

(1) Ghani Calls...

Ghani did not mention the Qatar talks between the US and Taliban, that ended on Saturday.

However, his address to the nation centered on peace and on the issue of troops withdrawal.

His address also came after reported discussions between him and the US's special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad who arrived in Kabul on Sunday after six days of talks with the Taliban in Doha, Qatar.

Until now, the Taliban has refused to sit with the Afghan government, which it sees as illegitimate. However, they have held four rounds of talks with the US since last year.

One of their key conditions however, is the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan – a topic that Ghani did raise in his speech.

Although he did not give any details about discussions between himself and Khalilzad he appeared to stand firm in his demand that the Taliban engage directly with Kabul. US Upbeat About Progress

With Khalilzad and his boss US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, as well as Taliban officials, hailing progress toward ending America's longest war, Khalilzad was the one expected to report back to Ghani on last week's talks.

To date, the Taliban have kept Kabul out of the process.

The six days of talks ended in Qatar on Saturday after initially being scheduled for only two days and Taliban sources said key parts of a draft pact were mapped out, including an 18-month timeline for the withdrawal of foreign troops after the completion of a deal. Ghani did not give any details on this but did touch on the subject and said no Afghan wants foreign forces in the country and that a withdrawal of these troops would be carried out in accordance with a plan.

Another key area reportedly discussed in the talks was that of the Taliban giving assurances that it will not allow Afghanistan to be used by al-Qaeda or Daesh to attack the US and its allies.

Ghani did not mention this in his speech. Taliban sources meanwhile said after the talks that the group wants to be part of an interim government following any ceasefire. Again Ghani did not mention anything about this except to call on the Taliban to engage in direct dialogue.

A fresh round of talks between Khalilzad and the Taliban is expected to take place on February 25 in Doha, two senior Taliban sources told Reuters on Sunday.

While he has not been directly involved up until now, Ghani's role is likely to grow as a full deal gets closer and diplomacy intensifies.

Without going into detail on Saturday night, Khalilzad said in tweets that nothing could be agreed without an intra-Afghan dialogue and a full ceasefire.

"He (Khalilzad) will inform Ghani and his officials about all the developments, seek their opinion before traveling back to Washington," a senior Afghan official said on condition of anonymity.

Khalilzad is also due to brief top regional diplomats on Monday morning.

Reuters reported Sunday that Western diplomats describe Ghani as being in a tight spot, with no authority to decide on the troop departure and the final decision to declare the ceasefire resting with the Taliban. He, however, does enjoy the power to decide to support an interim government rather than push for presidential elections which could prove to be a distraction to the peace effort, the report read.

So far he has rejected talk of an interim government. "It is time for Ghani to choose between elections or peace process," said a Western diplomat based in Kabul.

Despite the progress around peace, violence is widely expected to continue, with the Taliban mounting daily attacks against the Afghan government and its security forces. The Taliban now control about half of Afghanistan's territory and Ghani said in Switzerland last week that 45,000 members of the country's security forces had been killed since he took office in 2014. (Tolo news)

(2) IECC Accuses...

people have no patience and will no longer tolerate their weaknesses and inefficiencies. He stressed the government is obliged to bring comprehensive reforms and avoid people's rights from violation. (ATN)

(3) Next Round of...

forces training, advising and assisting their Afghan counterparts, the Taliban controls nearly half of Afghanistan. (Reuters)

(4) U.S. Committed...

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said last week that 45,000 members of the country's security forces had been killed since he took office in 2014.

There were reports last month that the United States was considering pulling out almost half of its forces, but a White House spokesman said U.S. President Donald Trump had not issued orders to withdraw. However, the administration has not denied the reports.

CORE CONCERNS

Both U.S. officials and the hardline Islamic group hailed progress after the talks on Saturday with U.S. special peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad. He told the New York Times on Monday that a draft framework had been completed but details still needed to be fleshed out.

Taliban sources told Reuters on Saturday that the United States had agreed on the withdrawal of foreign troops within 18 months of the signing of a pact but the U.S. official said a timeline was not discussed.

The United States has about 14,000 troops in Afghanistan as part of a NATO-led mission and a U.S. counter-terrorism mission largely directed at groups such as Islamic State and al Qaeda.

Some 8,000 troops from 38 other countries are participating in the operation, known as Resolute Support.

The official said progress was made on addressing core U.S. concerns that Afghanistan will not be used as a base by al Qaeda or Islamic State for attacks against the United States and its allies.

"That is why we came to Afghanistan in the first place," the official said.

Apart from the ceasefire, the Taliban did not discuss the need for talks with the Afghan government to reach a durable political settlement, the U.S. official said.

