

(1) Ghani, Imran...

Khan thanked Ghani for accepting his invitation and visiting Pakistan and termed it a step in the right direction to restore trust and confidence in bilateral relationships.

The Afghan leader said huge opportunities with regard to uplift of Afghanistan, Pakistan and regional countries existed and Afghanistan was taking practical steps to convert these opportunities into realities.

He said as a result of Afghanistan's policy of regional connectivity Central and South Asia had become closer through transit trade and connectivity.

He said the joint working committee of the two countries would encourage Pakistan's role in regional connectivity as well, which would have positive outcome for economic prosperity of the peoples of the two countries.

Separately, a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office in Islamabad, spoke positive about the future of ties between the two countries.

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have remained tense because of trust deficit between the two neighbours. Kabul for long has kept accusing Islamabad of supporting the Afghan Taliban. On the contrary, Pakistan has its own list of reservations that include Afghan government's lack of action against groups involved in cross-border attacks.

President Ghani arrived in Pakistan on Thursday morning for a two-day visit aimed at strengthening ties between the two countries. Upon arrival at Nur Khan airbase in Islamabad, Ghani was received by Adviser to PM for Commerce, Textile and Industry Production Abdul Razak Dawood.

He met Prime Minister Imran Khan at the Prime Minister House, where he was presented a guard of honour. The two leaders introduced members of their delegations to each other.

The two leaders later held a one-on-one meeting, in which matters pertaining to bilateral cooperation in various sectors and regional situation were discussed.

According to the statement, both leaders "agreed to open a new chapter of friendship and cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan, based on mutual trust and harmony for the benefit of the two peoples and countries and for advancing the cause of peace, stability and prosperity in the region".

Imran assured Ghani he was "committed to bring about a qualitative transformation in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations as part of his vision of a 'peaceful neighbourhood'".

The premier and Afghan president acknowledged that it was important to "craft a forward-looking vision of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations".

Both leaders also talked about Pakistan's role in the ongoing Afghan peace process, which Prime Minister Imran said was a "shared responsibility".

"[The prime minister] underlined that an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process was the only viable option to end decades-long conflict in Afghanistan. In this regard, Pakistan supported a result-oriented intra-Afghan dialogue," the PMO statement said.

Imran and Ghani also talked about economic ties and discussed the importance of completing the Central Asia-South Asia (CASA 1000) electricity transmission line and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Paki-

stan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline at the earliest.

The Afghan president also met Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi. Ghani "appreciated Pakistan's efforts for peace process in Afghanistan".

The visit comes less than a week after Pakistan hosted dozens of Afghan politicians to discuss ways to end an 18-year-long war in its neighbouring country.

President Ghani will also travel to Lahore during the visit, which is his third tour to Pakistan since 2014, as efforts have intensified to reach a political settlement and end decades of war in Afghanistan.

The delegation-level talks between the two sides would focus on strengthening bilateral cooperation in diverse areas including political, trade, economic, security, peace and reconciliation, education and people-to-people exchanges, said Pakistan's Foreign Office on Wednesday. (Pajhwok)

(2) US Reaffirms...

Iran's hostile actions were an international problem that affect many nations. They included pursuit of nuclear weapons, a growing ballistic missile program, support for international terrorism, and assaults on freedom of navigation in the Arabian Sea, Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman and in international airspace, as the world saw last week.

He, however, made it clear that the United States did not seek war with Iran. (Pajhwok)

(3) NATO Vows...

Addressing media persons here, after NATO Defence Ministers meeting, he said "We will stay in Afghanistan for as long as necessary, to ensure the country never again becomes a safe haven for international terrorists. We went into Afghanistan together and we will take decisions about the future of our mission together."

"Ministers were briefed by the mission's Commander, General Miller, and by NATO's Senior Civilian Representative, Ambassador Kay. While many challenges remain in Afghanistan, we now have a unique opportunity for peace," he added.

Allies fully supported the efforts of the US Special Representative, Ambassador Khalilzad, to achieve a political settlement. He is regularly consulting with Allies at NATO, including earlier this month, the secretary general said.

