

(1) US Envoy...

the US State Department spokeswoman told reporters. She said that Khalilzad had lengthy discussions with the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in Kabul. "Ambassador Khalilzad is in Kabul right now and he met with [President Ashraf] Ghani yesterday [Sunday] and he and president Ghani spoke about preparation for intra-Afghan negotiations," she said. Khalilzad in a tweet on Sunday said that he will "stay here for some time on this trip" and that he will have consultations with a wide range of people.

"Peace talks are entering a new stage and Afghans must be engaged more than ever," Khalilzad said.

Meanwhile, the US envoy held talks with leading female Afghan politicians and senior government officials on Monday. "We discussed progress Afghan women have made and their concerns about the future. US policy is that women should be at the table in intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations," Khalilzad said in a tweet early on Tuesday morning.

There has been some type of doubt in the US's efforts for Afghan peace among a number of critics and Afghan politicians. Among them is former President Hamid Karzai, who said the peace process is moving forward slowly and that it is questioning.

"So far, we have not seen indications that they are not truthful, but the slow pace of the process is raising our concerns. The question is that why this process is moving too slow," Karzai said in an interview with Russia's Sputnik news.

He said that Russia has a major role to play in the peace process in Afghanistan.

"Russia's role has been a leading role in favor of Afghanistan and it had undertaken the preliminary steps, whenever Russia made an invitation, the people of Afghanistan accepted," added Karzai.

He called on the Taliban to announce a ceasefire. However, the group has repeatedly rejected calls for a ceasefire, bringing the US forces presence as a reason for not accepting the Afghans' demands. (Tolo news)

(2) Lawmakers Warn...

declined to 30 later. Most of them did not want to attend the session due to existing dispute after the controversial elections.

AbdalMohammadi, a lawmaker from Samangan province, said delegations could not resolve the dispute over speaker's position, adding if any agreement reached most of the lawmakers would not accept it.

He preferred the issue should be resolved through compromise or the lawmakers should decide the fate of controversial vote.

BelqesRoshan, a lawmaker from Farah province, held similar view and said: "This problem should be resolved so that we can address other pressing issues in the country."

She added until which time the lawmakers shall face disgrace and insult, demanding swift resolution to the problem.

JavidSapi, a lawmaker from Kunar province, said he was unable to travel to his province due to prevailing problems. We face disgrace on social media and demanded the dispute over speaker's position to be addressed.

After inauguration of the 17th legislative term of the Wolesi Jirga on May 18, an election was conducted for the speaker position of the house but the poll went controversial.

The lower house is yet to reach a conclusion over the speaker position despite holding several sittings so far.

It was scheduled that a 10-member appointed delegation, tasked with addressing the deadlock, would present its report to the house on Saturday, but it did not happen as

a huge number of lawmakers were absent. (Pajhwok)

(3) Kabul, Islamabad...

Foreign Minister Idrees Zaman in Islamabad on Monday.

Zaman was visiting Islamabad for the first review session in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) -- the framework for bilateral ties agreed last year.

Pakistan Foreign Secretary Sohail Mahmood and Afghan Deputy FM Zaman earlier led their respective delegations at the APAPPS review session.

"The session provided the two sides an opportunity to review progress made under this framework since the inaugural session and exchange views on further collaboration in agreed areas of cooperation," the Foreign Office said.

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi called for making bilateral ties framework with Afghanistan effective.

Under APAPPS, Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed to discuss political and diplomatic issues and matters pertaining to economy and trade, refugee repatriation, military and intelligence cooperation as the way forward towards better ties.

But APAPPS could not progress well over the past year and the engagements under it came to a halt after a few meetings because of a sharp uptick in Taliban violence.

The APAPPS review comes ahead of President Ashraf Ghani's visit to Pakistan on June 27. It would be Ghani's third visit to Pakistan. His previous trips took place in Nov 2014 and Dec 2015. (Pajhwok)

(4) India Pledges...

commitment during a meeting with the Acting Higher Education Minister Abdul Tawab Balakarzai. The Ministry of Higher Education said the Indian government will award scholarships during the fiscal year 1399.

Ambassador Kumar also promised that the government of India will assist with the capacity building of university lecturers and Higher Education Ministry employees.

India has played a major role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban regime.

The government of India has invested over \$2 billion in various reconstruction and infrastructure projects. (KP)

(5) UN Stresses...

The war had negatively impacted the economy, health, education, development and reconstruction sectors, which urgently needed to be developed with the help of the government and international organisations. (Pajhwok)

(6) Concerns Growing...

an address to the nation for Eid, President Ashraf Ghani said 887 inmates would be set free as a gesture of "goodwill."

