

**(1) New IEC, IECC...**

and Mohammad Qasim Elyasi as spokesman of the body.

Following amendments to the electoral law and dismissal of former election commissioners, 17 presidential candidates voted last Friday to choose 14 persons as electoral commissioners and chiefs of secretariat for approval from the president.

President Ashraf Ghani, during a meeting on Sunday, selected Sayed Esmatullah Mal, Mawlana Mohammad Abdullah, Aurangzeb, Mohammad Hanif Danishyar, Musafar Quqandi, Hawa Alam Nuristani and Rahima Zarifi as members of IEC and Mohammad Qasim Elyasi, Zahra Bayan Shinwari, Maulvi Din Mohammad Azimi, Mohammad Younus Tughra, Sayed Qutbuddin Roidar as members of the IECC.

Under the presidential decree, Chaman Shah Etimadi has been appointed as IECC secretary and Habibur Rahman Nang as IEC secretary. (Pajhwok)

**(2) ESG Welcomes...**

whose reputation has been tarnished by mismanagement and allegations of misconduct. This trust would be generated through the concrete steps taken in their first weeks in office, and by working cohesively towards the sole purpose of delivering credible elections.

We strongly urge the new Commissions to expeditiously move forward with the finalization of the parliamentary election results, and preparations for the upcoming elections in 2019. Timely and responsible decision in consultation with relevant stakeholders is vital for preparations to proceed without further delay.

The independent electoral management bodies are responsible for holding transparent, realistically planned and properly prepared credible elections throughout Afghanistan that build upon lessons learned from the 2018 parliamentary elections. On this basis, the Election Support Group stands ready to support them.

\* The Election Support Group (ESG) comprises the key donors- the European Union, the Governments of Australia, Sweden (on behalf of the Nordic plus), Germany, Japan, United Kingdom, the United States of America - as well as NATO and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). It is chaired by UNAMA and convenes on a weekly basis. (PR)

**(3) No Blind Trust...**

against other countries, Taliban sources familiar with the talks said. In the past two days, the two sides have worked on the details of these agreements and there is a possibility that the negotiations will extend, the sources added.

But, the Presidential Palace said the final agreement on any topic relevant to peace will be determined by the Afghan government.

"Whatever is agreed, it is agreed only between the Afghan government and the Taliban and then the document becomes implementable," said President Ashraf Ghani's spokesman Haroon Chakhansuri.

The fifth round of Qatar talks entered their third day on Monday after they were suspended for two days aimed at "extensive" discussions and consultations on issues relevant to the negotiations.

The two sides are reportedly bargaining on the nature of foreign forces withdrawal and the assurance by the Taliban that threat will not be staged from Afghanistan's soil against a foreign nation. (Tolo news)

**(4) Prominent Us...**

he had "productive" discussions with the group in Doha.

Taliban sources on Monday said the US and the Taliban negotiators have advanced towards reaching agreement on some key disputed

issues.

The Afghan government, which has been out of these talks due to the persistent refusal by the Taliban, on Saturday called on Afghan politicians and people from different layers of the society to introduce their delegates for a national and inclusive negotiating team which will conduct peace talks on behalf of Afghans.

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**(5) Talks Alone...**

stability in the war-torn country.

He believed the peace could not be brought by force and conflict. But diplomacy and political means could lead to stability, the Qatari foreign minister said. (Pajhwok)

**(6) Pompeo May...**

Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad and his team are holding talks with the Taliban in Doha.

"I have a team on the ground right now trying to negotiate with the Taliban terrorists in Afghanistan, trying to find a way to achieve an Afghanistan that's not at war, that's not engaged in violence, that doesn't present a threat to the United States of America, that will respect the fundamental basic rights for every Afghan citizen - women, children - across the full spectrum," he said.

Pompeo was responding to a question from farmers after his address at the "Future Farmers of America" event in Iowa.

"That is a complicated problem, and if you add in the regional players - Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, China, Russia, all who have an interest in Afghanistan - it's an incredibly complicated negotiation," he asserted. At the same time, Pompeo said Khalilzad was on the ground, trying to "find pockets where there's sufficient agreement that everyone can begin to move forward, take all the various complex pieces and bring them together" to hopefully get an agreement.

Pompeo said the Afghan agreement would be "based on fundamental understandings about different interests and incentives" that the parties had, so that this agreement would hold and stay.

