

**(1) Ghani Reveals...**

that can ensure security of America and Europe and others on the one hand, but more fundamentally our own democratic rights and institutions and our right to live in peace and harmony," Ghani said. President Ghani, meanwhile, said government has brought reforms to security agencies.

"We have changed our security forces, rootstock and branch during this. Reform of the Inherent Law brought the age of retirement for a general to 56 years. Our four-star general is now retired at 62. Over 2000 generals and colonels have been retired. We are really focused, we have used this and day by day, we are gaining strength," Ghani said. (Tolo news)

**(2) Pakistan Rejects...**

Afghanistan using the Chabahar port. India took over the operations of a part of Shahid Beheshti Port, Chabahar in Iran last month. On 24th December 2018, India, Iran and Afghanistan jointly inaugurated the office of the Indian SPV - India Ports Global Chabahar Free Zone (IPGCFZ), at Chabahar. The physical take-over of the terminal area, cargo handling equipment and Office building was completed by 29th December 2018.

Commercial operations began at IPGCFZ with the arrival of a vessel. A Cyprus registered bulk carrier had arrived at Chabahar with 72458 MT of corn cargo. The vessel MV MACHERAS berthed at the terminal at 0130 hrs on 30th December 2018.

Central Asia countries have also lauded Chabahar. Uzbek ambassador to India Farhod Arziev has lauded the project saying a railway project in Afghanistan can connect Uzbekistan with Chabahar.

New Delhi is Afghanistan's largest donor in the region. (Pajhwok)

**(3) Pentagon...**

Ranger Regiment at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington. On Monday, the Taliban carried out a suicide attack on an Afghan intelligence base in the Maidan Wardak province of Afghanistan, killing a large number of personnel from the National Directorate of Security.

The US has approximately 14,000 troops in Afghanistan with the majority of those forces serving in non-combat roles as part of the NATO-led training mission, helping to train and advise local Afghan forces.

A smaller number of US Special Operations Forces participate in counterterrorism missions against international terror groups like al Qaeda and ISIS.

While those missions also involve partnering with Afghan troops, they can also involve US forces in more direct combat operations. Several US defense officials told CNN late last year that President Donald Trump wants to significantly reduce the number of US troops in Afghanistan. Two administration officials told CNN that Trump wants the plans made in hopes he could announce the reduction in his State of the Union speech, which is traditionally at the end of January or early February. (CNN)

**(4) 'Fundamental...**

regional and international consensus to achieve peace," Ghani said.

"Afghans as a nation and as a state are dedicated to overcoming the past. According to a World Bank analysis, if Pakistan continues the current course, they will be a very poor country by 2047. If they change and engage in regional cooperation, they could be a middle-income country," he added.

While addressing the issue of US withdrawing half of its troops from Afghanistan, Abdullah noted that Washington's South Asia Strategy is 'very thoughtful response to the situation on the ground' and may facilitate in achieving peace in the region.

"The South Asia Strategy is a very thoughtful response to the situation on the ground. First, the core of South Asia Strategy was to bring peace to Afghanistan, and we have welcomed this. Second, it is a conditions-based strategy. We've reformed our security forces," Ghani said.

This comes after Abdullah on Wednesday hit out at the Taliban for its lackadaisical attitude towards the peace talks initiated by the Afghan government. Citing the group's headline approach towards the Afghan government, Abdullah clarified that the people of the country were not in favour of the Taliban's style of governance or to see them back in power.

The Afghan CEO clarified further that the Ghani administration did not set any pre-conditions for the peace talks.

In a veiled reference to Pakistan, Abdullah warned certain countries in the region against supporting terrorism, saying that such an approach "will harm those who provide sanctuaries to them".

(ANI)

**(5) Uzbekistan Wants...**

India-Central Asia dialogues in the historic Silk Road city of Samarkand, which saw the Foreign Ministers of these countries agreed on the high potential of Afghanistan as a transit hub.

"One of the key items of discussion was to expand areas of connectivity between India and central Asia and use transit potential of Afghanistan. So now, discussion among the parties, among Central Asia and India is going on to increase the connectivity opportunities which will create new corridors between Uzbekistan, central Asia and India. We see great transit potential of Afghanistan in this regard. And we believe, this will have practical implication and it will be beneficial for all parties," Ambassador Arziev told WION. He also pointed out that Uzbekistan is not merely landlocked, but a double-landlocked country. That means each of its five neighbours are themselves landlocked. Uzbekistan and Liechtenstein are the only two double-landlocked countries in the world. This creates a problem of access to the sea, which is the mode of transport for a vast majority of the world's trade.