The Taliban have repeatedly refused to talk to the Afghan government, which they see as a puppet of the United States, throwing into question how effective a peace deal could really be.

The Taliban do want, however, to join an interim government post-deal - something that alarms Ghani. Khalilzad, an Afghan-born American diplomat, met Ghani for four hours on Sunday to outline progress and seek his support.

In response, Ghani said in a televised address that the presence of foreign forces was based on an international agreement and they will not be required for ever.

"No Afghans want foreign forces in their country for the long term," Ghani said.

"The current presence of foreign forces is based on need...and according to an exact and arranged plan we are trying to bring down that number to zero." (Reuters)

(5) Protesting candidates...

stand against fraud and corrupt individuals to teach them a lesson that people stand against fraud and rigging."

He warned of widespread protest if their demand not addressed. Maulvi Attaullah Faizani, another candidate, said: "I invite the second vice president and IEC commissioners for debate in order to protect the rights of people and unearth fraud and rigging."

Few days back, Dozens of unsuccessful Wolesi Jirga candidates and hundreds of supporters have called for invalidation of votes cast in Kabul, asking the judiciary to prosecute corrupt election officials.

The protesters, who staged a rally from Khalej Hotel to Independent Election Commission on Saturday evening, said all Kabul votes should be declared invalid due to widespread rigging and fraud.

While calling for re-election in the capital, the protesters chanted: "Where is my vote? Kabul ballots should be invalidated." IEC members and other corrupt officials be put on exit control list and prosecuted, they added.

Irfanullah Irfani, Wolesi Jirga's deputy secretary and a participant of the protest, said: "We have gathered for defending people's right to vote for candidates of their choice." IEC Deputy spokesman Zabihullah Saadat told Pajhwok Afghan News that protester could refer to the Independent Electoral Complaint Commission (IECC) against alleged rigging and fraud with prove and evidence.

He rejected the matter of bribery by commissioners and said the protesters could share such evidence with judicial organs. (Pajhwok)

(6) Yousuf Kargar...

Hafizullah Wali Rahimi, head of the National Olympic Committee, on Monday introduced Kargar as acting head of the AFF and said the federation's plans which were delayed as a result of the allegations should resume.

He said Kargar would lead the AFF based on FIFA and National Olympic Committee procedure until investigation into sex abuse allegations against the president of the federation was completed.

Kargar said the AGO had lifted his suspension and he would serve as acting head of the AFF until the case against the federation was decided or FIFA ordered new elections. He said the ongoing year was very important for the football federation as many foreign matches were in the pipeline and programs developed before should be implemented as soon as possible.

Exercises of players who were expected to join future matches would begin from tomorrow, he said. (Pajhwok)

(7) 2,615 Civilians...

most of casualties with 744 killed and 1,668 others injured.

Most of the suicide attacks - 10 - last year happened in July in which 68 persons were killed and 129 others injured.

One suicide attack in February in Helmand province killed eight persons - the least number of casualties in a suicide attack.

The deadliest suicide attack for civilians happened last year in January in Sadarat Square in Kabul, in which 103 people lost their lives and 200 others injured. The Taliban had claimed responsibility for that attack.

Last year, most of the suicide attacks happened in Kabul and the deadliest one was in Zabaq Square in which over 300 people suffered casualties.

After Kabul, most suicide attacks accounted -- 11 - happened in Nangarhar province in which 179 people, including women and children had been killed and 415 others injured.

In Nangarhar, the deadliest attack happened in Momandara district on protesters in which 68 civilians were killed and 165 others injured.

Daesh carried out most of the suicide attacks CPAG last year.

On April 30, a suicide attack in Shashdarak district of Kabul killed nine journalists. Sabawon Kakar, the reporter of Azadi Radio, was among the victim in the attack.

Sabawon's brother said: "Suicide attacks are not a brave attempt. It claimed the life of my young brother. I wish the 2018 year never happened to our family."

Jafar, resident of Dasht-i-Barchi locality, talks about the suicide attack on a learning centre in the limits of 18th Police District (PD).

Jafar said: "I have a shop close to the Ma-woud Learning Centre, it was nearly evening when the explosion occurred, sending a thick black smoke in the air. I and some others rushed to the blast site. Bodies and blood was everywhere, people were shouting for help. I just helped three blood bathed injured and took them out the site."

Laws and violation CPAG also accused the insurgents and Afghan forces of violating the clear rules and regulations of war and wanted the government to use all means to reduce the level of civilian casualties.

Night raid CPAG registered 256 overnight operations in 2018, in which 265 civilians were killed and 50 others wounded.

More than half of the night raids were conducted in Nangarhar that caused heavy casualties to civilians.

Most of such operations last year were launched in September, when 75 civilians were killed and six others wounded.