"In this case, if we could do this, if we could pull off a resolution in Afghanistan... boy, the good that we could do for the world! I hope Ambassador Khalilzad makes progress," he said.

"I am hoping he [Khalilzad] makes enough progress and I can travel there in a couple weeks and help move it along a little bit myself," Pompeo said.

The US negotiators and the Taliban members have reached to some kind of agreements on the modality of foreign forces withdrawal from Afghanistan and the guarantee that Afghanistan's territory is not used as a threat against other countries, Taliban sources familiar with the talks said.

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**(7) U.S. Abrupt...**

turn the country back.

"We don't feel that the Taliban are honest in the peace process. They [the Taliban] are still not ready to lay down their arms and reconsider their activities," said Mohammad Naim Nazari, head of Civil Society and Human Rights Network.

As the U.S.-Taliban talks continue in Doha, the Interior Ministry, meanwhile, said that the Afghan security forces are able to maintain the security and defend the country, in case of U.S. pullout.

He stressed the Afghan forces have taken the security responsibilities from the coalition forces since 2014 and that are shown the capability of defending the country. (ATN)

**(8) Nicholas Kay...**

UN Secretary General's Special Representative in Somalia.

Sir Nicholas replaces Ambassador Cornelius Zimmermann of Germany, who held the post since March 2017. Announcing his appointment in December 2018, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg had said: "I am pleased to announce that I have appointed Sir Nicholas Kay as NATO's next Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan."

Stoltenberg had said Sir Nicholas Kay would take up his appointment in March 2019 and that he knew Afghanistan well, having served for more than a year as the United Kingdom Ambassador in Kabul.

UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt had said: "Sir Nicholas Kay will bring a wealth of experience on the political developments in Afghanistan in his new role as NATO's Senior Civilian Representative and I would like to thank him for his tireless work as the British Ambassador to Afghanistan." The Senior Civilian Representative carries forward the Alliance's political-military objectives in Afghanistan, representing the political leadership of the Alliance in Kabul officially and publicly.

The role involves liaising with the Afghan Government, civil society, representatives of the international community, and neighbouring countries.

Working closely with the Resolute Support mission, the Senior Civilian Representative provides a direct channel of communication with NATO Headquarters in Brussels. (Pajhwok)

**(9) Samangan Accident...**

were shifted zonal hospital for better treatment.

He said the victims were between 20 to 25 years of age and hailed from Aibak, the capital of Samangan province. (Pajhwok)

**(10) Border Police...**

their investigation into the attack.

There has been no claim of responsibility for the attack. (Pajhwok)

**(11) Pentagon Threatens...**

Turkey for its part refused to bow to US pressure, insisting that diversifying military spending was crucial to national security. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan last week expressed his hope that Washington would "change its mind." Yet the US continues its consultations with Ankara to help it "find better solutions," and inform it of the "broader implications of purchasing Russian S400-s," Pahon stressed. (RT)

**(12) 'Never Has Europe...**

from the major shocks of the modern world."

He also seized on an opportunity to vent frustration over the painstaking talks on the UK-EU divorce deal, and all the controversies surrounding it. "Who told the British people the truth about their post-Brexit future? Who spoke to them about losing access to the EU market?"

The British government recently postponed a parliamentary vote on Brexit, and has been hectically trying to kick-start last-minute renegotiations after the previous hard-fought deal

was overwhelmingly rejected by the House of Commons.

After blaming Brexit and other European misfortunes on "nationalism" and "anger-mongers, backed by fake news," Macron shifted the alarmist tone to pro-EU praise and feel-good platitudes, calling for "a European renaissance." (RT)

**(13) Germany Wants...**

head of the Russian State Duma's Defense Committee said that China, India and other nations possessing intermediate-range weapons should join a framework agreement regulating their possession, development and use. However, he said that claiming a Chinese threat to Russia would need "solid evidence."

Vladimir Dzhbarov, deputy head of the Senate International Relations Committee, was even more skeptical, dismissing the German minister's statement as "no more than words." "The Chinese missiles do not pose any threat to Russia," Dzhbarov said. The German minister's sudden concern about Russian security might come as a surprise. However, her motives become much clearer in the context of strained relations between Moscow and the West. (RT)

**(14) Justin Trudeau's...**

members of his government attempted to pressure her into not taking action against a major Canadian engineering company in a case involving allegations of corruption in Libya.

