

**(1) 'Real Peace...**

with allies," he mentioned. "One of the important aspects of any potential peace deal will be how can we have mechanism in place to make sure that it is respected, implemented, verifiable," he said. NATO Defence Ministers are meeting today (26 June 2019) to begin two days of talks on key security challenges, including Russia's violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Ministers will discuss progress on burden sharing, NATO's defense and deterrence posture, new technologies and NATO's mission in Afghanistan. Acting Defense Minister Asadullah Khalid will attend the NATO defense ministers meeting in Brussels today. (Tolo news)

**(2) China Offers ...**

the National Security Council (NSC) said on its social media handle.

Ambassador Xijun said China was ready to support and provide facility for an intra-Afghan dialogue, and they supported President Ghani's and Government efforts on peace talks. He said without Afghan Government involvement, any arrangement or agreement could not be implemented.

NSA Mohib said; ANDSF and the people of Afghanistan paid tremendous amount of sacrifices and this must be recognized. Our commitment remains strong to peace but our commitment to fight terrorism also remains strong. NSA Mohib thanked China for their efforts in peace process. (Pajhwok)

**(3) Kabul Optimistic ...**

peace, elections, and security. The Secretary expressed his strong support for the ongoing peace efforts and the upcoming presidential elections in September," Ghani tweeted on Tuesday.

"Peace is in the interest of Afghanistan so that war and violence are finished in the country," said Fraidoon Khwazoon, deputy spokesman to Abdullah Abdullah. During the trip, Pompeo also held wide-ranging discussions with the Afghan leaders on some issues related to bilateral relations between the countries and the upcoming presidential elections.

"During the meeting, the US government announced its support to the election process and the peace process," said Haroon Chakhansuri, spokesman to the Afghan president Ashraf Ghani.

There is an optimism about a breakthrough in the stalled peace process in the seven round of talks between the US and Taliban in Doha.

"They inched very close behind the scene. I think we are away one or two steps from a peace deal," said a former Taliban commander Abdul Shakoor Mutmaen.

US and Taliban negotiators are set to begin next round of talks in Doha in the next three days.

The Afghan government expects that this round of talks prove helpful in kicking off intra-Afghan talks.

Meanwhile, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Tuesday said that the alliance strongly supports efforts by Khalilzad for peace in the country.

"First of all, we are strongly supportive of the peace efforts and all Allies support them and we are in close consultations with the US Chief Negotiator Ambassador Khalilzad. He has been here several times, consulting and briefing Allies and this will also be an issue we discuss at the meeting that starts tomorrow," Stoltenberg said on Tuesday.

When asked if the NATO will still provide financial support to the Afghan security forces, the NATO chief said that NATO and its allies have committed to continue financial cooperation to Afghan forces until 2024.

"We will also continue to provide financial support and Allies have committed to provide continued financial support until 2024. Then, of course, the presence of NATO troops in Afghanistan after a peace deal will, of course, depend on the content of the deal. But I think it is a bit too early to speculate exactly on what kind of presence we will have after a potential deal, because we haven't seen the content of the deal yet," added Stoltenberg. (Tolo news)

**(4) Group Set Up to ...**

other relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

The Group of Friends will also aim to give voice to victims at the international stage and promote their roles and that of their families in countering and de-legitimising terrorist narratives including through education.

During their statements at the launch, Ambassador Adela Raz recalled the experience of Afghanistan, which as a nation at the forefront of the fight against terrorism, understood all too well the pain and suffering of those whose lives had been destroyed at the hands of terrorism.

Secretary-General Guterres stressed the need to mitigate this pain and called strengthening the voice of victims and putting them at heart of counter-terrorism efforts, including through a new regulatory landscape engaging civil society.

Under-Secretary-General Voronkov and Karimipour stressed the importance of a victim-centered approach and highlighted the milestone of the Group of Friends as a mechanism to counter terrorism and violent extremism.

