

**(1) Ghani Invites...**

campaign against crime and activities of terrorist networks. They also discussed ways to stop these activities from happening. Last month, Ghani made a peace offer to the Taliban and also motioned for official talks with Pakistan.

However, the Taliban has not yet responded to the offer. (Tolo news)

**(2) MPs Warn of ...**

Abdul Rauf Ibrahim also raised concern over next (solar) year's fighting season, which is fast approaching.

"Predictions show that next year will be a deadly year and that it is good that commissions share their views on the country's situation with the administrative board," said Ibrahim.

"The best young forces have been martyred. Only in four days 22 bodies have been handed to their families in Bamiyan," MP Fakoori Behishti said.

A number of MPs meanwhile said the increase in Taliban attacks was a negative message from the group against government's recent peace offer.

They said disagreements between government leaders is another reason behind the deteriorating security situation.

"Morale has been lost to the extent that many (people) have turned to the Taliban and want to somehow get on board with them," MP Abdul Rahim said.

"Inter-government tension is increasing people's worries day by day," MP Keramuddin Reza Zada said.

Defense and interior ministries however said in the coming year they will eliminate the insurgent groups around the country.

According to the ministries, they have plans in place for the upcoming fighting season and that insurgents will be forced to come to the peace talks tables or be killed.

"We are sure that in the next year (insurgents) have to sit in peace talks with government, or have to die or flee," defense ministry's deputy spokesman Mohammad Radmanesh said.

"We also have plans for those areas that are far away from the (provincial) capitals and for insurgents who carry out explosions," interior ministry's deputy spokesman Nusrat Rahimi said.

Reports indicate that in the last two weeks around 150 security force members have been killed across the country.

On a separate matter, a number of MPs said in parliament on Saturday that in the last election for parliament's administrative board, some MPs handed out money in exchange for votes.

They said there had been electoral fraud and that the results should be discredited.

"The election that we had is a stigma in the Afghanistan parliament history," MP Gul Pacha Majidi said.

The administrative board however rejected the claims of fraud in the election and said the allegations were conspiracies to defame parliament.

"It is a shame to take bribes and we never do it. We will eat poison, but will not take bribes," Allah Gul Mujahid, an MP said.

On Saturday, most seats in parliament were empty and only around 40 MPs attended the session.

Some of those present sharply criticized the absence of their fellow members and said many MPs only sit in parliament for an election. (Tolo news)

**(3) Central Bank...**

Officials at the bank told TOLO news that after Afghanistan was removed from the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) gray

list last year, Afghan banks have been able to work to expanding their businesses and to work with foreign banks.

Meanwhile, the Afghan Banking Association says the Central Bank must also streamline the trading process by standardizing its systems and by digitalizing their monetary transaction process.

Seven months ago, Afghanistan was removed from the FATF's gray list.

However, Afghanistan needs to ensure that no black money, or money earned through illegal activities can be processed through their banks. Banks can also not deal with funds to finance insurgent groups in the country.

"It's not easy to get off of the gray list, therefore, we need to work to improve the situation and we have programs in this section," said Wahidullah Nawsher, first deputy of the CBA chairman.

But concerns have been raised inside the country that the open borders of Afghanistan with neighboring countries, especially with Pakistan, a country accused of supporting terrorist activities, the usage of Pakistani rupees in the country, and the absence of official financial services could pose as problems.

"To work out the monetary system, work needs to be done to ensure digitalized identification of people because, for example, many bank customers have many ID cards, each with a different name," said Najibullah Amiri, the Banking Association's CEO.

Union officials said that by improving and regulating the financial services sector, banks will be able to grow and global confidence in Afghanistan's banking system will develop.

Countries on the FATF's gray list struggle under strict limitations in terms of financial dealings.

In March last year the Central Bank of Afghanistan said it had met all the requirements of FATF and after a rigorous assessment, Afghanistan was removed from the list. (Tolo news)

**(4) Horse-Trading...**

and election of the heads of commissions.

Gul Pacha Majidi, a lawmaker from southeastern Paktia province, termed the recent internal polls as 'shameful' and an insult to the house. He formally asked the speaker to revoke the results.

He warned of moving the Attorney General Office if the speaker did not act on his request. Another member of the house claimed over 3\$ million had been distributed by the candidates for first, second deputy speakers and secretary positions.

