

(1) President Shavkat...

of trade, transport and energy, programs in the fields of education, healthcare and other areas were considered. Views were exchanged on current issues of the regional and international agenda. President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani expressed sincere gratitude to the President of Uzbekistan for the efforts on practical implementation of the joint Uzbekistan - Afghanistan initiative on conduction of an international forum on Afghanistan in Tashkent, as well as emphasized readiness for deepening cooperation in areas of mutual interest. (Agencies)

(2) White House...

However, the Taliban has still not responded to the offer. Calls meanwhile for the group to join the peace process have been growing - from within Afghanistan and the international community.

On Sunday, Pierre Mayaudon, the European Union (EU) Head of Delegation to Afghanistan called on the Taliban to take advantage of the peace opportunity and enter into dialogue with the Afghan government.

His call came on the eve of the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan peace meeting in Tashkent.

The first such move by Tashkent since 1999, the two-day meeting will bring together regional leaders and representatives from the wider international community where they will discuss the current situation in Afghanistan and the broader fight against terrorism.

High-ranking officials are expected to attend the Tashkent meeting including UN General Secretary Antonio Guterres and the UN Special Envoy to Afghanistan Tadamichi Yamamoto, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, as well as the foreign ministers of China, Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, France, Turkey, India, Iran, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, uzdaily.com reported. (Tolo news)

(3) MoI Briefs...

According to Murad, from the total 7,355 polling stations, 1,122 centers are under medium threat and another 1,120 face more serious security threats - all of which need to be secured by the security institutions.

But two weeks ago the IEC said from the total number of 7,300 polling stations, 1,707 centers are under threat in 32 districts with the majority of the polling stations located in Helmand, Uruzgan, Kunduz, Badakhshan, Faryab, and Ghazni among other provinces.

"Packing of material is being done and these will be transferred to the provinces. Based on the procedure, our programs will start soon," said Abdul Badisayyad, chairman IEC.

Wasima Badghisi, IEC operational deputy chief said last week the election management body has taken all necessary steps to ensure elections are held as per scheduled. The original date was July 7 this year but this has been moved to October 21 (29 Meezan 1397).

According to Badghisi, the Afghan government so far has not provided solid assurances about delivering on its promises regarding security for the election. Based on the electoral calendar, candidates will be able to file their nomination papers on first of Jawza (22 May).

Bringing about reforms in the commission is one key responsibility of the IEC members. In line with this, Badghisi said that at least 14 provincial IEC heads have been in their positions for 14 years and will have to reapply for their positions and that other candidates can also apply.

The IEC is set to start the voter registration process on 14 April. The IEC has hired dozens of employees for this purpose in prov-

inces across Afghanistan.

"The number of districts where the transfer of materials is at risk has increased, we need to find alternative routes for them," added Murad.

"With the launching of the voter registration process we must retain the trust of the people. There are some people who want to misuse the elections, the employees must be vigilant about it," said Shahlah Haqqarast, acting chief of IEC secretariat.

"The commission will not remain silent if an employee violates the law, they will face legal action," said IEC administrative board chief Maazullah Dawlati. The IEC has estimated the budget for the elections to be between \$70 million USD and \$90 million USD and that the bulk of the money will be covered by the international community. (Tolo news)

(4) Germany Warns ...

the 209th Military Corps said support to Afghan forces, particularly in the north, was discussed during the meeting with German delegation

German troops would keep supporting Afghan people within the NATO mission until the fulfillment of peace and stability in the war-torn country, she promised. (Pajhwok)

(5) EU Asks...

will press the Taliban and their backers to join the peace process. "More pressure is expected to be mounted on the Taliban at this conference so that the group enters into dialogue. Afghan-owned peace process will be getting more support at the conference," HPC spokesman SayedEhsanTahiri said.

According to the EU envoy, at the summit, the EU will once again call on the Taliban to respond positively to the peace offer recently made by the Afghan government.

"No doubt about it, I think there are two or three aspects regarding the Tashkent conference which indeed takes place tomorrow and the day after. I think first it is an important development following Kabul II conference that took place here on 28 of February," said Mayaudon.

High-ranking officials are expected to attend the Tashkent meeting including UN General Secretary Antonio Guterres and the UN Special Envoy to Afghanistan Tadamichi Yamamoto, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, as well as the foreign ministers of China, Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, France, Turkey, India, Iran, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, uzdaily.com reported.