Ambassador Agustin Santos of Spain further stressed the global dimension of this threat and thanked all participant member states for supporting the initiative. Over 20 permanent representatives and senior diplomats of members and observers of the Group of Friends took the floor and expressed their support. They thanked Afghanistan and Spain for their leadership in the process.

This is the second initiative led by Afghanistan on the topic of victims of terrorism, having previously tabled resolution 72/165 on the "International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism".

That initiative was adopted by consensus and co-sponsored by 95 countries during the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly. A resolution on the matter is expected to be tabled for consideration of the General Assembly on Friday. (Pajhwok)

**(5) Mumbai Trade ...**

"Coming to India was a game changer for us," said Hasina Bezhani Zaefi, owner of Akaam Zaefi, one of the women exporters invited to participate. "It gave us access to major Indian buyers."

USAID is linking Afghan producers of high-value products with buyers from all over the world to benefit the Afghan economy and their journey to self-reliance. (PR)

**(6) Afghanistan's ...**

surged from less than 10 kilograms in 2010 to almost nine tonnes in 2013 and a record 125 tonnes in 2017.

Cannabis continued to be the most widely used drug, with an estimated 188 million people using it.

Synthetic opioids remain the main cause of opioid overdose deaths in the United States, which went up by 13 percent to more than 47,000 in 2017.

Cocaine production hit an all-time high in 2017, up by 25 percent. The yield largely increased in Colombia, where remote fields and criminal gangs jacked up production. The surge came despite efforts to wean rural communities away from coca cultivation. "What is happening in Columbia is worrisome," said Angela Me, chief of research at UNODC. (Pajhwok)

**(7) Ghani to Visit ...**

But Ghani's government has been shut out of negotiations by the Taliban's refusal to deal with what they consider an illegitimate "puppet" regime.

Ghani this year accused Pakistan of meddling in internal politics, saying the keys to the war are in the cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, where its government and military are based, and Quetta, location of a key group of Taliban leaders.

Pakistani officials deny supporting the Taliban and say Islamabad strongly favors a political settlement to maintain stability in Afghanistan, but Afghan officials remain cautious.

Pakistan's role in the peace talks is delicate, as it seeks to avoid demonstrating the kind of broad influence over the Taliban long attributed to it by Washington.

U.S. special envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad, who is leading the push to broker a peace deal with the Afghan Taliban, has held several rounds of talks with Pakistani officials to smooth the way.

Last week, dozens of Afghan politicians and opposition leaders gathered in Pakistan to discuss ways to achieve peace.

Trade analysts said Afghanistan was a key export market and important hub with central Asia for Pakistan, which faces bleak economic headwinds, including a looming balance of payments crisis likely to be worsened by regional turmoil.

"At this stage Pakistan cannot afford to see Afghanistan slide into chaos when it has been running short of foreign exchange reserves," said Mohammad Jamaluddin of the Pakistan Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce. (Reuters)

**(8) Taliban's Islamic...**

agree to a single perspective toward peace. This comes as peace and election in the country are the top two priorities of the Afghan government and the international community. (ATN)

**(9) Attacks on Media ...**

the media "to change their attitude and stop being hostile towards the Taliban or else they will no longer be regarded as media outlets and will instead be regarded as enemy intelligence sources and as military targets that will be attacked by the Mujahideen. Journalists and media outlets will no longer be safe."

"Attacks against civilian targets, including media and journalists, constitute war crimes," said Reza Moini, the head of RSF's Afghanistan desk.

"We call on the countries participating in the peace talks to demand a statement from the Taliban explicitly undertaking to respect international humanitarian law's basic treaties, starting with the Geneva Conventions," Moini added: "At the same time, the Afghan government must ensure that the intelligence services and the military do not use the media for propaganda purposes, and must guarantee the safety of the media, which should be able to operate in a free and independent manner."