Lawmaker Ramazan Bashardot criticized continued absence of some lawmakers and added: "I don't know why more than 40 lawmakers are not present in the house by 2:55pm."

Second deputy speaker Amir Khan Yar said those alleging horse-trading should present evidence. (Pajhwok)

**(5) Pence, Abbasi...**

Yoho, chairman of the House Committee on Asia and the Pacific, and its ranking Democrat Congressman Brad Sherman.

"Like Pence, the US lawmakers also focused on the current situation in Afghanistan but they expressed their concern about China's growing influence in Pakistan," the newspaper said.

The prime minister reiterated Pakistan's "sincere commitment" to efforts for peace in Afghanistan and also underlined the sacrifices his country has rendered in the war on terrorism.

"The prime minister assured the US leader that no other state wants peace in Afghanistan more than Pakistan does, as it will be a direct beneficiary of this

peace," one source told the daily. (Pajhwok)

**(6) Pakistan Has ...**

are still seeking actions from Pakistan that we have not seen. We are continuing to look for real actions and not word on the Taliban and the Haqqani sanctuaries," the official said.

While demanding cooperative action against terrorist, the US was prepared to take necessary steps to protect its personal in Afghanistan, the official said, indicating the time was running out for Pakistan to act.

The official, however, did not give a timeline. However, he did say it was bounded by the time limit that kicked in the Congress on a number of financial and security assistance to Pakistan.

About the series of terrorist attacks in Kabul coming from across the Durand Line, the official said there should be a sense of urgency on the part of Pakistan to take action.

"It's Pakistan choice in which direction it wants to take the future of the relationship," he said, adding the US was still engaging Pakistani leaders and wanted address some of Islamabad's concerns.

President Donald Trump was constantly monitoring progress on his South Asia policy, the official noted, alleging Pakistan was taking bare minimum action against terrorist groups.

"President has made it clear that he is not satisfied with the action taken by Pakistan. We have communicated clear to Pakistan to what we mean by decisive action," the official said.

Stressing the elimination of terrorist safe havens from Pakistan, the official claimed Islamabad wanted to be responsive to the US request. The US continued to send specific requests for actions against terrorist groups, the official added.

On deadline questions, the official said the US was in discussion with Pakistan. "We do not talk in terms of deadlines," the official said.

Pakistan understood the way the America appropriations were set up and there were deadlines with regard to assistance. These Congressional deadlines will sometime kick in.

"We need to sustain the pressure. Any sense that the pressure is being relieved, we definitely would not see the objective that we want to see...It's good for Pakistan to cooperate with the US on Afghanistan," the official said.

"We expected it would take some time for Pakistan to break the relationship between intelligence services and the militants. So far, we have seen them taking bare minimum steps that we are requesting," the official pointed out.

Praising Ashraf Ghani for his offer of direct talks with the Taliban, the official said it was up to the militant movement to grab the opportunity.

"I think this is most important gesture or opening made to the Taliban by the Afghan government, in several years ago and we're still waiting to see what the responses from the Taliban," the official said. (Pajhwok)

**(7) Bamyan...**

he explained. Mohammad Ali, a cave-dweller, said: "Eid is the day on which my children relish rich food. Nawroz is that day for me." Children of cave-dwellers do not make preparations for the new year and wear old clothes during Eid and Nawroz.

The cave-dwellers say people in sound economic condition could celebrate Nawroz in a befitting manner. They wear new clothes, eat good food and sweets and spend Nawroz days with their

families.

Ahmad Hussain Ahmadpur, acting director of information and culture, said traditional festivities, including buzkashi and other functions, would mark Nawroz celebrations.

Residents joyously ring in the new year, with a variety of sports events and cultural programmes in Bamyan City and Yakawlang district.

He said the Department of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation would organise a three-day Nawroz celebration. He hoped people would take part in the events. (Pajhwok)

**(8) Maimana-Mazar...**

The Taliban could not be reached for comment despite multiple attempts.

At least a 50 kilometers portion of the Maimana-Mazar highway had been under Taliban control over the past one year.

The rebels had established check post on the highway, making it impossible for government or military vehicles to travel. (Pajhwok)

**(9) Car Bomb...**

Osman, who was nearby when the explosion shattered nearby buildings and who said he had seen four or five bodies.

Police officials said the exact cause of the explosion was being investigated.