"The Afghan government is releasing Taliban's prisoners to bribe Taliban to sit with them for peace negotiation, it will have a negative effect," said Karim Khuram, Chief of Staff for Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

In a statement, Taliban says most of the released prisoners are not their members, however, the group welcomed the move.

"The releasing of prisoners can narrow the gaps but it cannot end the issue of Afghanistan," said Sayed Akbar Agha, a former Taliban official.

Meanwhile, Afghan special forces have broken several Taliban prisons and released civilian and military prisoners.

On Tuesday, the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan John Bass in a tweet welcomed the Afghan government decision of releasing Taliban prisoners. In addition, he thanked Afghan forces for their bravery in freeing hundreds of Afghans by breaking the Taliban's prisons. (ATN)

(7) Afghanistan...

purposes. The visit was made in

coordination with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEI).

Under the MoU, the two sides will cooperate in various nuclear-related fields, especially regarding human resources capacity building, and the application of atomic energy in healthcare and agriculture. (Pajhwok)

(8) Trump's 'Modus...

slapped tariffs on Chinese goods, while accusing Beijing of taking advantage of the US economy.

China retaliated in kind, but stressed it stands ready for talks "in an equal matter" and does not want a proper trade war. However, should Washington go on "escalating the trade frictions, we will respond resolutely and fight until the end," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang told reporters on Monday.

In December, both sides agreed to not enact more tariffs, paving the way for negotiations. Several rounds of talks followed, but no agreement was reached and Trump has threatened Beijing with new tariff hikes.

On Monday, Trump said the tariffs will go up immediately if Xi Jinping does not attend the G20 event on June 28-29 in Osaka, Japan to hold trade talks with the US. (RT)

(9) Turkey Chafes...

and "unfounded" allegations in the resolution.

"It is unacceptable to take decisions which do not serve to increase mutual trust, to continue to keep the language of threats and sanctions on the agenda and to set various artificial deadlines," it added. (Reuters)

(10) Thai Junta...

parliamentary vote, 500-244, against Future Forward party leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit. All junta-appointed senators voted for Prayuth to lead the next government, apart from the Senate speaker, who abstained from voting in line with custom.

Critics have expressed doubt whether a government led by Prayuth can fare well in a parliamentary framework, with the parliamentary vote indicating that his coalition has only marginal control over the House, which passes laws and approves budgets.

Prayuth's coalition government includes 18 political parties whose leaders were also present for Tuesday's ceremony.

His appointment was made official after a royal order to announce it was published in the Royal Gazette on Tuesday.

The Palang Pracharath Party, which campaigned for Prayuth to lead the next government, won the second-most seats during the March election. The party includes many former members of the military government.

Election laws that the junta introduced also weaken traditionally large political parties and the number of seats they could attain while giving seats to smaller parties with fewer votes.

The measures are seen as being directed at the Pheu Thai Party, which headed the government deposed in 2014. Pheu Thai, under various names changed for legal reasons, has won every national election since it was founded in 1998 by telecoms tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra, who is despised by the country's conservative base, which includes the military. Thaksin himself was overthrown as prime minister in a 2006 military coup. (AP)

(11) New Zealand...

Government's foreign policy objectives relating to its Pacific Reset policy and the impacts of the climate crisis.

Significant new planned investment designated by the plan includes an Enhanced Sealift Vessel to complement HMNZS Canterbury, with an additional vessel scheduled to replace Canterbury in the mid-2030s, maintaining a two vessel sealift fleet.

The Plan also signals growth in the New Zealand Army to 6,000 personnel by 2035, and an uplift in defense intelligence personnel and cyber security and support capabilities.

The highest priority project within the plan is the replacement of the Royal New Zealand Air Force's C-130H Hercules fleet. The C-130J-30 Super Hercules will be a preferred option for the replacement. (Xinhua)

(12) Russian MoD...

were identified as US Air Force reconnaissance aircraft RC-135 and Sweden's electronic intelligence-gathering Gulfstream jet. The Su-27 flew at a safe distance from both aircraft, "escorting" them and preventing any violations of Russian airspace, the military said. (RT)

(13) Italy's Coalition...

well as tax cuts," Salvini said in a statement after the coalition meeting.

"There won't be any budget correction nor tax increases."

Rome's debt has been rising steadily from a pre-crisis low of 104% of domestic output in 2007 and now stands at 132% -- second only to Greece's within the euro zone.

Market concerns have been heightened by the spending plans of the eurosceptic government which took office a year ago.

Emboldened by the League's strong showing in last month's European election and local polls across Italy, Salvini has made tax cuts a priority for the government and has repeatedly taken aim at Brussels, demanding an overhaul of EU fiscal rules.

