

**(1) Yamamoto...**

of peace further. Yesterday a presidential decree was issued for the holding of a Peace Consultative Jirga, a traditional assembly of leaders, in late April. We hope, that this will help create a national consensus on peace through an inclusive process."

He also emphasized on joint and concentrated efforts on international community and regional players in support of Afghan-led and owned peace process and added that "The United Nations welcomes various efforts and initiatives undertaken by countries concerned, but stress the need for all those constructive efforts to be in concert and aligned in support of Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace efforts as agreed in Geneva last November. In this context, we understand that the Government of Afghanistan has proposed to hold the third meeting of the Kabul Process on Peace."

The Secretary General's Special Representative also emphasized that the legitimate and profound concerns of Afghan citizens should be considered in peace process, including concerns existing regarding the compromises on the gains made over the past 18 years,

"The United Nations shares many of these concerns, particularly regarding the fate of women's rights, freedom of expression including media rights, and space for civil society to function effectively, all of which must be protected under a peace agreement," he added.

In regards to presidential elections, Yamamoto said "The holding of the presidential election on schedule, however, will be very challenging. The widespread irregularities during last October's parliamentary elections undermined confidence in the electoral management bodies."

"With less than five months remaining until electionday, the technical and political challenges are daunting," he said, adding that "The new commissioners will need to take urgent decisions on the implementation of the amended Election Law which provides for reforms, including the use of biometric technology and a change in the electoral system."

In other parts of his speech, Yamamoto expressed concerns regarding growing civilian casualties and drugs production, adding that "This year is likely to bring both numerous challenges and unprecedented opportunities. Addressing the challenges, and taking advantage of the opportunities, will require the concerted efforts of the international community, with Afghanistan in the lead." (KP)

**(2) US, India Say...**

attack to justice and the urgency of Pakistan taking meaningful action against terrorist groups operating on its soil," the statement said. "They noted the strength of our partnership and discussed ways to further enhance cooperation, including on counterterrorism."

They also discussed the two countries' complementary visions for the Indo-Pacific, US-India defense cooperation, and the growing US-India economic partnership, including joint efforts to expand bilateral trade in a balanced and reciprocal manner, the statement said.

This comes as tensions between India and Pakistan escalated after Indian fighter jets bombed terror group Jaish-e-Mohammed's biggest training camp near Balakot deep inside Pakistan on February 26.

The Indian strike on the JeM camp was carried out 12 days after the terror outfit claimed responsibility for the Pulwama terror attack on a CRPF convoy in Kashmir, killing 40 soldiers. (Tolo news)

**(3) AGO Slaps Travel...**

Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC).

According to the AGO, investigations are underway on a regular basis against former IEC chief Abdul Badi Sayyad, former IEC commissioners Wasima Badghisi, Maazullah Dawlati, Hafizullah Hashemi, Maliha Hassan, Rafiullah Bedar, and Abdul Qader Qureshi.

Rasuli said investigations are also underway against the former head of the IECC, Abdul Aziz Ariaee, and mem-

bers of the IECC Humaira Haqmal, Ali Reza Rouhani, Ghulam Dastagir Hedayat, Abdul Baseer Fayez.

The former election commissioners were removed after President Ghani last month approved new amendments in the election law based on which new commissioners were appointed for the two electoral bodies. So far, the Independent Election Commission has announced the final results of parliamentary elections for 18 provinces and the results for another 15 provinces are yet to be announced. The parliamentary elections faced allegations of fraud and irregularities by a number of candidates, the people and electoral monitoring organizations.

This comes as former election commissioners have been accused of corruption and their cases have been handed to the Attorney General's Office and were banned from traveling outside the country. (Tolo news)

**(4) Portugal to Take...**

with a right to asylum.

In a statement posted in his official Facebook page, Vitsas announced that the first 100 refugees to be transferred in the "pilot phase" will be mainly families and other vulnerable persons "granted and/or seeking international protection who are currently in camps."

The initial agreement for the resettlement of 1000 refugees to Portugal concluded in October between Greek officials and Portuguese interior minister Eduardo Cabrita.

The draft agreement was then referred to European Commission for arranging funds for the program which subsequently was approved, according to Vitsas.

According to agreement, the asylum seekers would be interviewed by Portuguese authorities after submitting their application for asylum in Greece. (KP)

**(5) Chinese Envoy Asks...**

The international community should honor its commitment by sustaining its firm support to Afghanistan as durable peace and development in the country will not only benefit the Afghan people, but also regional security, stability, peace, and prosperity, he said.

Wu also asked for efforts to facilitate the holding of the presidential election in Afghanistan.

"We hope the new Independent Election Commission will scale up its preparations for the presidential election. We also hope that UNAMA will provide technical support to the commission," said Wu, referring to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. All parties in Afghanistan should enhance unity and take national stability as their shared responsibility and address their differences through dialogue, said the Chinese envoy.

The top UN envoy for Afghanistan, Tadamichi Yamamoto, warned on Monday that the holding of the presidential election on schedule will be "very challenging."

