

**(1) Ghani Stresses...**

"You are no longer victims of decisions on the future of Afghanistan," Ghani reiterated. "No one can impose peace on us. A peace which is not sustainable is rejected."

Ghani also stressed the need for holding the upcoming elections and said the polls will prove significant for strengthening a democratic system in the country.

He said Afghans are living as responsible citizens under the Constitution and that women's message to Afghan forces is that they are protecting the Constitution.

Other speakers at the event said the agenda and the manner of presentations in the peace Jirga should be inclusive, diverse and respectful.

"All Afghans are demanding peace and today's event is also aimed at ending the war," the First Lady Rula Ghani said.

She said the event was initiated by her office, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Afghan Women Network, and Afghan civil society.

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This comes as US negotiators and Taliban held talks on peace for the fifth time in the last four months.

The US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad said on Thursday that the meetings in the last three days with the group's members in Doha were "productive".

The four main topics of US-Taliban talks in Qatar have been US forces withdrawal from Afghanistan, ensuring that Afghanistan's territory is not used as a threat to any other country, a comprehensive ceasefire and direct talks with the Afghan government. This was confirmed by the Afghan government as well as by sources ahead of the talks.

Taliban and the US peace negotiators in Doha are taking a two-day break after "extensive" discussions on Tuesday and Wednesday on counterterrorism and US troops withdrawal, the Taliban said in a statement on Thursday. (Tolo news)

**(2) Afghan Forces...**

Support, and a separate U.S. counterterrorism mission largely directed against militant groups like Islamic State and al Qaeda.

But U.S. President Donald Trump told Congress last month he intended to reduce U.S. forces from Afghanistan as negotiators make progress in talks with Taliban insurgents, saying: "Great nations do not fight endless wars."

In addition, some 8,000 troops from 38 other countries in Resolute Support provide training and support for Afghan forces.

Helmand is seen as a strategic target for the militants as large stretches of the province provides a source of much of the world's illegal opium supply.

During more than a decade of international intervention, Helmand was the deadliest province for foreign troops, claiming nearly 1,000 lives.

The governor of Helmand province in a statement said nine attackers including three suicide bombers were killed and Afghan commando forces were busy with clearing the area.

An officer of the Afghan security forces in Helmand said a suicide bomber had blown himself up in a dining room inside the military corps compound and clashes continued.

The Taliban said their fighters were engaged in clashes with U.S. and Afghan forces at the Shorab airbase in Helmand province.

Pakistan to return captured Indian pilot

"Heavy clashes continue as tens of members of the enemy forces had been killed or were wounded," Qari Yousuf Ahmadi, a Taliban spokesman said in a statement.

Security officials in Kabul said clashes between the Taliban and the government forces who are backed by foreign forces have not subsided even as U.S. and Taliban officials were holding talks in Qatar to find a negotiated solution to end the war in Afghanistan.

The Afghan soldiers in the past week thwarted a Taliban attack in Zabul province, killing 28 Taliban fighters and at least 15 members of the insurgent groups were killed in air strikes conducted by the Afghan air force in Kandahar province, a senior security official said. (Reuters)

**(3) Imran Khan Says...**

meetings in the last three days with the group's members in Doha were "productive".

When beginning the talks, Khalilzad said that this time he will be talking with a "more authoritative" delegation of the Taliban, pointing at the presence of Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Taliban's deputy leader and head of the group's Qatar office.

"Meetings were productive. We continue to take slow, steady steps toward understanding and eventually #peace," Khalilzad said in a tweet.

The announcement for a two-day break in US-Taliban talks was made in a statement by the Taliban on Thursday morning.

Khalilzad said, "both sides will take the next two days for internal deliberations, with plans to regroup on Saturday".

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Pointing out to the four topics, Khalilzad said that "all four key issues remain on the table".

In his last visit to Kabul, Khalilzad called on the Afghan government to form a national team to engage in talks with the Taliban.

Mentioning this, Khalilzad said, "as talks continue in Doha, there is also progress on forming a national team in Kabul ready to engage in intra-Afghan dialogue and talks with the Taliban". (Tolo news)

**(4) Under Peace Plan...**

in coming months, the 14,000 American troops currently in Afghanistan. It would task the 8,600 European and other international troops with training the Afghan military — a focus of the NATO mission for more than a decade — and largely shift American operations to counterterrorism strikes.

Various elements of the plan were shared with The New York Times by more than a half-dozen current and former American and European officials. It intends to help talks with the Taliban that are being led by Zalmay Khalilzad, the American special envoy.