However, Conte has made clear he does not want a confrontational approach in the looming EU talks and has threatened to resign if the two coalition leaders fail to reach a compromise to settle the budget tussle with Brussels.

Both Di Maio and Salvini have expressed confidence that Rome would reach an accord with the EU, but have made clear that the government had to stand up to the European Commission.

"We will need a dialogue with Europe, but also a firm stance. I'm not interested in fighting with the EU but we must get the results which Italians are interested in," Di Maio told RTL 102.5 radio on Tuesday.

Rome is also scrambling to avoid a sales-tax increase worth 23 billion euros, which is due to kick in automatically next year unless the money can be found from other quarters.

Both coalition parties have ruled out a sales tax hike, but have yet to spell out where they will find the financial cover.

"Italy has got all it takes, strategically and politically, to get to a 2020 budget that must raise salaries and cut taxes," Di Maio said. (Reuters)

(14) As Investors...

recent weeks. Perhaps most importantly, the Federal Reserve has intimated it may come to the market's rescue again and cut interest rates if the trade war swamps the economy.

But skeptics say optimists aren't looking closely enough at all the troubles getting overshadowed by trade disputes. Among the concerns: — SLOWING ECONOMIC GROWTH, EVEN BEFORE THE LATEST TRADE SKIRMISHES

The bright spots for the U.S. economy are still clear: The job market is solid, as long as Friday's disappointing report doesn't herald something more lasting. The unemployment rate at 3.6% is at its lowest since 1969, and consumers are feeling relatively confident. That's key when consumer spending accounts for two thirds of the economy.

But skeptics point to other recent economic reports that showed weakness in April, before this latest round of trade worries flared up. Among them: another drop in North American freight shipments, slower manufacturing growth than economists expected and weaker business spending on equipment.

Michael Wilson, equity strategist at Morgan Stanley, sees a warning flag in falling profits for many retailers. While the industry's overall figures for the first quarter may look decent due to big gains for Amazon, Nordstrom and other retailers saw big declines. That could be an early sign that U.S. consumers, whose spending is such a key part of the economy, may be less willing to spend in coming months.

"Get ready for more potential growth disappointments even with a trade deal," Wilson wrote in a recent research report. (AP)

(15) Japanese PM...

According to the Japanese government, Abe's visit is aimed at developing Japan's traditional friendly relations with Iran, easing regional tensions and promoting dialogue between the United States and Iran.

Abe told a Liberal Democratic Party meeting on Monday that the stability of the Middle East is directly related to the stability of Japan, and that he will play a constructive role on the basis of the friendly relations between Japan and Iran forged by his predecessors.

According to Japanese media reports, the Iranian side will entrust Abe to convey Iran's position to Trump during the Japan-Iran summit.

Meanwhile, some analysts said the visit will be another "political show" by Abe to display his diplomatic achievements before the Upper House election in July. (Xinhua)

(16) Uzbekistan...

the criminal code). Yusupov had been admitted to the hospital following a concussion and other serious injuries incurred during an apparent suicide attempt.

He has been held at the pretrial detention facility of the State Security Services ever since.

Security service officials handling the case refused to allow Yusupov's attorney or family members to meet with him for nearly five months after his arrest and pressured Yusupov to reject his attorney's representation. Authorities only reinstated the attorney's access to his client and allowed him to meet Yusupov confidentially since April 24, 2019, following media reports on the case and statements of concern by rights groups.

The attorney signed a nondisclosure agreement on the case and cannot discuss it with anyone except the client's family.

Yusupov's relatives told Human Rights Watch that, according to their sources, Yusupov was a victim of psychological torture over four months following his detention on December 10, 2018. According to them, Yusupov said that between December 2018 and late March 2019, two State Security Services officers entered his cell two or three times each day and threatened that if he did not admit his guilt, they would rape him with a rubber baton, rape his wife and daughter, and arrest his two sons, including a son who lives abroad, by means of extradition.

Relatives told Human Rights Watch that in a video of an interrogation authorities conducted with Yusupov, before he had access to his lawyer, one can hear and see the arm of a person to his side instructing him on the answers he should give. Yusupov later identified the person as one of the officers who periodically entered his cell and threatened him and his family with physical harm.

Yusupov's attorney has petitioned Uzbekistan's general prosecutor regarding the alleged torture and other due process violations but received no response.

Yusupov's relatives told Human Rights Watch security service officials have prevented them from giving Yusupov prescription medication he takes to manage a health condition and that they have been subjected to harassment and surveillance. On December 13, 2018, border guards prevented Temir Yusupov, Yusupov's younger son, from leaving Uzbekistan at the Kazakhstan border, telling him he was banned from leaving the country. (Agencies)