In a question about Taliban's Qatar office Mayaudon said: "This question comes time and again, I think it is important to have a channel for engagement, for discussion, this Qatar office has to prove that it is useful, that it is relevant as a channel for exchanging opinions, messages in relation with the crisis. If the Qatar office fulfills these objectives fine, if it doesn't, it is an issue." Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and his Afghan counterpart President Ashraf Ghani will open the international conference on Afghanistan.

"US holds the key for peace in Afghanistan, peace can be restored in Afghanistan if the US really want it, US must put pressure on Pakistan to press the Taliban to come to the negotiating table," said MP Shekiba Hashimi.

Meanwhile a member of Afghanistan's senate Safiullah Hashimi said: "Central Asian countries have a common pain from terrorism, they will honestly contribute in the peace process for Afghanistan at the conference." This comes on the heels of the recent Kabul Process meeting where Afghan President Ashraf Ghani laid out a detailed peace offer to the Taliban.

The conference will be summed up by a Tashkent Declaration,

that will reflect the main points of the discussion.

Uzbekistan hosted the first peace conference on Afghanistan in 1999. (Tolo news)

(6) Turkey Plans...

in Turkey and assured the commitment of Turkey to continue the Afghan police officers training program.

"Earlier this month, the two countries announced the formation of a joint trade commission," the statement read.

"Both sides talked regarding political, security and economic issues, Istanbul Process, bilateral relation, and Organization of Islamic Cooperation meeting," the statement read.

Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) spokesman Sayam Pasarlay meanwhile told Anadolu Agency bilateral trade between the two countries was witnessing a significant surge and a new consulate in Herat would further promote it.

Pasarlay said Afghanistan wants to end its reliance on Pakistan and diversify its international trade routes; in this regard, the country sees Turkey as a major player in a number of sectors, mainly construction, medicine, garments and home appliances, Anadolu Agency reported.

Afghanistan's diplomatic ties with Turkey go a long way back. The country recognized the Republic of Turkey in the 1920s. (Tolo news)

(7) US to Handover...

troops when needed, AP reported.

"The important thing that our forces need in the battlefields is to be provided with timely reinforcement and equipment and the Black Hawk is the only helicopter that can reach them quickly and provide them with better support," Lieutenant Masehullah Kakar, an Afghan Air Force pilot and UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter trainee said.

Currently AAF has 46 MI-17 Russian helicopters, which are mostly used to carry in reinforcements and to provide equipment to ground forces. Out of the 46, only 25 of them are active and the rest are not in service.

"These very same aircraft were the ones used by US forces. The importance of lift is critical to the battlefield, this is why the UH-60 Alpha is coming at such a decisive moment. We had a very good fighting season last year, we expect that the fight will continue this year and in the years to come and the UH-60 is going to be a critical element to move troops and bring casualties out of the field, a critical element in any fight," US Colonel Armando E. Fiterre, Commander 73th Air Expeditionary Advisory group said.

In addition to UH-60 Black Hawks, other helicopters, including surveillance helicopters such as IC-208, MD 530 and A-29 helicopters, have been provided to the AAF by the US.

"We are still providing as much assistance as possible, but our goal is to step back as the years progress so we are no longer doing the primary training and we are just in an advisory role; that way if an experienced instructor or an experienced evaluator pilot needs to rely on us or ask us questions we are still there alongside of them," US Major Denis Nita, AC-208 evaluator pilot said.

So far AAF has received 11 Black Hawks from the US army and is expected to take delivery of at least another 19 by the end of the year.

By 2023, AAF will take delivery of a total of 159 Black Hawks from the US. (Tolo news)

(8) All Baghlan...

lawmaker no one has asked me for building a school in Baghlan."

She said more budget was allocated to Baghlan compared to other provinces that would be implemented gradually but the local government should fight corruption seriously.

Khadija Yaqeen, women's affairs

director, emphasized on building schools for girls and appointing of women as teachers.

Provincial Education Department director, PaikanHaidari, said there were 566 schools active in Baghlan but 316 of them lacked buildings.

Mohammad Ayub, a teacher, said: "Since two years, Taliban have been noting absence of students and teachers and threaten teacher who stays absent for a long period."

He said the Taliban had also asked female teachers to come to schools on time and urged all residents to send their children to schools.

President Ashraf Ghani, ringing the new education year bell termed the new solar year as the year of education, stressing the need for more attention to the development of the vital sector. (Pajhwok)

(9) Lasting Peace...

Lasting peace in the neighbouring country was in Pakistan's best interests, he remarked.

Pakistan was trying its best to eliminate the menace of terrorism from its soil, he said, insisting there were no safe havens for terrorists on its soil. (Pajhwok)

(10) Tashkent Conference...

