

### (1) Ghani Stresses...

The president said efforts undertaken for management of water showed coordination between authorities concerned had increased, but said it was still insufficient and more work and efforts should be made in this regard.

"The information on the state of water in the country is indicative of the abandonment of the sector," the president said.

He said they should work on a national plan to make their activities more coherent and achieve tangible results in a short time.

He also said the public perception remained that the water situation was constant, but it has changed due to climate change.

"We need to have a clear vision at the national level and there is a need for a basic roadmap to make clear progress on water management," Ghani said.

The president said 90 percent of the country's irrigation remained traditional and with the advent of climate change, the sector was in danger. (Pajhwok)

### (2) Iran Says Taliban...

But Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on a visit to India that Iran has had intelligence contacts with the Taliban because it needed to secure border areas controlled by the Taliban on the Afghan side.

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"I think it would be impossible to have a future Afghanistan without any role for the Taliban," Zarif, who is in New Delhi for talks with Indian leaders, told NDTV in an interview. "But we also believe that the Taliban should not have a dominant role in Afghanistan."

The Taliban, who are fighting to oust all foreign forces and defeat the government, want to re-impose strict Islamic law in Afghanistan after their 2001 ouster by U.S.-led troops.

Zarif said it was up to Afghans to decide what role the Taliban should have but Afghanistan's neighbours would not want them to be in overall control.

"Nobody in the region believes that a Taliban dominated Afghanistan is in the security interests of the region. I believe that is almost a consensus." A Taliban source speaking about the cancelled talks told Reuters that U.S. officials had insisted that the Taliban should meet Afghan officials in Qatar and said "both sides were in disagreement over declaring a ceasefire in 2019".

The Taliban have rejected repeated requests from regional powers to allow Afghan officials to take part in the talks, insisting that the United States is their main adversary. (Reuters)

### (3) Mazar-i-Sharif...

The products being exported from Balkh province include carpets, dried and fresh fruits, saffron and others. Zahoouruddin Sherzad, deputy commerce and industries minister, said that around 5,300 tons of domestic products had so far exported through cargo flights abroad and 20 percent of the transportation cost was paid by traders and the remaining 80 percent by the government.

"We can increase our products by increasing our exports, the government has programs for promoting domestic products and is trying to find new ways to facilitate Afghan traders in area of exports," he added.

Turkish consul general in Mazar-i-Sharif, Schekin Alpar, said that Afghanistan and Turkey were friends and they would increase their commercial relations in future.

He said the inauguration of the Lapis Lazuli Route and the Mazar-i-Sharif air corridor would further strengthen relations between the two countries. Alpar said more than 120 tons of Afghanistan products had arrived in Turkey via air corridor over the past eight months.

Balkh Chamber of Commerce and Industries head, Arash Younusi, said, "We are happy that we can export our products to other countries through Balkh airport, we thank the president for his efforts in this regard."

He said was an important achievement for Afghanistan to sign a transit agreement with Turkmenistan on allowing domestic products to be exported to central Asian countries.

However, Younusi said some problems regarding Afghan traders' visa remained unaddressed and the government should pay attention to them. (Pajhwok)

### (4) Rand Corporation's...

At the end of the draft agreement, spaces have been provided for signatures of leaders from Afghanistan, Pakistan and other regional countries.

Also, there are also unconfirmed reports that the two sides have outlined their views on 50 percent of the issues and will share them at the meeting.

Wahid Muzhda, a Kabul-based political analyst, called the RAND Corporation a credible source. The think-tank has interviewed him in this regard, the observer said.

About the draft deal, he said: "What isn't seen in it is the Bilateral Security Agreement between the US and Afghanistan. This agreement is unacceptable to the Taliban."

Without going into details, Muzhda said individuals close to the Taliban had prepared their own peace agreement. Many issues in the peace process were still vague and the Taliban themselves did not know would happen next.

"Some topics are still being discussed behind the scenes, as both sides (Taliban and the US) don't want the media to debate them," Muzhda added. Taliban made four demands at the first meeting with the US -- an exact date of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, remove of Taliban leaders' names from the blacklist, exchange of prisoners and recognition of their office in Qatar, he explained.

Muzhda said none of the demands had been met so far, as the two sides had only a few meetings.

"The Taliban tend to pull out of any process that doesn't lead to a positive outcome. But they haven't yet walked out this process and have held talks with representatives from several other states.

"It seems something substantial is there. This (US-Taliban dialogue) is a good opportunity. There is a sense of optimism," the commentator continued.

Nazar Mohammad Mutmain, another analyst, said: "RAND Corporation has ascertained views of Afghan, regional and international actors." Mutmain said RAND Corporation's senior researcher Laurel Miller, who helped compile the draft deal, had spoken to him as well.

No formal agreement had been reached yet, the expert said, indicating the two sides could achieve a breakthrough at the Qatar meeting.