The deadliest overnight operation was conducted on September 16 in Nangarhar province, in which 15 civilians including women and children were killed.

Only one night operation was conducted in January last year but that killed 35 civilians. One operation was conducted in February that killed seven civilians. Ten civilians were killed and six others wounded in the only overnight operation taking place in March.

Two civilians were killed in a night raid in Nangarhar province in April last year.

The number of night operations increased in May, when 13 civilians were killed and eight others wounded in Nangarhar and five people killed and seven others wounded in Paktia that month.

Nine people were killed and five others wounded in three night operations, all conducted in Nangarhar province in June.

Night operations increased in July -- four operations were conducted in Nangarhar, one in Khost and one in Logar province and a total of 23 civilians were killed and two others wounded in these raids.

Fortunately, no such operations were conducted in August -- the most peaceful month for civilians in terms of night raids.

In September, nine night time operations were conducted across the country, in which 75 civilians were killed and six others wounded.

In October, eight night operations killed 50 civilians and wounded four others. Five operations were launched in Nangarhar alone. Seven night operations in November killed 36 civilians and wounded 12 others.

September was the deadliest month for civilians in 2018, when nine operations, most of them in Nangarhar, were conducted by Afghan forces. Most of casualties also occurred in Nangarhar province in night raids during this period.

MaidanWardak province also suffered civilian casualties during overnight operations in late 2018.

Delawar Khan, a farmer since 26 years, lost one of his sons in a night raid in Sadmardi village of Narkh district of MaidanWardak province.

He said: "It was 12am at night when my house's gate was blown up with bombs, two of my sons who had recently returned from Iran, were handcuffed and taken away by the forces. We later heard fire and as we came out of home and we saw the 01 Unit soldiers killed one of my sons and detained the second who is still with intelligence forces."

Mursalin, also a resident of the same village, confirmed the incident and said no one the Taliban, the government and US forces showed mercy to civilians during the last one year.

Airstrikes: Afghan and foreign forces' airstrikes hit 19

civilian targets in 2018 and as a result, 136 civilians were killed and 87 others wounded. The deadliest airstrike took place on July 13 in Zurmat district of Paktia province that killed 15 civilians.

Another deadly airstrike carried out by US forces in Chahardara district of Kunduz province on July 19, when 14 civilians were killed and a child injured.

In January, three airstrikes happened in which 21 civilians were killed and 28 others wounded.

Four civilians were killed in the only airstrike that took place in February. There were no airstrikes that caused casualties to civilians in March and April.

However, eight people were killed and five others wounded in the following month of May while six civilians were killed in airstrikes in June.

In July, 34 civilians were killed and four others wounded during three airstrikes.

No airstrikes happened in August that killed or wounded civilians but 24 noncombatants were killed and six others injured during two airstrikes in September.

Most of the airstrikes and civilian casualties in such incidents last year happened in October. Civilians were targeted six times in airstrikes in October when 28 noncombatants were killed and 29 others injured.

Nine people were killed and 14 others injured during two airstrikes in November.

Victims of these incidents say the government has ignored their ordeal. They say deals were made on their dead relatives whenever they approached the government for help.

MasihRahman, a resident of Jaghato district of MaidanWardak province, lost 12 members of his family in an airstrike by the Afghan Special Forces and US forces on September 23.

"I was in Iran for work and no male family member was at home when security forces came to our village at night and they also searched our home. After that my cousins came to our home in the morning to give comfort to my children, it was 10am when security forces bombarded our home, they did not let anyone enter our home until the next morning, there were all 12 women, my children and my cousins in the home, all of them were killed, I arrived three days later and saw my home was turned into debris," he said.

Twelve members of a family were killed and a child wounded during a joint Afghan and US forces airstrike in Chahardara district of Kunduz on July 19. (Pajhwok)

(8) First Afghanistan's...

countries. The agreement aims at developing the southern Iran port into a regional trade hub. India began commercial activity at Chabahar on January 8th. (Pajhwok)

(9) Thousands of...

during the period.

He added around 15 women had learnt driving this year. At present, three women are busy learning how to drive. But the lack of female instructors is a problem. He says students could learn driving in 35 days.

Another driving course chief in the Kart-i-Naw area of Kabul, Ahmadzai Omari, said about 42 women had been imparted driving training over the past five years. Currently, three women are being trained as part of the course.

Sanam, 25, a resident of the Shah Shaheed neighbourhood of Kabul, says she is learning how to drive based on need. But she does not want to be a driver because of social attitude.

"One day, I was traveling with my family to Logar. Suddenly, my father felt unwell, so much so that he lost the ability to drive. At that difficult time at night, I drove very slowly," she explained.