President Ashraf Ghani is co-chairing the conference being attended by foreign ministers from about 20 countries.

The Taliban, who have long been insisting on the pullout of American and other foreign troops in Afghanistan, will stay away from the meeting in Uzbekistan's capital. (Pajhwok)

(11) Multifillion Afghani...

the past two years.

He said two years ago the Ministry of Higher Education provided the university 11.5 million afghanis fund on the condition if utilized the campus would be given more next year.

He said the money was used in-time on needs and last year the university was provided 13.5 million afghanis more which was being used on reconstruction works on the campus.

Miakhel said the money was used on repairs of various buildings, painting and repair of water systems and other decorative works.

The chancellor said currently projects worth 10 million afghanis were in different stages of progress and the most important among them was the building of the economy faculty.

He said some teachers had been against the faculty building because they had constructed homes on the faculty land. He said after hectic efforts the teachers were forced to vacate the land.

He said ground on the economy faculty building would be formally broken in near future but now only initial works on the project were underway.

He said the ongoing projects included buildings for law and Sharia faculties, computer science faculty and economy faculty, a grand mosque, repair of the administration block, and building for the university hospital.

Babak Miakhel also mentioned future projects on the campus, saying if the ongoing schemes were completed in the given time, new projects would follow. He said future plans would include an organized canalization for the university and reconstruction of the university teaching hospital's building.

Second year student of journalism faculty, Dunya SangarNiazi, said the university had been in a bad condition when she first arrived on the campus.

Fourth year student of literature department, Navidullah, said he studied inside an old building for two years and the next two years were good in terms of environment due to a new building. (Pajhwok)

(12) ICC Congratulate...

for their efforts in recovering from a slow start to take this prestigious title and, both them and the West Indies for qualifying for the ICC Cricket World Cup 2019.

We look forward to welcoming them along with the eight top-ranked ODI teams in England and Wales for what I'm sure will be highly competitive event," said Mr Richardson, who attended Sunday's final in Harare.

"The ICC Cricket World Cup Qualifier has seen some highly competitive and enthralling cricket with all sides producing some fine performances in their quest to qualify for the World Cup.

(13) 14 Insurgents...

district eastern Nangarhar province on Sunday, the MoD said in another statement.

However, the MoD did not provide further details about the airstrikes. (Tolo news)

(14) Helmand Activists...

to come and sit and make peace," said protestor Mohammad Dawoud.

All victims killed in Friday's explosion had attended a wrestling match at the stadium. A suicide bomber detonated a car laden with explosives outside the stadium when people were leaving the area.

Officials in the province later confirmed that children had been among those killed and wounded. (Tolo news)

(15) 2 Years on...

education director Rohullah Muhaqqiq told a gathering marking the new academic year here that thousands of children remained deprived of education in Warduj district due to closure of 16 schools. He said the schools had been closed due to Taliban threats, lack of routes, bridges and culverts in the province.

"We have spoken many times to Taliban commanders through Islamic scholars and tribal elders of Baharak district which is near to Warduj district and we hope the doors of all education centers would reopen soon in the area". Meanwhile, Dr. Ahmad Bashir Samim, Badakhshan provincial council (PC) chairman, expressed his concern over the closure of a number of schools, seminaries and teacher training centers in the district.

He further added instability in Darwaza, Kirn, Manjan and Mirzai districts had rendered children unable to attend schools.

He urged the central government to pay attention to the issue in order to enable thousands of students to return to their studies. Badakhshan deputy education director Ismatullah Sharqi said currently 45, 0000 students with 40 percent them girls went to schools in Badakhshan. (Pajhwok)

Turkey's Erdogan: EU Membership Remains Strategic Goal

SOFIA, Bulgaria - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Monday that membership in the European Union remains a "strategic goal" for his country despite the uneasy relationship with the 28-member bloc.

Erdogan spoke ahead of a likely arduous summit with EU leaders in the Bulgarian Black Sea resort of Varna. Erdogan said he would urge the EU to remove "political and artificial" hurdles against Turkey's membership and revive stalled accession negotiations during talks with European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker and European Council president Donald Tusk.

"As Turkey, we have been continuing on our way with the goal of full membership (of the EU) despite all the mines that were planted on our path and barriers in front of us," he told reporters. "Today, membership in the European Union remains a strategic goal for us."

Tusk, speaking later Monday, called the summit an opportunity to re-establish dialogue. He spoke ahead of a working dinner of EU leaders and Erdogan.

Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, whose country holds the rotating EU presidency, said good relations with Turkey are important "to handle the migratory flow, which has created many problems for the Union in recent years." (AP)