In a statement in October 2015, the Taliban identified Afghanistan's two leading privately-owned TV channels as "military targets." The threat was carried out on 20 January 2016, when a bus operated by the Kabura TV production company was bombed, killing seven Moby Media Group employees.

The resumption of peace talks between the US and the Taliban at the start of 2019 has not reduced tension in Afghanistan. Although the level of press freedom has not been visibly affected, the safety of journalists and media is worsening steadily, above all because of the lack of protective measures by the authorities.

According to RSF's tally, there have been at least 45 cases of violence against journalists and the media in Afghanistan since the start of the year, including threats, physical violence and destruction of media outlets.

Afghanistan is ranked 121st out of 180 countries in RSF's 2019 World Press Freedom Index. (Pajhwok)

**(10) Nearly 16,000 ...**

He said even some the workers could write. He also accused IEC local officials of not sharing information with election watchdogs.

The IEC on June 8th announced launching a 20-day voter registration process for the Sept 28 presidential election nation-wide.

Nangarhar IEC officials said they recently conducted the voter registration process in Shirzad district after some delay.

Currently, 28 voter registration process centers are operating in the province and six of them are in Jalalabad. (Pajhwok)

**(11) Afghanistan Records ...**

communities to accept vaccination programmes.

Hedayatullah Stanekzai, the health ministry's point person on polio, said that out of some 9 million children eligible for vaccination, around 860,000 had not been administered polio drops in 2018, mainly due to security threats.

"We have full preparation and facilities to run a vaccine campaign in the whole country but due to security threats, we can't send our campaigners to the Taliban-controlled and other insurgent areas," he said.

A Taliban ban on the Red Cross (ICRC) and World Health Organization operating in areas under their control had made the work of prevention more difficult and there was a risk that the disease could break out in other areas, he said.

Many health workers administering the vaccines were women, able to gain greater access to families in very conservative areas of the country and their safety was a key concern.

"We are deeply concerned about the Taliban's ban on WHO and ICRC's activities," he said.

"If the ban is not lifted soon the polio virus will spread out to the areas which were cleaned in past 18 years," he said.

Stanekzai said officials were talking to communities in Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan and Zabul provinces.

"We are in contact with tribal elders and people to find a solution for the problem, but we hope the anti-polio campaigns are not taken hostage by the warring sides for political purposes." (Reuters)

**(12) 2 Service Members ...**

"I think this drives home the need for us to be successful, right, the mission set that we've undertaken in Afghanistan is a reconciliation, to reduce the level of violence, to reduce the level of risk to Afghans broadly and the risk to American service members," Pompeo told reporters in India where he is holding bilateral meetings.

The Resolute Support Mission consists of some 17,000 troops, about half of them from the United States. A smaller number of U.S. troops also operates in Afghanistan under a counter-terrorism mission.

The latest U.S. casualties come a day after Pompeo stopped in the Afghan capital, Kabul, for daylong talks with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani as well as other senior leaders and opposition politicians to discuss ongoing efforts Washington is making to reach an agreement with the Taliban toward ending the nearly 18-year-old war.

As U.S. and Taliban negotiators are preparing to meet in Qatar Saturday for a new round of talks, Pompeo told reporters before leaving Afghanistan he is hopeful of a peace deal "before September 1", ahead of the country's presidential election on 28th that month. (VoA)

**(13) 5 Pro-Govt ...**

three militants were killed.

A resident of the area, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that one pro-government fighter was killed and three others were wounded when uprising forces commander Mohammad's vehicle struck a roadside bomb. (Pajhwok)

**(14) Dairy Processing ...**

would cost 20 million afghanis and would be completed in six months.