"Any projects that can help Uzbekistan to reach the international market we see positively. The projects like Chabahar creates an opportunity for central Asia. We believe it will play a very important practical role in expanding trade and economic relations," Arziev said.

He added that the present connectivity vision focussed on a railway link between the Central Asian countries and Chabahar Port through Afghanistan. Presumably, this would be an extension of the Chabahar-Zaranj-Delaram-Hajigak that India, Iran and Afghanistan have agreed to jointly build. Hajigak lies about 100 km west of Kabul.

Arziev also pointed to the expanding trade and strategic ties between India and Uzbekistan, which includes the agreement for the supply of uranium for Indian reactors and the extension of \$200 million credit lines for social and infrastructural projects. (Monitoring Desk)

**(6) Afghan, Pakistani...**

and we hope to continue providing them with opportunities to highlight their skills in art and other faculties," stated Dinesh Shrestha, the head of the office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Peshawar on the occasion.

The winners were awarded cash prizes and certificates. Abbas Khan, Commissioner for Afghan Refugees, Iain Hall, UNHCR Deputy Country Representative, and Dr Muhammad Sher Ali Khan, Chairman of Department of Art and Design, University of Peshawar, jointly distributed the certificates. (Agencies)

**(7) Taliban Appoints...**

the Inter-Services Intelligence, and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. His release, according to security experts, was part of high-level negotiations led by Khalilzad with the Taliban.

Diplomatic efforts to end the United State's longest running conflict intensified last year after the appointment of the Afghan-born Khalilzad to lead direct talks with the Taliban.

He has held at least four meetings with the Taliban representatives. But there has been no let up in the violence.

And abiding fears about how Afghan government forces would withstand the Taliban threat without U.S. military support have been heightened by reports that U.S. President Donald Trump wants to bring home almost half of the 14,000 U.S. troops deployed in Afghanistan.

"POSITIVE PROGRESS"

But the unexpected extension of peace talks was a positive sign, according to two senior Taliban leaders in Afghanistan who have been kept informed of the progress made in Qatar.

During the first two days, the talks focused on a roadmap for the withdrawal of the foreign forces and a guarantee that Afghanistan would not be used for hostile acts against the United States and its allies, according to one of Taliban leaders.

"The mechanism for a ceasefire and ways to enter into an intra-Afghan dialogue were the two other big topics that were supposed to be discussed on Thursday," he told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

A third source based in the Gulf, who has close ties to the Taliban representatives, said the decision to extend the meeting in the Qatari capital Doha came after "positive progress" during the first two days. Members of Afghanistan's High Peace Council (AHP), a body which oversees peace efforts but does not represent the government said they were hoping for positive news.

"When talks take a long time it means the discussion is in a sensitive and important stage, and the participants are getting close to a positive result," said Sayed Ehsan Taheri, the spokesman for AHP

in Kabul. The Taliban who are fighting to oust foreign troops have repeatedly rejected the offer to hold direct talks with President Ashraf Ghani's government, which they consider an illegitimate foreign-imposed regime.

The U.S. and regional powers insist that the peace process should be "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned".

Newly appointed Baradar will also hold the additional post of third deputy of Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, the leader of Taliban and work with Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, a veteran Taliban official who has been running the group's political office in Qatar since 2015 and has participated in the latest rounds of peace talks.

"Stanekzai was given the responsibility but he was not powerful to make all decisions," said a second Taliban official on conditions of anonymity. (Reuters)

**(8) Pakistan Offered...**

sources as saying that the proposals could be implemented only if Washington was satisfied with Islamabad's efforts to find a negotiated settlement to the Afghan war.

US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and Ghani's adviser Mohammad Umer Daudzai recently commended Pakistan's help in arranging US-Taliban peace talks in Qatar and the UAE. During his recent trip to Islamabad, Daudzai noticed that "Pakistan's civilian government and security institutions are on the same page" on the need to push for peace in Afghanistan.

Senator Graham, a strong supporter of the US military presence in Afghanistan, has endorsed Imran Khan's position on the need for reconciling with the Taliban. (Pajhwok)

**(9) Rally in Nimroz...**

which showed the people of Afghanistan were really looking forward to have peace.

Zaranj city mayor Noor Rahman Hotak said the demonstration was full of emotions and strong feelings for nationwide peace.

He said the Provincial Council, the Municipality and Information and Culture Department helped and cooperated in arranging the demonstration.