The widespread reports of irregularities during parliamentary elections in October 2018 undermined confidence in the electoral management bodies. As a result, the country's Election Law had to be amended and the Independent Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission had to be reshuffled, he told the Security Council ahead of Wu's statement. "With less than five months remaining until election day, the technical and political challenges are daunting," said Yamamoto, the UN secretary-general's special representative and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

Echoing Yamamoto's concerns over Afghanistan's security and humanitarian situations in his briefing to the Security Council, Wu asked for efforts to improve the security situation in Afghanistan and lift people's livelihood.

2018 saw a record high of civilian casualties in Afghanistan and drug production remained high, said Wu. The international community should help the Afghan national security force with its capacity building, help the country develop alternative agriculture and fight terrorists, he said.

He also asked the international community to effectively help improve the

livelihood of the Afghan people.

The past five years have seen a drastic increase in the number of people living in poverty in the country. The international community should continue to help the Afghan government and people eliminate poverty and improve people's lives by honoring its commitment to assistance, helping the country unlock its development potential, and integrating into regional economic cooperation, he said.

China is ready to work with the international community to contribute to the security, stability, development, and prosperity in Afghanistan, said Wu. (Xinhua)

**(6) Floods Affect...**

have been verified as requiring humanitarian assistance as a result of the flooding that began on 2 March 12, 2019 in four districts of Helmand province, including Nahr-e-Saraj, Nawa-e-Barakzai, Lashkragah and Nad Ali.

The report adds that a further 1,320 families were affected by flash floods in Khoshkaba area in Nahr-e-Saraj district.

In western Farah province, the report says, 3,205 households have been identified as affected by the floods, and requiring humanitarian assistance.

Of these households, the report says, 1,601 homes have been destroyed and 1,604 have been partially damaged.

According to inter-agency assessment teams, 85 percent of the flood-affected areas were assessed as of 10 March.

On 9 March, heavy rain struck Muqur district, of western Badghis province, resulting in flash floods that damaged infrastructure and agricultural land in three villages, Sangi Zard, Cheshma Duzdak and Kalanzai.

Wheat, cumin, pea and pistachio crops have been destroyed by the flood waters, and irrigation canals have been damaged, the report says.

According to the report, water systems including wells, water catchments and water reservoirs have been destroyed. It has been reported that in some affected areas, flood waters are 50cm high, and there is the risk that poorly constructed homes may collapse. (Tolo news)

**(7) Herat- Delhi...**

in Herat," said Saad Khatibi, the head of the Herat Chamber of Commerce and Industries.

Government statistics show that Afghanistan has so far sent 5,400 tons of goods, worth at least \$100 million, to different countries through air corridors and in 425 flights. (Tolo news)

**(8) FIFA Extends Ban...**

In December, former Afghan player Khalida Popal, told CNN the abuse had taken place during a seven-day training camp in Jordan at the end of January last year. Popal, who was forced to flee Afghanistan and now lives in Denmark, was present at the Jordan training camp. She says that at least five women were abused in their rooms by two male officials, who had been sent by the AFF to accompany the players.

Apart from Popal, other players have only spoken anonymously, fearing for their safety and that of their families.

In a statement released at the time of the allegations, the AFF said it "vigorously rejects" the allegations and said it had a "zero tolerance approach" to abuse. It said the allegations were being driven by "former employees."

In December, a FIFA source said the world governing body had called in help from the United Nations.

"The safety of those involved was the most important aspect in all of this," the FIFA source told CNN. (CNN)

**(9) Helmand...**

among deadliest countries for journalists.

The Afghan government has always committed to supporting journalists and freedom of the press. However, reports show that journalists are still facing different kinds of threats.

Government's statistics show that there are 96 TV channels, 65 radio stations and 911 print media in Kabul, as well as 107 TV channels, 284 radio stations, and 416 print media in other provinces. He says there are 1,879 active media outlets in Afghanistan which are called as one of the main

achievements of the country in the past 18 years. (Tolo news)

**(10) Khalid Declares...**

Yaftali said that the Afghan forces are supporting President Ghani's plan for the peace process and that ready to defend the past years' achievements and values.

He emphasized the past decades' bad experience should not be repeated in the country. (ATN)

**(11) Broadcast Costs...**

Afghanistan have pre-World Cup warm-up ODIs scheduled against Scotland, Ireland, Pakistan and England before they begin their campaign against Australia in Bristol on June 1. Zimbabwe did not qualify for this year's World Cup. (Reuters)

**(12) 3 Key Taliban...**

of the group in Baghlan province, Ramiz son of Mohiuddin who had infiltrated in police ranks and was working as a recruitment officer in Baghlan police commandment, and Hedyatul-ah son of Syed Rahim who was working as a driver and was involved in destructive activities, collection of information regarding the military and security institutions.

The anti-government armed militant groups including Taliban have not commented regarding the report so far. (KP)

**(13) Boeing Pledges...**

The US Federal Aviation Authority (FAA), however, has taken a more cautious approach, arguing that the similarities between the Indonesian and the Ethiopian crashes, to which many experts and regulators have been pointing, have yet to be proven or otherwise by the results of an investigation still in its early stages.