The US troop withdrawal would be one of the main topics for discussion in Doha, he believed, hoping for concrete progress at the next meeting.

A peace activist close links to Taliban, Inayatullah Kakar, told Pajhwok Afghan News that RAND Corporation's plan was a draft -- but not an ineffective one. It covers most of Afghanistan-related facts and issues.

According to Kakar, Khalilzad's wife is also working with RAND research centre in a senior position. With this in mind, he thinks, there has been coordination between the research centre and the US envoy.

He added RAND Corporation, popular with many US policymakers, had drafted security plans in many cases. Most of the plans had been implemented by the US government, he continued.

"It looks this draft agreement has been demanded by the US administration and it may have been leaked deliberately to generate a debate on the issue -- a process that will help identify and rectify flaws in the proposed accord," Kakar commented. Kakar suggested: "It will be good for the US, especially for Khalilzad, to share the draft deal with Afghan stakeholders at seminars, workshops and other gatherings. It will help forge a consensus ...."

The Taliban have not yet commented in this regard. But Chief Executive

Dr. Abdullah's office has rejected reports regarding any agreement between the Taliban and US.

CEO spokesman Faridoun Khwazon said any decision excluding the Afghan government was mere speculation. The Afghan government alone reserved the right to make decisions. He said the US and regional countries were trying to pave the way for talks between the Taliban and Kabul. (Pajhwok)

### (5) New Political...

Popal said the alliance would take its final decision whether to create its own electoral team or support another presidential candidate in the July 20 election.

He added their alliance would support a team that had the ability to deal with the current situations.

Abdul Qahir Shariati, deputy head of the alliance, demanded the establishment of peace and the conduct of the presidential election. "Parties involved in the conflict cannot establish peace, a mediator is needed to talk to both the sides." (Pajhwok)

### (6) Afghanistan Says...

"NO CHANGE IN TALIBAN"

Abdullah, who shares power with President Ashraf Ghani after a U.S.-brokered political deal in 2014 that led to formation of a coalition government, said the Taliban have not changed since their austere regime was toppled by U.S.-led forces in 2001.

"We haven't seen any change in the Taliban so far and that country that supports them, has not unfortunately changed its policies toward us either," said Abdullah, referring to neighbouring Pakistan which Kabul accuses of harbouring Taliban leaders.

Pakistan denies the charge and says it is encouraging the Taliban to talk directly with the Afghan government.

A senior Afghan government official said the talks also would have involved discussion about the formation of an interim administration known as the "peace government" after U.S. forces announce a withdrawal and the Taliban accept a ceasefire.

The peace government would bring all warring parties under one administration until the Taliban are fully integrated and election are held.

But Ghani has strongly opposed any interim government.

Abdullah called on Afghans to support the current administration instead.

"They say they are not the Taliban of the past and they have learnt lessons and are in favour of an inclusive government, but they instead go and talk to some individuals and call them elders which is against our national interest," Abdullah said, referring to political figures.

"They do this to show that the government is either weak or does not exist," he added.

The impasse over the talks comes as Afghanistan prepares to hold presidential elections in July with many Afghans believing the vote may be cancelled if a peace deal is reached with the Taliban.

Presidential candidates, including Ghani who seeks a second five-year term, have not officially announced they are running as coalition-building among leaders of various ethnic groups debated whom to support. The United States sent troops to Afghanistan after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington. At its peak the U.S. deployment involved more than 100,000 troops, but Washington withdrew most in 2014 and now has around 14,000 troops in the country as part of a NATO-led mission aiding Afghan security forces and hunting militants.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on a visit to India on Wednesday that the Taliban must have a role in Afghanistan in future, but not a dominant role. (Reuters)

### (7) Afghans Not in...

will only fight Al-Qaeda, then they will fight the Taliban, but only on Afghan soil, and since they did not pursue the Taliban to their safe havens,

they have actually fought from a very comfortable position," he added.

According to Haqqani, Taliban are divided in two - one division supports the current changes, while the other wants the return of the Islamic emirate.

"There will be some Taliban who say our concern is only our village, our district and our province. Then there are some Taliban who will say, 'now we have an Islamic emirate back in Afghanistan'. I don't think the latter will easily happen because the people of Afghanistan will fight to preserve the gains of the last 17 years," he said. The former Pakistani envoy said Afghanistan has made many improvements over the past years.

"More girls are going to school in Afghanistan, women have much more participation in urban life if nothing else, the economy is a lot better than it used to be, the cities that were reduced to rubble have been rebuilt. I don't think the people of Afghanistan will let that go easily," he said as he talked about developments in Afghanistan's post-Taliban regime.