A number of other demonstrators expressed similar views and supported President Ghani's latest efforts for peace talks with the Taliban. (Pajhwok)

**(10) Over 100 Arrested...**

students who join these schools," Balkh Police Chief Gen. Akram Saame said. This comes after two Turkish citizens and former teachers at Afghan-Turk schools, Yulmaz Aitin and Sami Yaoz, who were under house arrest in Kabul for at least 13 months, were released and were granted asylum in Sweden.

Back in December 2017, Afghan security forces raided an Afghan-Turk female high school in Taimani area in Kabul's PD4 and surrounded the school for at least three hours. The teachers were arrested at that time.

Afghan-Turk schools' parents associations said two teachers had filed an asylum application to the UN office in Kabul over fear of prosecution in Turkey. The Turkish government had asked the Afghan government to hand over these individuals to Turkey. But there is no extradition agreement between the two countries.

At least 600 boys and girls are enrolled in Afghan-Turk schools in Mazar-e-Sharif city. The management of the schools are supposed to be handed over from Cag Educational Foundation to Turkish government, but the students and teachers of the schools are resisting against the decision.

On February 2018, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Afghanistan's Ministry of Education and Turkish government, the management of the schools was officially handed over to President Erdogan's administration. (Tolo news)

**(11) 168 Afghan...**

Academy, was quoted as saying: "We regard Afghan people as old friends, we are aware that they need us right now.

"We are working for the establishment of peace and security in Afghanistan by conveying our knowledge, skills and experience to them," Inal told the state-run Anadolu Agency.

Turkey and Afghanistan had signed the Memorandum of Understanding on the Training and Capacity Enhancement of the Afghan National Police on March 5, 2011 in Afghanistan's capital Kabul.

Under the 2011 MoU, 500 mid-ranking Afghan cadets are imported six-month-long basic training in Sivas every year. (Pajhwok)

**(12) Protest Camp...**

process was manipulated. Noorudding Fitrat, the provincial IEC head, confirmed they had started re-counting votes cast at 290 polling stations.

But the recount has angered some successful candidates. Mohammad Din Hamdard, one of the winners, alleged the recount was in the interest of certain individuals.

"We don't accept the process of recount at a few polling stations. All Kunduz votes should be recounted," he stressed, warning of launching demonstrations if the commission did not reverse its decision. (Pajhwok)

**(13) Corruption Redux...**

More than half of them belong to Afghans.

In this report, Pajhwok has obtained comments from traders, drivers, civil society activists and members of the provincial council. They accused the police personnel of taking bribe. But authorities insist corruption in Torkham has decreased.

Video of police taking bribe

A video recorded secretly received by Pajhwok shows a border policeman taking money from a truck driver and putting it into his pocket. In another 13-second video: a policeman checks a cargo truck driver's pocket. He starts beating the trucker after finding no money in his pockets.

Voice message of a former commissar Pajhwok obtained verbal instructions of a former commissar, who was later replaced. He directed a policeman through a walkie-talkie to ensure that some vehicles departed earlier in the morning. Some sources claimed the trucks were allowed departure out of turn in return for bribes.

Drivers' complaints

Hijrat, a cargo truck driver, alleged he had been waiting at the port for the past one month. Many trucks have since crossed the border after paying bribes, according to the truckers, apparently disturbed by the current state of affairs.

"We parked our trucks in Barikab area last night. The policemen manning a check-post there asked us for unlawful gratifications. Several drivers paid Rs3,000 each and departed earlier in the morning. But my vehicle remains parked," he grumbled.

Shinwari, another driver, said: "By God, I have been here for 20 days; other drivers paying bribes have finished their work and departed. Policemen in plainclothes take money brazenly."

Another driver, speaking on the condition of anonymity, revealed he had been made to wait for a month last time. But this time around, he was forced to pay Rs15,000 to avoid facing a similar delay. "I struck a deal with a border policeman and was permitted to move on."

Problems of traders

Due to the bribery, traders say they are purchasing goods at high prices -- something that negatively impacts on the entire nation. Directors of Nangarhar marble factories' community also said truck drivers were frequently asked for paying money at the Torkham gate because of traffic rush there. Bilal Musazai, deputy director of the marble factory owners' community, told Pajhwok the issue had been shared with the commissary, customs, municipality, transport and other government departments in the dry port. But so far, no one has paid attention to his complaint.

Noor Rahman, deputy head of the coordination council of entrepreneurs and truck drivers, accused policemen and custom personnel of doing nothing as long as they were not bribed.

Meanwhile, provincial chamber of commerce and industry officials confirmed the problem. Torkham gate guards collect bribes from truck drivers through teenagers on different pretexts.

