

(1) Taliban, US...

agreement must cover a cease-fire and the insurgent group's engagement in intra-Afghan talks, involving the Kabul government.

"I don't see the dialogue is deadlocked. It is progressing, but steadily or gradually," Suhail Shaheen, who speaks for the insurgent negotiating team, told VOA ahead of the upcoming talks.

"I hope with the announcement of a timetable for withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan, the process may gain momentum, paving the way for the Afghans to sit together and chart a road map for a future Islamic system and government," Shaheen said.

Khalilzad, in a statement ahead of the upcoming meeting with the Taliban, also vowed he would "try to bring the first two parts of our peace framework to closure," but he emphasized success would require other parties to show flexibility.

"We hope Khalilzad will deliver what he has promised — that he would try to bring to closure the framework for peace on these two issues," Shaheen said when asked to respond to comments by the chief American negotiator.

Two-day session

Official sources in Kabul, meanwhile, have told VOA a two-day peace dialogue among Afghans, including government and Taliban representatives, is being arranged in Doha early next month. The sources said the meeting was scheduled for July 7 and would be an outcome of the upcoming U.S.-Taliban negotiations.

The Taliban are opposed to any direct talks with Afghan government officials, dismissing them as American "puppets." But the insurgent group, Taliban officials said, is not averse to a peace dialogue with a delegation representing all sections of the Afghan society, including government officials in their individual capacity.

While Washington has engaged in direct talks with the Taliban, a top American military commander noted this week that strongholds of the Islamic State group in eastern Afghan provinces "are very worrisome to us." Strong pressure seen

However, Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, head of U.S. Central Command, said earlier this week that IS was under strong military pressure in Afghanistan.

American forces and their Afghan partners routinely attack IS bases in the country while Taliban insurgents also regularly clash with loyalists of the Middle Eastern-based terrorist group.

"ISIS in Afghanistan certainly has aspirations to attack the United States. ... It is our clear judgment that as long as we maintain pressure on them, it will be hard for them to do that," McKenzie, using an acronym for Islamic State, told reporters in Germany.

But the Taliban swiftly rejected McKenzie's assertions as baseless and alleged they were aimed at justifying the U.S. military presence in the country.

"Their occupation is practically providing Daesh a ground in Afghanistan, and they are using its name and existence as an instrument," alleged Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, using the local name for IS.

Mujahid claimed the Taliban had cleared many Afghan areas of IS, and he accused American forces as well as their local partners of launching aerial strikes against Taliban positions in areas where the insurgents are battling IS militants.

"Creating hurdles"

"If American generals really fear from Daesh, then why are they avoiding its elimination and creating hurdles against mujahideen operations? Statements of American generals are opposite of their actions," Mujahid said. American military officials, for their part, have

reportedly insisted the Taliban has not done enough to fight IS, particularly in eastern Afghan provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar, where the terrorist group has set up bases.

"But not only are the Taliban mostly avoiding fighting the Islamic State, they are also feeding its ranks. Taliban insurgents serve as one of the Islamic State's primary recruiting pools, and they often bring a wealth of combat experience with them," the officials told The New York Times.

U.S. interlocutors in continuing direct talks with Taliban envoys in Qatar have proposed to leave behind a counterterrorism force in Afghanistan after any peace agreement to fight IS. (VoA)

(2) Watchdog Reps ...

Council, media, Afghan Women Network, civil society and Afghanistan Integrity Watch to ensure transparency in the process.

In this letter, the institutions have been requested to introduce their representatives to AGO to complete the investigation process in their presence.

The AGO received an official letter No. 1010 on the 27th of May from the Deputy of Policy, Monitoring & Evaluation of The Office of Chief of Staff to the President about the investigation of Gen. Habibullah Ahmadzai's claims. (Pajhwok)

(3) MoUs on Railroad ...

launched in Afghanistan this year. Herat Governor Abdul Qayoum Rahimi said TAPI project included surveys, acquisition of land, security and some legal issues. He informed work on the project would be launched this year. (Pajhwok)

(4) Rahmani Vows to ...

Rahmani told TOLONews that he is the winner of the voting based on the principles of the Wolesi Jirga, the Lower House of the Parliament. "I will not step down from my post," he reiterated.

"I have been asked to step down. I will not do this at any cost. In the last 16 legislative terms of the parliament, I am the only speaker in Afghanistan's Wolesi Jirga who has been elected as speaker through voting," said Rahmani.

Rahmani said that there are certain elements inside and outside the house who are not willing to see an end to the current crisis in the parliament.

"I can say with confidence that there is a circle which provokes our friends," said Rahmani.