While reaffirming 737 MAX's airworthiness, the FAA demanded Boeing make mandatory improvements to its flight control software, which is alleged to have malfunctioned and become the ultimate cause of the Lion Air Flight 610 crash on October, 29. According to a preliminary report into that tragedy, pilots failed to tackle the automatic anti-stall system due to it receiving erroneous readings from a sensor that measures the angle between the wing and the oncoming air flow, which forced the plane into a nosedive.

It was reported back in November that Boeing was ready to unveil a software fix within six to eight weeks. (RT)

**(14) 'Islamophobia Expert...**

Swedish-Norwegian national Michael Skramos was captured in Baghous by Kurdish forces last week, according to the Swedish newspaper Expressen. The 33-year-old's route to radicalization began when he converted to Islam in 2005, becoming a preacher and self-described "Islamophobia expert" at a Gothenburg mosque shortly afterwards.

Skramos packed up his wife and two children, changed his name to Abo Ibrahim Al Swedi, and headed to Syria in 2014 to join IS. There he filmed a propaganda video encouraging his fellow Swedes to follow his lead.

"The door to jihad is standing there waiting for you," he said in the 2015 video. "It's the fastest way to Jannah (paradise)."

As things turned out, there was a Swede among Skramos' captors too. Swedish soldier Jesper Soder, fighting with the Kurdish YPG, told Expressen that Skramos was arrested along with around 50 other militants, including "many Europeans." (RT)

**(15) From Scaremongering...**

their German counterparts, which operate under stricter regulations in relation to spying, especially domestically.

Washington considers Chinese companies to be a potential threat, presuming that any equipment and software provided by them could potentially be used by Beijing to spy on other nations. Huawei and ZTE already face restrictions on the American domestic market, while US officials are leaning on other nations to exclude China from the lucrative upgrade of wireless infrastructure to 5G standard.

Commenting on the report, Chinese

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang said Washington should accept the fact that other countries may take strategic decisions independently, as is their right. Beijing sees US attacks on Chinese telecom giants as baseless scaremongering and a not-so-subtle way of undermining a competitor through political leverage and legal attacks.

Berlin said that the US failed to provide any evidence that Chinese products would pose a security threat, adding it was willing to use them as long as they comply with Germany's recently reviewed cybersecurity standards.

American officials say a backdoor may be sneaked through with a software upgrade and doubt the Germans would be able to detect it, considering the complexity and sheer volume of the code. "The Americans will assume that everything we share with Germany will end up with the Chinese," a senior US State Department official said, describing the American position to the WSJ. (RT)

**(16) NYT Faces Indian...**

rallying behind Prime Minister Narendra Modi as elections approach."

Not only did it spell the name of Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrong. The "explosion" in question was the February suicide bombing, which killed 40 Indian security troops in the region of Kashmir, which is contested by India and Pakistan. The description of the attack, which was claimed by the Pakistan-based terrorist group Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), naturally landed badly with quite a few Indians.

Others implied that the slip-up exposed racism, suggesting that only deaths of white people mattered to Americans in the grand scheme of things. (RT)

**(17) 'Pressured' Chemical...**

Moscow's Permanent Representative to OPCW, Alexander Shulgin, told RT after the event that the chemical arms watchdog's findings were "full of gaps, discrepancies and inconsistencies."

"We noted that the report by the FFM disregarded the briefing organized [at the OPCW headquarters] in [late April] 2018 with the unwilling witnesses or even 'unwilling comedians' that took part in the video performed by the White Helmets," Shulgin said.

More than a dozen people testified back then, saying that there was no chemical attack in Douma and that they'd been forced to star in the fake footage, devised by the members of the White Helmets, a Western-backed aid group with apparent links to terrorists.

"There's a small footnote in the FFM's report, saying that [the statements by] alleged witnesses... were dealt with like information from open sources. Somehow this very important information was dismissed."

Shulgin recalled that the Syrian authorities have, on numerous occasions, reported that stockpiles of chemical weapons had been discovered in areas liberated from terrorists and the OPCW was well aware of that.

"In Douma, there was also a warehouse with chlorine barrels and the [FFM] experts didn't accept to inspect it, alleging that it was too dangerous to manipulate these items."

The investigation failed to uncover what really happened in Douma despite the fact that "from the very beginning the Syrians were very open. The [OPCW] Technical Secretariat experts were given access to all places they needed to examine. Moreover, the Russian military police did their best to secure the work of the Technical Secretariat experts," the Russian envoy pointed out. (RT)

**(18) Brexit Hangs...**

least while the fundamental circumstances remained the same, no internationally lawful means of exiting the Protocol's arrangements, save by agreement," Cox said.

May announced three documents - a joint instrument, a joint statement and a unilateral declaration - which she said were aimed at addressing the Irish backstop, the most contentious part of the divorce deal she agreed with the EU in November. (Reuters)