During the debate, Indian Army Chief General Bipin Rawat said, "There should be talks with Taliban as long as they don't come with preconditions and as long as they are looking at lasting peace in Afghanistan and bring about stability in that country." He said Pakistan is rightly aiming for a favorable situation in Afghanistan. "Pakistan has always treated Afghanistan as its backyard. They are concerned about it and, as a military leader, I would say why not be concerned about their backyard. (Tolo news)

### (8) Khalilzad Embarks...

Executive Abdullah and other stakeholders to ensure an intra-Afghan peace process. The US says its goal is to promote dialogue among Afghans about how to end the conflict.

During his last trip in December, Khalilzad reiterated the only solution to the conflict was for all parties to sit together and reach an agreement on the political future of Afghanistan with mutual respect and acceptance. This is Khalilzad's first trip to India after he was appointed as the special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation last year. He has since made multiple trips to the region. However, the diplomat has not visited India before. (Pajhwok)

### (9) NDS Arrests 11...

According to the statement, the group was involved in targeting security check posts and security forces supply convoys in the province.

The statement said two members of the militant group were ready to conduct suicide bombing in Kandahar. Taliban has not commented on this report. (Tolo news)

### (10) Key Taliban Leader...

Jawzjan was among the relatively calm provinces in North of Afghanistan but the security situation in some of its districts has deteriorated during the recent years.

Both the Taliban and militants affiliated with ISIS Khurasan have been attempting to expand their foothold in this province. (KP)

### (11) 'MoI Officials...

first of the Access to Information Law.

The statement also highlighted article eight of the law that says information having the value of news should be shared with the journalist within 24 hours.

According to the Access to Information Law, the Presidential Palace, ministries, independent commissions, judiciary, parliament and all other institutions working under the state law should provide information when required.

The AILC said according to article five, three, and eight of the Access to Information Law, the MoI has violated the law by restricting its employees from disseminating information. The commission asked the MoI to reverse its decision and allow access to information. (Pajhwok)

### (12) Afghan Envoy...

military establishment. And we see every sign of that, that's a good thing

to see in Islamabad. So, we are very hopeful, we have all the right kind of symptoms and signals from Islamabad. At the moment we have no reasons to doubt their contribution," he added.

He said Pakistan has influence on the Taliban and that Taliban should be "encouraged" to come to the negotiations table.

"They (Pakistan) have influence over the Taliban. I would hate to accept the use of the word 'force'. When you force somebody to come to talk then they don't talk. You have to encourage them, you have to convince them that it is in their interest to come to the negotiating table and I think that's what Pakistan is doing," Daudzai said.

So far, Taliban has refused to talk directly to the Afghan government.

Khalilzad is on a new tour of the region and will travel to India, China, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

This time he isn't expected to visit Qatar, where the Taliban have a political office. (Tolo news)

### (13) Most Lawmakers'...

members said some colleagues had themselves made illegal and fake car plates.

Rahimullah Ghaleb, deputy head of the Wolesi Jirga secretariat, said five VRPs (1 to 5) and as many VRPs associated to the parliament in black color had been awarded to administrative panels of the both houses and the remaining plates were fake and illegal.

He said the issue had often been shared with security institutions to stop the movement of these vehicles.

Lawmaker Dr. Ramazan Bashardost said most of lawmakers during the past 10 years had made such plates. He claimed some VRPs associated with the parliament had been used for drug trafficking and in blasts, a fact the former MoI minister had acknowledged in the house.

Lawmaker Jummadin Gayanwal said some of lawmakers had themselves created and used fake registration plates.

He was unaware of the exact number of these plates but said most of the lawmakers used them.

Haji Hameedullah, a resident of Kabul City, said: "A lawmaker offers his vehicle with parliamentary VRP against \$3000 monthly fare to businessmen."

He said businessmen who had contacts with lawmakers rented their vehicles in order to move freely and stay safe from mafia and other groups. (Pajhwok)

### (14) Daikundis Worried...

blamed on the price hike on the closure of transit highways to the province.

Mayor Khadija Ahmad confirmed the hike in prices of fuel and other essential items and said they could not interfere in the free market but still they monitored in the bazaar many times a month. (Pajhwok)

### (15) Ministry Plans...

Exporters Union, Yaya Khan Zadran, said a strategic plan is required for investment in pine nuts trade.

"The demand of the union is that a strategic plan should be prepared on investment in pine nut processing," Zadran said.

Statistics show that last year Afghanistan exported 1,100 tons of pine nuts valued up to \$45 million through the newly-established air corridor to China, while it was 400 tons in 2017. Based on MAIL statistics, Afghanistan produced 23,000 tons of pine nuts last year. (Tolo news)

### (16) Six Security...

Taliban set fire three armored vehicles belonged to the Afghan forces in the province.

Balkh police confirm the clash but did not give details about the casualties.

Balkh police said in a statement that the Ministry of Interior has directed them not to share information with media.

Taliban has released a video on social media which according to them shows a number of local police force members taken hostage by the group in Balkh. (Tolo news)