Meanwhile, the Speaker of the Meshrano Jirga, the Upper House of the Parliament, Fazl Hadi Muslimyar, said the rift between the lawmakers has impeded the activities of the Senate.

"If Mr. Rahmani has secured 124 votes from the total 247 votes in the quorum which makes 50 plus votes, whether it is bullying or wrongdoing, both sides should avoid damaging the activities of the house," said Senate chief Fazel Hadi Muslimyar. "No one is taking care of the national interests. They are committed to their religious responsibility and they are not tolerating each other," said MP Kamal Safai. (Tolo news)

(5) In Kabul ...

to be named, said this centre had been open for the past three days but only 10 people had arrived for registration.

One of the staffers said the centre was located in the middle of buildings and it was difficult for the people to access it.

Lack of awareness

Samiullah, 67, an inhabitant of the Mirwais Maidan area of Kabul, told Pajhwok: "I am unaware of the voter registration campaign and its importance."

Mohammad Idress, hailing from Khoshal Khan area, was aware of the voter registration's launch. However, he had no idea about the location of the registration centre.

Ali Ahmad Jaffari, a resident of the

3rd police district, believed the IEC had made a hasty decision on choosing registration centers.

He suggested the commission should have launched a public awareness programme and chosen accessible areas for voter registration centres.

Meanwhile, officials of the poll panel refused to share their views on the issues.

On Thursday, IEC Secretary Habib Rahman Nang blamed the Ministry of Education for not helping in identification of polling stations in a particular area.

He alleged the security forces had also failed to supply important materials to the polling sites. As a consequence, the process was marred by delays in most of districts.

He said since the launch of the registration process, 15,000 people had had been listed as voters, including 9,358 men, 4,500 women and 113 Kochis.

Nang said political parties, civil society groups and media should spread awareness among the people regarding the importance of registering as voters. (Pajhwok)

(6) No Handicrafts ...

Farida Naseri, in charge of women's affairs in the Ghor Human Rights Commission, also said outdated traditions, lack of women's access to work, market, low literacy and government's inattention to establish market for women's handicrafts were reasons that women faced more problems.

On the other hand, Fazalulhaq Wahid, director of Labor and Social Affairs department, confirmed women's problems in the province and said his department was providing educational training to dozens of women annually.

However, he said the number of women attendees of such programs had lately decreased due to lack of market for their products.

He said he had discussed creating jobs for women and market for women's handicrafts with a number of relevant organs.

Wahid said currently 210 men and women trainees were busy learning skills in tailoring, embroidery, goldwork, electricity, mobile phone repair and other areas in Firozkoh, Dawlatyar and Tolak districts of the province. (Pajhwok)

(7) 10 Logar Schools ...

"With the presence of check-posts, the Taliban could not operate, so they (Taliban) are pressuring people to call for removal of the posts," he explained.

But he said the governor's house would share the issue in security meeting. Around 12,000 students had been deprived of study as a result of the closure of schools. (Pajhwok)

(8) Kabul Sees ...

committed to the 23-point resolution of the recent Consultative Loya Jirga on peace. "Although the Afghan war is multi-dimensional, reaching a peace agreement with the Taliban is a key component for the reduction of violence".

Ghani made four suggestions on Afghan peace.

- A regional and international coalition for peace should be formed;
- A regional task force should be formed to develop bankable programs and projects for regional connectivity and poverty reduction;
- The issue of narcotics as a driver of conflict and criminality should be comprehensively addressed within the peace-making and peace-building framework;
- And finally, agreeing to a regional framework for fighting terrorism.

Ghani said the Afghan government will hold the presidential elections on September 28, focus on peace, implement a program of self-reliance, invest in regional connectivity and renew its international and regional partnerships to pursue the vision of building our institutions. "As a free, fair, inclusive and trans-

parent election is the test of a constitutional order, we invite international observers to monitor the process," he said. (Pajhwok)

(9) Zaman Discuss ...

held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Afterwards, Deputy Ministers of Business and Industries, Refugees and Repatriation, Justice, Interior, and representatives of other related organizations talked about their future plans for APAPPS.

At this meeting, issues related to the President's imminent trip to Pakistan were also discussed. (Pajhwok)

(10) Strong Start ...

stan a scare a minute later, when Leo Chow Ka Lok headed a kick-in into the penalty area, where Wong Wai Kwok was waiting, but the forward failed to keep his shot down as it deflected off the top bar.

Abdul Razaq Momrak's side showed their set-piece prowess in the 20th minute, when quick one-touch passes led to Sadiq Zaheri tapping in his first goal of the tournament, with Seyed Hosseini Mousavi claiming the assist.