So far, the plan has been met with broad acceptance in Washington and NATO headquarters in Brussels. But American officials warned that Mr. Trump could upend the new plan at any time.

And officials said that even if the peace talks broke down, the United States would go forward with shifting to counterterrorism missions from training Afghan forces.

Until the final withdrawal, several thousand American forces would continue strikes against Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, including on partnered raids with Afghan commandos. The counterterrorism missions, and the military's dwindling presence, are also critical to allowing the C.I.A. to operate in Afghanistan.

Lt. Col. Koné Faulkner, a Pentagon

spokesman, said no decisions had been made as peace talks continued. The Defense Department "is considering all options of force numbers and disposition," Colonel Faulkner said.

But European allies said they had been consulted about the proposal — a stark contrast to Mr. Trump's surprise announcement in December to withdraw American forces from Syria.

"The Europeans are perfectly capable of conducting the training mission," James Stavridis, a retired American admiral and former top NATO commander who is now with the Carlyle Group private equity firm. "It is a smart division of labor to have the United States shift the bulk of its effort toward the special forces mission and having the Europeans do the training mission."

Mr. Stavridis said the two missions would be coordinated, including American logistical support and military backup for the European troops. On Monday, American diplomats met with the Taliban in Qatar in the highest-level negotiations yet, including the attendance of Gen. Austin S. Miller, the commander of the international mission in Afghanistan. The negotiations paused on Wednesday and are set to resume on Saturday.

The two sides have sought to flesh out a framework agreement, decided in principle last month, for the full withdrawal of foreign troops and assurances by the Taliban to prevent terrorist groups that seek to attack the United States from using Afghan territory as a safe haven.

The Afghan government has not been a part of the negotiations because of Taliban reluctance to talk to President Ashraf Ghani or his envoys.

The prospect of an American military withdrawal has raised fears across the world that it could lead to the fall of the Western-backed government in Kabul and a return to the extremist rule of the Taliban. Before it was ousted in 2001, the Taliban was accused of human rights abuses, prohibited girls from attending school and imposed harsh penalties on accused heretics. American officials have said any deal to withdraw international forces from Afghanistan must involve a cease-fire agreement and the inclusion of government leaders in the negotiations.

In a speech on Thursday in Kabul, Mr. Ghani warned Afghan security forces to be prepared for possible Taliban attacks ahead of any peace deal. (Monitoring Desk)

**(5) Ministry Signs...**

experience in establishing and running Real Time Data Management System.

Bustos said they have installed the Real Time Data Management System in six countries.

The Afghan government imposed a 10 percent tax levy against telecom companies which directly affected mobile phone subscribers in October 2015.

However, so far there was not an electronic system for monitoring of the taxes collection and now the ministry has signed the contract to oversee revenues generated from tax on telecom companies.

Aryubi said that so far, more than AF\$14.5 billion has been collected from the 10 percent taxes on telecom services. (Tolo news)

**(6) US and Taliban...**

made on the issue, tweeting "there is also progress on forming a national team in #Kabul ready to engage in intra-Afghan dialogue and talks with the Taliban."

Earlier in the week the special envoy met with the Taliban's top political leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar in Doha, in what has been touted as the highest-level engagement between the two sides in the months-long diplomatic thrust.

Khalilzad welcomed the presence of Baradar — a cofounder of the Islamist movement — at the table, calling the militants' negotiating side a "more authoritative Taliban delegation."

Baradar is believed to be widely respected by the Taliban's various factions and analysts said his participation would help garner support for any deal from insurgents on the frontlines.

He was arrested in Pakistan in 2010, but was released in October and named as head of the Taliban's political office in Doha.

General Scott Miller, the top US and NATO commander in Afghanistan, is also attending the talks.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly voiced his eagerness to end America's involvement in Afghanistan, where 14,000 US troops are still deployed.

Afghanistan has been enmeshed in nearly constant conflict since the Soviet invasion of 1979, which was followed by civil war, the Taliban regime, and the U.S. invasion in late 2001. (AFP)

**(7) European Rights...**

precariousness, and insecurity." Khan crossed the English Channel in March 2016 and is now living in Birmingham, England.

In the second case, the court ordered Greece to pay 4,000 euros (\$4,550) to nine teenagers — six Syrians, two Iraqis, and a Moroccan — who arrived in the country in early 2016. The court found they had been held for between three and five weeks in police or border-guard stations before being transferred to migration authorities.

The ECHR said the detention facilities were unsuitable for such long terms, particularly for children.