He added: "we remain in close contact with him. NATO is strongly committed to Afghanistan. We have recently generated forces for the next rotation, throughout next year."

When asked about beginning of intra-Afghan talks in the near future singled by US Secretary Pompeo, he said: "First of all, these negotiations are extremely important because they mean that we are now closer to a peace deal than we have ever been before in Afghanistan. That doesn't mean that we know that there will be a deal, but a deal is closer than it has ever been before."

He added: "And NATO Allies, all our partners, strongly support those efforts. Ambassador Khalilzad has briefed us on many, many times in the different meetings here at the NATO Headquarters, there are four elements. First is about Afghanistan never again becoming a safe-haven for international terrorists, so how to make sure that doesn't happen. The second element is about the presence of international forces, NATO forces in Afghanistan. The third el-

ement is about an inter-Afghan dialogue, because to have a sustainable peace in Afghanistan, it has to be, of course, a dialogue between the Taliban, the government and the different communities in Afghanistan, to create a sustainable peace. And the fourth element is the comprehensive ceasefire. And the inter-Afghan dialogue is something which is supported by all Allies, and Germany plays a key role because, actually, they're now trying to facilitate and also helping to, to support and organise an inter-Afghan dialogue."

The secretary general maintained: "I will be very careful about any specific timelines, partly because, it is Ambassador Khalilzad which is responsible for the negotiations. And second because no one can predict exactly when or if there will be a deal, because a deal requires agreement between two parts, or the two parties, two sides. Our best way to support the effort to find a peace deal is to stay committed. To send a very clear signal to Taliban that they will not win on the battlefield. And the good news now is that actually we see that the Afghan forces are making progress on their own."

They are retaking territory which was previously controlled by Taliban, now the Afghan forces are able to retake that. And by continuing to train them, advise them, help them and to fund them, the Afghan forces, that's the best way to create the conditions on the battleground to enable progress around the negotiating table.

When asked about Taliban's emphasis regarding full withdrawal of foreign forces and outcome of talks in Qatar, he said that NATO's presence in Afghanistan had been the alliance biggest military operation outside NATO territory ever. So, of course, this was and had been a very important mission for NATO.

"We have to understand why NATO went in. We went in to Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks on the United States, 9/11 2001, because we saw that Afghanistan was a platform to train, to organise attacks on our countries. And that could not continue. And these attacks were at the United States, but actually we saw also attacks in Madrid, in London and elsewhere. So this was actually attacks organised by al-Qaida, other terrorist groups against us. So we are in Afghanistan to protect our interests, to protect our security. So this has been important for NATO Allies and partners to prevent Afghanistan again being a safe place for international terrorists. And, together with Afghan forces, we have been able to deny safe haven for international terrorists in Afghanistan."

"It's not easy, and we have paid the price, all of us. But at least Afghanistan is not the safe haven for international terrorists it was before 2001. Then, of course, for us the aim is not to stay as long as possible in Afghanistan. For us the aim is to train, build the Afghan forces so they can stabilise their own country. And again, there are many problems, many challenges in Afghanistan, but at least we have made a huge achievement, made a lot of progress, by being able to go from more than 140,000 combat troops in Afghanistan a few years ago, to now around 16,000 in a noncombat operation, where we train and advise the Afghans and they do the fighting."

"They are on the frontline. And they are now making progress, because they are well-trained, bet-

ter equipped, better commanded, new commanders, younger commanders, better organised and better led and more enablers including, for instance, air forces."

"So the progress we see on the battlefield now is actually something that Afghans achieve and we are, what should I say, grateful for that, because that's also in our interest. And we're also proud because we have helped that happen by training and advising them. Then it's, of course, not possible for me to say exactly how many troops we will have if there's a peace deal, because that depends on the peace deal," he said.

"What Ambassador Khalilzad has said many times, and I totally agree with him, is that nothing is agreed, because before everything is agreed. So this is a package. And we are not aiming for a leave deal, we are aiming for a peace deal. So the elements have to be in place, including Afghan reconciliation," he added.