Ali Arab Zada got into the goalscoring action two minutes into the second half, when he sprinted down the left flank before letting loose an unstoppable strike that found the back of the net to make it 3-0.

Hong Kong's campaign now hung in the balance as they trailed by three goals, which forced them out of their own half and press the issue.

Mousavi, who was Afghanistan's top scorer in the Central Zone Qualifiers, had a taste of glory with a goal of his own after side-stepping two Hong Kong players outside the box in the 36th minute, before doubling his personal tally a minute later from the same position.

Afghanistan will face Iran in their second match on Sunday night and the match will kick off at 7:30pm Kabul time. (Tolo news)

(11) Taliban Attacks ...

intensifying the war in the south so they can "get privileges" during the talks.

"We are prepared and we will respond to every attack by the Taliban," Khan said.

A study by Afghanistan Institute of Strategic Studies in 2017 found that the number of unregistered madrasas in Afghanistan has dramatically increased.

Almost 300 people were interviewed at 50 unregistered madrasas in ten provinces of Afghanistan with the main focus on suicide attacks, the study shows.

"Afghan students should be trained inside the country in order to prepare their mindset in favor of their country, but when they receive training on use of weapons and extremism in other countries," said Fida Mohammad, member of Kandahar Provincial Council.

"We have Islamic education sections within the education directorate but it is marred by corruption. We will be able to prevent the seasonal conflicts if we send a limited number of students to proper Islamic studies centers outside the country," said Hekmatullah, a civil society activist in Kandahar.

Ghorak, Shorabak, Shah Wali Kot and Maiwand districts in Kandahar province recently witnessed a rise in Taliban attacks, targeting government forces.

Khan said that most of the attacks have been push back by the security forces. (Tolo news)

(12) Rising Targeted ...

track down perpetrators of targeted attacks.

Karkhel said: "Common people and tribal elders are killed in the provincial capital but the government has failed to stop these killings."

"Who is responsible to protect us?" he asked, urging the government to grill the organs concerned regarding their failure to ensure the security of the city.

Police chief Col. Mohammad Usman Janbaz acknowledged insecurity in the city, saying a new plan had been devised to control incidents of violence.

He termed cooperation from other government institutions vital and said police alone could not control crime and violence. (Pajhwok)

(13) Insecurity ...

"I am now working on finding proper places to shift voter registration centers from some schools there," he said.

He said the IEC had transferred election materials to all districts except Giro, Jaghato, Nawa and Ajiristan. He said elections would not take place in the mentioned districts due to security problems there.

Nawa district of Ghazni has been under Taliban's control over the past 16 years.

On the other hand, Mohammad Arif Noori, the governor's spokesman, told Pajhwok Afghan News that security situation in the province had improved compared to the past.

Citing an example, he said Afghan forces were recently able to recapture Khwaja Omari and Deh Yak districts of the province from the Taliban.

He said local officials were trying to maintain security in unstable districts before the presidential election.

The presidential election is scheduled for September 28. Wolesi Jirga elections were not held in Ghazni due to serious security problems. (Pajhwok)

Guatemala to Elect President amid Violence, Migration

GUATEMALA CITY - Guatemalans on Sunday will vote for a new president, who will face the challenge of curbing drug gang violence that has convulsed the country and helped spur illegal immigration to the United States, fueling tensions with President Donald Trump.

Nineteen candidates will compete in the election, which is expected to yield no outright winner, forcing the top two vote getters to face off in a second round on Aug. 11.

Former first lady Sandra Torres, of the center-left UNE party, has led the race to succeed President Jimmy Morales, a conservative former television host whose term has been blighted by accusations of corruption made by U.N.-backed investigators.

Torres, who has promised to send troops onto the streets to fight drug gangs, and to tackle poverty with welfare programs, has support of around 20 percent of the electorate, according to polls.

Her closest rivals, trailing by a few percentage points, are conservatives Alejandro Giammattei, who is running in his fourth campaign, and Edmond Mulet, a former United Nations official whose candidacy has increasingly gained traction in the run-up to the vote.

"I want to see education improving, more jobs and for security to get better, because we live in a very unsafe country. And for politicians and lawmakers to stop stealing," said John Estrada, 24, a tattoo artist in Guatemala City.

Rampant violence and widespread discontent over corruption and impunity in the country of 17 million have prompted more and more Guatemalans to flee to the United States.

The surge of departures has undermined Trump's pledge to curb illegal immigration, and the U.S. president has responded by threatening to cut U.S. aid to Central America.

That prospect has caused alarm in Guatemala, where the legacy of the bloody 1960-1996 civil war continues to cast a long shadow over the country's development. (Reuters)