The court rejected a claim by the migrants that the reception center to which they were eventually sent was overcrowded and unsanitary.

The court said the influx of migrants to Greece at the time was an "unprecedented migratory and humanitarian crisis" and that the reception center had been created on an emergency basis. (AP)

**(8) Chinese Defense...**

presence in the adjacent Wakhan Corridor belonging to Afghanistan. The statement was in line with earlier denials of any plans to deploy troops to the war-torn nation with which it shares a narrow border, AP reported. (AP)

**(9) Like Father...**

Osama bin Laden was killed in 2011 during a CIA-led raid on his compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. The US military said bin Laden's body was brought to Afghanistan for identification and then buried at sea amid high secrecy. (RT)

**(10) Kim Jong...**

KNCA's report Friday offered an upbeat takeaway of the meeting, saying both leaders walked away with a deeper commitment to forging ties between the two historically hostile nations.

The report said Kim was appreciative that Trump had made "active efforts towards results" and that he regarded the summit talks as "productive," Reuters reported.

Efforts were taken on both sides, Kim reportedly said, to ease tension and bring about peace in the region. Though not yielding any concrete results, the second summit was an important state in reversing decades of hostility and bringing the two nations' relationship to the next level, Kim reportedly said.

President Trump, meanwhile, told reporters Thursday that it was unclear if he would meet again with Kim in the near future.

"Speed is not important," Trump said at a Hanoi news conference. "What's important is that we do the right deal." (Fox News)

**(11) Eurotunnel Withdraws...**

The agreement enables the development of infrastructure, security and border measures that "will guarantee the flow of vehicles carrying urgent and vital goods and that will keep supply chains essential to both industry and consumers moving." (AP)

**(12) Grounded Ship...**

Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade said there was a high risk that the remaining oil would leak and it was "profoundly disappointed" by the slow response.

It said the Solomon Islands government had advised it that the responsibility to salvage the ship and mitigate the environmental impact lay with the companies involved.

Radio New Zealand reported that the ship's owner King Trader Ltd. had sent a team to help with the salvage operation while Bintan had claimed that as charterer, it had no legal responsibility for the ship or liability for the accident.

UNESCO has designated the southern third of Rennell Island as a World Heritage site. It says the island is the largest raised coral atoll in the world and is a "true natural laboratory" for scientific study.

It's also home to about 2,000 people, whom the High Commission notes rely on the ocean along with the natural resources of the island for their livelihoods.

Both Australia and New Zealand have sent experts to help with the monitoring of the oil spill and the potential salvage of the ship. (AP)

**(13) Us Plans to Buy...**

The US has openly supported Venezuelan National Assembly leader Juan Guaido who proclaimed himself interim president in January following violent clashes on the streets of Caracas.

Venezuela's opposition is also backed by US' Latin American allies as well as many European countries including the UK, Germany, France, and Spain. Russia, China, Turkey, Iran and a number of other countries stand by Maduro who was re-elected in 2018. Supporters of both the president and the opposition leader rallied in Caracas over the past weeks. (RT)

**(14) Minister Urges...**

(Archbishop Ventura) benefits from diplomatic immunity, but the Holy See is clearly aware of the serious accusations that have been brought against the apostolic nuncio and I don't doubt for a second that the Holy See will do the right thing," Loiseau said.

"This inquiry needs to be allowed to reach its conclusion, what matters is that the truth be known," she said, adding that Ventura enjoyed the presumption of innocence. "I'm waiting for the Holy See to take its responsibilities in hand."

The Catholic Church worldwide, including senior church figures, is reeling from crises involving sexual abuse which have deeply damaged confidence in the Church in the United States, Chile, Australia, Ireland and elsewhere. (Reuters)

**(15) India's Growth...**

An expected deceleration in economic growth in major economies around the world, including China and the United States, is expected to hurt trade growth.

"We don't expect any election-spend related upside to growth for the next two quarters," said Soumya Kanti Ghosh, chief economist at State Bank of India, the country's largest state-run bank.

He said there was an overall slowdown in consumption and government spending on infrastructure and that this could continue until the September quarter. Ghosh is forecasting economic growth could decline to 6.2 percent in the January-March quarter and below 6 percent in the June quarter.

The government has played down the risks to the economy.

Subhash Chandra Garg, one of the top officials in the finance ministry, said the downward revision of the government's annual GDP growth estimate to 7 percent in the current financial year was at least in part due to an upward revision of GDP growth for the previous year, to 7.2 percent. (Reuters)