She said the administration's senior officials issued "veiled threats" against her in an effort to convince her not to file criminal charges against SNC-Lavalin, the Canadian company that employs about 9,000 people in Canada or 52,000 across the world, according to CBC.

Wilson-Raybould praised Philpott for resigning, saying: "For almost 4 years our country has witnessed your constant & unassailable commitment to always doing what is right & best for Canadians."

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The company is accused of bribing officials in Libya with millions of dollars between 2001 and 2011 to secure government contracts in the African nation. If found guilty, the company would be banned from receiving any federal government business for a decade. (Fox News)

**(15) Food of the Future...**

a chicken leg, or a Danish pastry so that it looks as identical [to the normal food] as possible. But the consistency will be like a loose panna cotta," Richard Asplund, from the food production company, told Hallandsposten.

3D-printed food has emerged as a major technological development in recent years and is expected to be worth a whopping 535\$ million by the year 2023.

What was once reserved for intricate sugary pastry decorations has ballooned in possibilities to encompass automated cooking, mass manufacturing and personalized meals. (RT)

**(16) EU's Tusk...**

forces hostile to Europe to decide on key priorities of the EU and the leadership of European institutions." Political parties seen as hostile to the EU have surged across the bloc, particularly since the 2016-2015 migration crisis that saw hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers arrive. Nationalists now rule in Tusk's native Poland and in Hungary, and share power in coalitions in Italy and Austria. Polls anticipate parties with such views surging in the May vote, when EU citizens elect lawmakers to sit in the European Parliament.

Tusk offered praise for some reforms proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron, who has sought greater European cooperation in what he calls a "Renaissance of Europe".

Macron's proposals include a new European agency that would be charged with protecting democracy, to

safeguard the bloc from cyber attacks and propaganda that undermine its elections and from foreign funding of political parties. Other proposals include bloc-wide agencies to deal with borders, security and asylum, and issues such as food safety. (Reuters)

**(17) Belarus Leader...**

rapprochement with the West "sometimes cause tantrums" in Russia which, he said, fears that Belarus "has turned its head somewhere else."

"We're in a situation where we have to turn our head around all the time... because we are situated in the middle of Europe," he said.

Belarus' ties with the European Union and NATO have been strained for years over a clampdown on civil rights and persecution of dissenters in the country.

As well as Russia and Ukraine, Belarus has borders with Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, which are all NATO members.

Separately, Belarus on Tuesday removed a cap on the number of U.S. diplomats in the country, which had been in place since 2008 as retaliation for U.S. sanctions against Belarusian authorities over a crackdown on opposition protests. (AP)

**(18) Outcry over...**

Pereira said the proposal was for a partnership of at least five years to raise three million euros a year.

He said talks with Saudi officials were suggested by people close to regional Lombardy region president Attilio Fontana, a member of Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini's nationalist League party.

In December, at the start of the new La Scala season, Italian Culture Minister Alberto Bonisoli met with his Saudi counterpart, Prince Badr bin Abdullah.

The Saudi minister might join the prestigious opera house's board, according to widespread Italian media reports.

The talks came under fire from opposition leaders.

"The idea that the Saudis will come into La Scala is a slap in the face for Milan over human rights," said Antonio Panzeri, a European lawmaker from the main opposition Democratic Party.

"I understand the need to find funds, but we absolutely cannot allow one of the most prestigious symbols of Milan to collaborate with those who trample on rights and freedom every day in their own country." (AFP)

**(19) Pompeo Sees...**

The two sides gave different reasons for the abrupt end to the talks about denuclearization on the Korean peninsula.

Trump said on Thursday that North Korea wanted the sanctions lifted in their entirety, while North Korean foreign minister Ri Yong Ho said they had only demanded a partial easing in exchange for dismantling its main nuclear site at Yongbyon.

However, the two sides left room for further discussions, with Trump highlighting the economic benefits for North Korea if it gave up its nuclear weapons.

North Korean state media, which in the past has used fiery rhetoric against Trump and blamed the United States for previous failed negotiations, reported on Tuesday that Kim returned home after a "successful" trip to Vietnam.

It made no mention of the summit breakdown or any disagreement between the two leaders, in line with its positive coverage last week.

Pompeo said during the Iowa visit that his team has been trying to convince Kim that the security of his country and government would not be compromised if it abandoned its nuclear weapons program. (Reuters)

**(20) Burundi Forces...**

But the rights council voted both to renew the investigation and to send the experts, infuriating the Bujumbura government. (Reuters)