"We have been there to protect our own interests, our own security, but, of course, we also recognise the huge progress which has been made in Afghanistan when it comes to social, economic progress, not least human rights, freedom of press and the rights of women. And for us, it's important to try to preserve those gains. And that has to be one part of the peace deal," he believed.

When asked about his message to the Taliban and Afghan government, Stoltenberg said: "My message to the Afghan government is that we will stay committed. We will continue to provide forces and funding. Forces for training and funding for security. And my message to Taliban is that they will not win on the battlefield. Actually, now, the Afghan forces are making progress regaining, retaking territory which was previously controlled by the Taliban." (Pajhwok)

(4) Seventh Round...

"Almost all described this negotiation important. We hope it solves the problems between the United States and the Taliban," said Hamayoun Jareer, an official of the 'Hiz-e-Islami' party.

On the other hand, there is also pessimism regarding the dialogue.

"If the U.S. and the Taliban do not reach to an agreement, there are possibilities of a deadlock formation in the process," said Nazar Mohammad Motmaein, a pro-Taliban analyst.

Meanwhile, the sources say that that the Secretary of the U.S. Department of State has convinced the government and senior politicians in his trip to Kabul that a peace agreement to be achieved before the upcoming presidential election.

"The United States has stressed that the peace agreement to be achieved before the election and Afghans have agreed on this. We expect that this round of talks has positive outcomes," said Ahmadullah Alizai, the Chief of the 'Bonyad-e-Jadeed Afghanistan' political party. Previously, Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, has said in a tweet that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. (ATN)

(5) US, Taliban...

the occasion of last year [parliamentary] elections," he said.

"Preparations require to work extremely hard, including by listening to the advisers provided

to assist the Afghan electoral authorities. Preparations also require a great effort to keep the public informed. At this stage elections are set for September; so preparations must continue to that effect," he added.

On Wednesday, the NATO Secretary Jens Stoltenberg at a press briefing in Brussels said that "a real peace process" is taking place in Afghanistan and that the international community is closer to a peace deal in Afghanistan.

"We are close to peace deal now than we ever been before in Afghanistan," Stoltenberg said. "All NATO allies strongly support the peace efforts and the best way to do that is to continue to stay committed to Afghanistan to continue to provide political support but continue to support the Afghan army and security forces with train and funding." NATO defense ministers will hold a two-day meeting on the alliance's defense spending as well as Afghanistan among other issues. (Tolo news)

(6) Absolute Majority...

His remarks come as NATO just wrapped up the defense ministers meeting where the head of the alliance, Jens Stoltenberg said there is a unique opportunity for peace in Afghanistan.

He said that the alliance and all its partners and members are strongly supporting the peace efforts in Afghanistan. (Tolo news)

(7) Professionals' Shortage...

education in this particular area," he said. Reza said the laboratory cost \$80,000.

Shafi Sahrifi, head of ICTI, said that Afghanistan was placed in the lowest position in scientific innovations but the IT laboratory would help resolve the issue to some extent. (Pajhwok)

(8) Voter Registration...

registered in Ghazni as voters in which 28,100 were men and over 12,680 were women. Over 200 Kochis have also registered to vote in Ghazni.

She said the voter registration process would end on June 29 but it would be extended in Ghazni for one week. (Pajhwok)

(9) UN Slams Taliban's...

response to the public threats by Taliban to turn media outlets into military targets, highlighted two fundamental principles: that freedom of the press is critical, and that civilians should never be deliberately targeted with violence. (Agencies)

(10) Security Personnel...

recaptured police headquarters of Dayak district last night. Mujahid claimed 35 security personnel, including Commander Saleh Mohammad were killed during the clash.

He rejected casualties inflicted on the Taliban in the clash.

Earlier, officials in Ghazni claimed to recaptured Ghazni's Dayak district after one year. (Pajhwok)

(11) NDS Arrests

The individuals were identified as Mohibullah and Nasib Shah who has confessed during the initial investigations, the statement said.

The suspects had loaded the weapons and ammunition in a trailer truck. Three rocket launchers, 19 rifles, 2 weapons silencers, 2 grenade launchers, 55 radio sets, 40 remote control disks, thousands of rounds of ammunition and some other military equipment were seized by security forces, the statement added. (ATN)