens of millions of dollars for their affluent clients, including Microsoft billionaire Charles Simonyi, who went twice.

Reaction in Russian-speaking social media to the announcements was mixed: some expressed excitement at the sheer chance of recreating the most famous space journey, and welcomed the return of the publicity that surrounded the space tourists. Others felt that this was a money-making distraction from genuine space exploration, and symptomatic of stagnation in the domestic space industry.

Roscosmos will argue that space tourism does not come at the expense of any other space projects, as its ambitious moon exploration program is reportedly on track, while a Russian state-affiliated research institute boasted on Sunday that it is developing reusable "space yachts" that can take tourists to the orbit within five years. (RT)

**(16) 'They Want...**

The 56-year-old Venezuelan leader also slammed Trump's attack on socialism in his country and elsewhere, pointing out that the White House's "Nazi-style discourse" seeks to limit political diversity and impose a "colonial model" of US "supremacy" across Latin America. "They want to enslave us," Maduro said. (RT)

**(17) EU Commission...**

Hungarian-born billionaire Soros, who promotes liberal causes through his charities, has been the subject of a campaign by the right-wing government of Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

Soros' charitable Open Society Foundations left Hungary last year, while Central European University, a top graduate school based in Budapest, has said it was being forced out of Hungary and would move its main programs to Vienna.

Hungary was the first country in Europe to take a hard anti-immigration line in 2015, when more than a million immigrants arrived, about half of them transiting Hungary en route to western Europe. (Reuters)

**(18) Iran's New...**

the Islamic Republic, he ruffled no feathers among fuel purveyors in Iran. Iran produced less than 50 million liters per day of gasoline before the former Obama administration imposed sanctions on Tehran in 2011 when consumption stood at about 60 million liters a day. That meant the country had to purchase around 10 million liters per day from international vendors.

Last summer when overall gasoline consumption stood at 91 million liters, Iran's production capacity had already surpassed 93 million liters, according to figures provided by Ministry of Petroleum.

The launch of the Persian Gulf Star Refinery's third phase on Tuesday raised the overall gasoline production capacity to 105 million liters a day. (Press TV)