At least 6,000 litres of milk would be processed within 24 hours, he said, adding Afghanistan imported dairy products worth \$60 million annually and the government was working on a plan to build similar plants in other provinces. He added dairy imports would be reduced

by 50 percent with the construction of the plant and that would strengthen the economy. Rahmatullah, owner of a farm, said he supplied his products to the local market, but he was not offered fair prices. (Pajhwok)

**(15) Japan's Abe...**

also called for international efforts to restore peace in the Middle East, where tensions have escalated amid a dispute between the U.S. and Iran over its unraveling nuclear deal. (AP)

**(16) Pompeo Meets...**

partners despite retaliatory tariffs they imposed on some goods this month.

India imposed tariffs on 28 American products including walnuts and almonds on June 16 in retaliation for the U.S. ending India's preferential trade status on June 1. The Trump administration imposed higher duties on Indian products including aluminum and steel.

Another irritant in their relationship is India's plan to purchase Russia's S-400 air defense system. U.S. has shown reservations about the deal. But still the U.S. has become India's top defense supplier in the last two years. India's trade with the U.S. has also seen steady growth and is currently about \$150 billion annually.

Pompeo's visit comes ahead of a planned meeting between President Donald Trump and Modi on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit in Japan later this week.

Indian officials say they have few differences with the U.S. over political and strategic issues including on Iran, but have cautioned the two countries need to be careful on trade and commerce.

India stopped oil purchases from Iran after a U.S. sanctions waiver ran out in May, but Indian officials have continued working for a renewal of the waiver amid escalating tensions between the U.S. and Iran. Indian officials say they understand the U.S. concerns regarding Iran, but their country has taken an economic hit.

Jaishankar said global energy supplies should remain stable, predictable and affordable. "I think that's a concern to which Secretary Pompeo was certainly very, very receptive. I think he understands that this is today the world's fifth largest economy, which imports 85% of its energy, a large part of it from the Gulf. So I think he certainly gets ... what our interests are," he said.

Pompeo said the two leaders didn't discuss a lifting of waivers but they agreed to work through the problems.

On Iran, Pompeo repeated that Tehran "is the world's largest state sponsor of terror" and that the Strait of Hormuz needs to be kept open. "There's a shared understanding of threat and a common purpose to ensure that we can keep that energy at the right prices, and deter this threat, not only the threat in the narrow confines of the Middle East, but the threat that this terror regime poses to the entire world," he said. (AP)

**(17) South Korea...**

wider diplomatic charm offensive in Asia. Prince Mohammed, the kingdom's de facto leader, visited Pakistan, India and China in February, and is scheduled in Japan later this week to attend the G20 summit in Osaka.

Khashoggi, a fierce critic of the prince, was killed at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October, a murder that tarnished the image of the kingdom and of the crown prince in particular.

Riyadh initially denied the killing, then gave several conflicting accounts of Khashoggi's death, and now claims he died in an unauthorised operation that did not involve Prince Mohammed.

The murder sparked global indignation, with US lawmakers pushing for Washington to distance itself from the crown prince, but the White House has maintained close relations with Riyadh, a major ally in the Middle East.

A Blue House spokeswoman told reporters Wednesday that Moon had "no plans" to discuss Khashoggi's death with the visiting prince.

The economic pact also involved several other deals between Saudi Aramco and Korean firms, including Korea National Oil Corporation, Hyundai Heavy Industries and carmaker Hyundai Motor.

The crown prince also met with the heads of the country's biggest conglomerates, including Samsung heir Lee Jae-yong.

Prince Mohammed aims to diversify his country's heavily oil-dependent economy and to sell up to five percent of Saudi Aramco - the world's largest energy firm.

Proceeds from the sale - which aims to raise up to \$100 billion - will help create the world's biggest government investment fund, whose profits could provide an alternative to oil revenues. (AFP)

**(18) Merkel: We...**

agree on who to appoint to a raft of top European Union jobs. The winner needs the backing of all national leaders as well as a parliamentary majority.

"Not everyone in the European Council is in favor of the Spitzenkandidat process and since we value the Franco-German relationship greatly we have to accept that the French president has a different view on it from me," Merkel told the lower house of parliament. (Reuters)

**(19) Oman to Open...**

measures to open the embassy, it said. The announcement was cautiously welcomed by a senior Palestinian official.