A spokesman for the chamber of commerce and industry, Shakirullah Safi, also charged that cargo truck drivers were forced to pay Rd 500 to Rs1000 per vehicle at check-points. Empty trucks are made to park for days but those loaded with fruits and vegetables are not subjected to long wait.

Khanzada Afghan, a trader, recalled he would pay in the past total expenses of Rs200,000 on a truckload of goods from Pakistan's port city of Karachi to Nangarhar. But the cost has now increased three times, according to him.

Demurrage charges are another concern for traders. An amount of \$120 had to be paid for a container parked for a month, he concluded.

Civil society & provincial council Abdul Latif Waheedi, Nangarhar civil society council's head, told Pajhwok the issue had been taken to the Presidential Palace and the Ministry of Interior. But the problem remained unsolved.

"We have to fight against extortion, We have shared the issue with media representatives and could offer evidence of police forcing cargo truck drivers to pay Rs500 to Rs60,000 in bribes per vehicle."

Abdul Rahman Moawin, deputy head of the National Youth Committee, cor-

roborated allegations that security guards at the Torkham gate compelled drivers to pay bribes for crossing the border.

He said trucks were parked from Torkham to Momand Dara district to force drivers into greasing palms of police.

A provincial council member, meanwhile, blasted Pakistani border guards for conniving at the illegal practice. Ajmal Omar claimed border police were fleeing truckers with the abatement of their Pakistani counterparts.

"When we arrived in Torkham to monitor the situation, we collected receipts from vehicles but the gate was closed. Policemen on both sides have telephonic contacts and exchange messages about the arrival of the monitoring team. Thus the gate is shut."

Ashabuddin Wali, another member of the council, expressed similar views. He said truck drivers had no option but to offer policemen money to cross the border in time.

He said the truck are made to stay for even one month and finally they had to offer them money to quickly cross the border because the stay is a lost in other way to them. Another member of the council said evidence of the corrupt practice was not available because police used ordinary people to collect bribes for them.

Official reaction

Torkham commissary officials admitted corrupt practices were a nuisance in the past. But the scourge had been eliminated, they claimed. Lt. Col. Pacha, deputy commissar, said new officials had taken effective measure to stop corrupt practices.

Deputy Governor Tamim Arif Momand did not rule out corruption in state institutions and said drivers and businessmen had registered complaints of corruption in Torkham. "Many complaints were registered against former officials. With the appointment of new officials, things have changed and we will see what happens next."

Last week, he recalled, a delegation headed by Presidential Advisor Samiullah Momand visited Torkham and investigated charges of corruption. The delegation took notice of public complaints against the commissary, customs, municipality, transport and other department.

The deputy governor acknowledged complaints against all departments, saying the commissar had been replaced. Activities of the new appointee were being monitored, he added.

The Nangarhar appellant court said no case linked to bribes had been filed yet. But a different bribery case was filed from Torkham at the appellant court three month back. Judged Fazal Walli Qazizada said the case was related to two people from Shamshad Civil Society Organisation who asked drivers for illegal payments.

Nangarhar Transport Director Khan Wazir acknowledged the frequent congestion caused by trucks in Torkham. Following a spate of complaints, a delegation from the Presidential Palace recently visited the port city to resolve the issue. He, however, did not provide information about corrupt practices and said so far he had not received such information. (Pajhwok)

**(14) Questions Raised...**

This comes as some candidates still continue their protests on what they call widespread fraud and irregularities in parliamentary elections in Badakhshan. Badakhshan candidates claimed that Musawi has "embezzled" salaries of the commission's employees. Badakhshan IEC staff members also said they have not been paid for the past few months.

"Ten months has been passed since the project ended. We visit the commission, but so far, we have not been paid," said Zabihulla, an IEC employee in Badakhshan.

"The money has not been transferred to us. This money is paid by the UNDP (United Nations Development Program). The UNDP says that when the main person comes, and his identity is recognized, then they will pay the staff," said Ghulam Jan Anwari, acting direct of IEC office in Badakhshan. The IEC's deputy spokesman Abdul Aziz Ibrahim, meanwhile, said Musawi has went out of the country for vacation, but now they do not have any information about his whereabouts.

"I said he is on leave, but again we will investigate the matter to find out where he (Musawi) is and what he is doing," Ibrahim reiterated.

The Attorney General's Office said their investigation is ongoing on fraud allegations against Kunduz IEC chief, who is believed that have left the country to "escape the allegations". According to the Attorney General's Office, so far, 232 people including 22 employees of the election commission have been arrested in 19 provinces in relations to electoral crimes. (Tolo news)