Sanam added after the incident, she got admission to a driving course. She also complained of harassment of female drivers by some men:

"While I was driving, some boys in a car blocked my way. I sped up and there was a child on the road. I did not want to harm the boy; my car crashed into a roadside wall."

She escaped unhurt but her car was damaged, Sanam recalled, urging men not to pester female drivers. She hailed traffic policemen for helping female drivers.

Naqibullah Nasiri, a traffic police official at the Baraki Square of Kabul, said helping people, especially women, was his responsibility. Women were more compliant with traffic laws than men, he acknowledged.

Khalida, 24, who is learning how to drive in a private driving school, said both need and interest were behind her admission to the course.

"In our society, women are harassed. But because of need, we are forced to learn driving in the hope that the culture of female drivers will become normal," she remarked.

However, several women can be seen driving in some provinces of the country. However, they complain of harassment at the hands of men. (Pajhwok)

(10) Afghans Upbeat...

what they are talking about, therefore we do not have an idea about our future," said Mukhtar Hazrati, another resident.

Meanwhile, a number of women have also said they have strong reservations about the peace talks with the Taliban.

"Afghan youths must be given a role and government must hear their voice about peace," said Maryam, a resident in Kabul. "We want our rights (to be upheld), we want to go to academies for education, we want to go to university, we want the freedom of speech to work," said Nazanin, another resident.

This comes a day after reports surfaced in the media that US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad and the Taliban had made "significant progress" over six days of talks in Doha, Qatar.

Khalilzad said he had "more productive" meetings than in the past in Qatar. After wrapping up talks on Saturday in Doha, he left for Kabul for "consultations".

"Meetings here were more productive than they have been in the past. We made significant progress on vital issues," he said in a tweet on Saturday night.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and his US counterpart Mike Pompeo also welcomed the developments.

Pompeo has hailed what he called "significant progress" made by Khalilzad and said on Twitter: "Encouraging news from [Khalilzad]."

"The US is serious about pursuing peace, preventing Afghanistan from continuing to be a space for international terrorism and bringing forces home. Working with the Afghan govt and all interested parties, the US seeks to strengthen Afghan sovereignty, independence and prosperity," Pompeo tweeted.

Pakistan's Qureshi on Sunday said last week's talks between the United States and the Taliban was a "major diplomatic victory".

This came after six days of talks between the US and Taliban - talks that were originally scheduled for only two days. (Tolo news)

(11) ISIS-K Militants...

Kunar is among the relatively volatile provinces in East of Afghanistan where both ISIS-K and Taliban militants are active in some of its districts. (KP)

(12) Agricultural Greenhouse...

Agro Shade Tents, the women have also received vegetable seeds, agricultural equipments and training, MAIL said, adding that the tents have been distributed in Pul-e-Khumri city, Dosthi, Khenjan, Nahrin, and Baghlan Markazi districts. (KP)

(13) Working Daikundi...

with men and most of the men in the market did not like women shopkeepers.

Adela, another businesswoman, said: "We hope the president will implement his promise of establishing a separate market for women in Daikundi."

Daikundi Mayor Khadeja Ahmadi said the distribution of land in Daikundi hit a snag due to some issues which also halted progress on the allocation of land for a women market. (Pajhwok)

(14) Sherpao Welcomes...

Sherpao cautioned all stakeholders against taking credit for the nascent peace initiative. The stakeholders should move forward cautiously to take the peace initiative to its logical conclusion, he suggested.

Peace in Afghanistan would help bring stability to the region, particularly to Pakistan, the QWP chief suggested, saying Pakhtuns on both sides of the border had suffered over the last 40 years due to bloodshed in the region.

"There is a dire need for making strenuous efforts to mitigate the sufferings of the people by restoring peace," he stressed, appreciating Pakistan's role in bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table. (Pajhwok)

(15) Khost Traders Say...

goods via Torkham port." Meanwhile, Khost Chamber of Commerce and Industries head Nawab Amirzai told Pajhwok that the government should provide facilities to Khost traders instead of creating troubles for them.

He urged the government to provide facilities to entrepreneurs at the Ghulam Khan port same as provided at Torkham, Spin Boldak ports and other ports of the country. Pajhwok tried to seek comments from the customs and NDS offices in this regard but failed.

However, Talib Mangal, the governor's spokesman, said the parked goods had been illegally imported to the province and in order to implement the law the goods were shifted to the Khost customs office.

He said, "We want from traders to do business in line with the customs law and we support traders in all circumstances."

Experts believe the government should provide all facilities to traders because they pay taxes to it. (Pajhwok)

(16) Free Afghan-Pakistan...

a trade agreement was signed in 2010 between Pakistan and Afghanistan. But stakeholders were not consulted, he alleged, claiming that Af-Pak trade was harmed as a result. (Pajhwok)