While the latest blast was relatively minor compared with others that have killed scores of people recently, the constant stream of attacks in Kabul has undermined confidence in the Western-backed government of President Ashraf Ghani.

Earlier this week, General John Nicholson, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, said security in Kabul would be "the main effort" for international powers helping Afghan defence and security forces. (Reuters)

**(10) Astana to Host...**

educational program, about 1,000 Afghan citizens will study in Kazakh universities between 2010 and 2021," the ambassador added. (Pajhwok)

**(11) Ghazni Hostages ....**

tribal elders, said Mohammad Arif Noori, the governor's spokesman.

He said it was not known why the Taliban released the captives from Nekhtai area, but the Shirabad residents had been released through tribal elders' mediation.

A Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the fighters had seized Nekhtai residents a few months back after they defied a Taliban ruling.

"No exchange has taken place, we released the captives as per demand of Nekhtai people because they promised to resolve the issue with Shirabad people."

Over the past many years, the residents of Nekhtai and Shirabad areas have been locked in a dispute over irrigation water and the tension sometimes leads to bloody incidents. (Pajhwok)

**(12) Pakistani...**

water for other uses from the river and other places," said Ali Jan, a resident of Ghoraki district in Nangarhar.

"If the situation prevails and if the two countries (Afghanistan and Pakistan) do not help us, then they should let us take care of ourselves and pick up our own arms and ensure our own security," said Afsar Khan, a resident of Ghoraki village.

Meanwhile, security force members stationed in the mountainous area are faced with many challenges when it comes to supplies.

A Border Police Force member, Dadgul, says they have to carry all their supplies on foot or with the help of donkeys or horses as

there are no usable roads to their outpost.

"We have to fetch our supplies by using animals because vehicles cannot get through on this road. It takes three hours to climb the mountain (to the base) and it takes two hours to come back," Dadgul said.

"Shamshad Mountain is a strategic place. This place was not operational last year when our forces fought Pakistanis (forces). After that, a delegation from the Ministry of Defense came and assessed the area and it was decided to make a landing pad for helicopters in order to supply heavy arms, but nothing was done," said Khalilurrahman Shinwari, a tribal elder.

A local official in Nangarhar said construction of the road to the two outposts falls under the ministry of defense.

"Two outposts which are far from the paved road are not in our plans. The Ministry of Defense, Border Forces or any other relevant institution should work in this respect (to resolve the problem)," said Zabet Khan Mangal, head of Public Works Department of Nangarhar. (Tolo news)

### **Bali's Day of Silence Shuts Airport, Clears Beaches, Streets**

BALI, Indonesia — Indonesia's normally bustling Bali has shut down social media, closed the airport and shuttered all shops for a Day of Silence that marks New Year on the predominantly Hindu resort island.

"Nyepi" began at 6 a.m. Saturday, emptying streets and beaches for 24 hours except for special patrols to ensure silence is observed. This year, phone companies agreed for the first time to turn off the mobile internet on the island, home to more than 4 million people.

Aside from no Facebook, Instagram or instant messaging apps, television and radio broadcasts have ceased and Balinese are staying indoors, covering the windows and not even turning on lights, for the day of reflection that is the most sacred in Balinese Hinduism.

"Nyepi is the time for us to wash our hearts and minds of bad thoughts and deeds, plead with God to purify ourselves, human beings and the universe," said Kadek Chantini, a Bali tour guide.

Not everyone was happy with the decision to disrupt internet access, saying it was going too far and an inconvenience for tourists and non-Hindu residents of Bali, but others welcomed it.

"It will certainly provide a quieter atmosphere so we can focus and concentrate on perfecting our meditation and prayers," said Komang Suda, a resident of Denpasar, the Bali provincial capital. (AP)

### **China Wins First-Ever Winter Paralympic Medal with Gold in Wheelchair Curling**

PYEONGCHANG - China won its first-ever Winter Paralympic medal with gold in the wheelchair curling final of the 2018 PyeongChang Paralympic Winter Games on Saturday.

The Chinese team took an extra end to defeat world champion Norway 6-5 in the final, making history by winning gold as the country's first-ever Winter Paralympic medal.

China, which finished fourth at the Sochi Winter Paralympics four years ago, beat defending champion Canada in the semi-final Friday, after recording an outstanding win-loss figure of 9-2 in the round robin. (Xinhua)