"We think maybe first of all it will help us educate the Omani government as to the real nature of the occupation and also working with Palestine directly," Hanan Ashrawi told journalists. But she warned Oman against using the new embassy as a step towards establishing formal relations with Israel. "If this has a political price attached then certainly there will be ramifications," she said. Egypt and Jordan are the only Arab countries to have established diplomatic ties with the Jewish state.

But Oman was the first Gulf state to receive Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in October 2018.

A US ally bordering Saudi Arabia and Yemen, Oman has frequently served as a mediator in the Arab world. (AFP)

**(21) Bahrain Conference...**

creation of an independent state. Even the conference's lone Palestinian speaker - a West Bank businessman who is viewed with deep suspicion by many compatriots - talked about the need for a Palestinian state.

Christine Lagarde, the managing director of the International Monetary Fund, suggested that peace is the missing part of the proposal, which was put together by President Donald Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner.

The Palestinians have great economic potential that can only be fulfilled with serious reform and protections for investors that must include serious anti-corruption efforts. But those alone are not enough, Lagarde said, stressing that a "satisfactory peace" is imperative for prosperity. "It's a matter of putting all the ingredients together," she said.

"Improving economic conditions and attracting lasting investment to the region depends ultimately on being able to reach a peace agreement," she said in a statement released later by the IMF. "Peace, political stability and re-establishment of trust between all the parties involved are essential pre-requisites to the success of any economic plan for the region."

Lagarde's comments appeared at odds with the views expressed by Kushner when he opened the conference on Tuesday and said an economic plan "is a necessary precondition to resolving what has been a previously unsolvable political situation."

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who had a hand in earlier peacemaking efforts and has been supportive of Kushner's plan, also spoke of the need for the economic proposal to have a political component.

"Obviously, it isn't a substitute for the politics," Blair said in a conversation with Kushner. "There will be no economic peace. There will be a peace that has a political component and an economic component, but the economy can help the politics and the politics, of course, is necessary for the economy to flourish."

The only Palestinian on the agenda, Ashraf Jabari, downplayed the Palestinian Authority's rejection of the plan. He noted that it had not been formally invited to the conference but he said a Palestinian state is necessary for economic improvements.

"This is our objective: to have an independent state of Palestine," Jabari said. "The Palestinian people would like to be independent and we are sure that this will lead to the development of the Palestinian economy." (AP)

**(22) Boris Johnson's...**

produced an immediate outpouring of global reaction on the internet and among politicians - ranging from the bemused to the belittling.

US political scientist Brian Klaas called it "truly weird" and "so bizarre that it's mesmerising", while Australian broadcaster Matt Bevan said "this is exactly how my (three-year-old) son would answer this question".

Opposition Labour MP Owen Smith cast doubt on the veracity of Johnson's claimed hobby.

"Is there anyone out there who believes that Boris spends his spare time relaxing by 'making model buses out of crates and then painting model happy people enjoying the bus'?" he asked on Twitter.

But others pointed out the gaffe-prone politician has a track record of sketching and painting. His mother is an artist and Johnson became an accomplished painter at a young age. A doodle of a bus he made recently raised £1,000 (1,117 euros/\$1,270) at a charity auction. Women's rights campaigner Nimko Ali, a friend of Johnson and his 31-year-old girlfriend Carrie Symonds, told Channel 4 television she had even seen "what he was talking about". "That shows how down to earth he is," she said of the pastime.

Leading Brexit advocate Johnson has another, controversial, connection to buses: the campaign coach he used to tour the country in the run-up to the 2016 referendum. It was emblazoned with the claim that Britain sends the EU £350 million a week, which was widely criticised as misleading because it represented its gross contribution to the bloc and excluded a budget rebate and other payouts from Brussels. (AFP)