

(1) US Diplomats...

important to resist temptation to ball-tampering with the Afghanistan peace process and its internal affairs."

In a separate tweet, Khalilzad hailed Pakistan for its constructive contribution to Afghan peace process, but not Imran Khan's recent comments about an interim set-up in Kabul to conduct elections.

"While Pakistan has made constructive contributions on the AfghanPeaceProcess, PM Khan's comments did not. The future of Afghanistan is for Afghans, and only Afghans, to decide. The role of the international community is to encourage Afghans to come together so they can do so." Earlier, Pakistan's Foreign Office said in a statement that Imran Khan's comments on Afghanistan had been reported out of context, leading to an unwarranted reaction from various quarters.

It clarified that Pakistan has no other interest in Afghanistan but to promote peace through an 'Afghan-owned' and 'Afghan-led' political process, a statement from the Foreign Office said. (Pajhwok)

(2) Afghan People...

should decide yourselves, Afghan people, Afghan political parties and prominent figures," said Mantyskiy.

Talking about the Afghan peace, Mantyskiy said Moscow is not worried about US and Taliban talks behind closed doors, but is worried why so far, an agreement has not been reached.

He said Russia wants peace in Afghanistan and that peace need an agreement to be reached.

"We do not have any concern regarding these talks. My concern is if, agreement should be reached in this matter. Because without any agreement, timetable, ceasefire, direct talks between different Afghan parties, it is impossible to have peace here in your country. Peace is very essential, not only for you, for your neighbors, for Russia also," Mantyskiy added.

The Russian envoy, meanwhile, criticized the Afghan government for not sending its delegations to Moscow format meeting on Afghanistan last year. He insisted that such meetings should be held to address Afghanistan's problems, but did not make clear when the next round of Moscow format meeting on Afghanistan will be held. Meanwhile, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) said any peace that comes by force is not acceptable to the commission, insisting that a lasting peace should be maintained in the country.

"A peace in which the human rights values and justice is stepped on, that is not peace, it is a political deal that will not take us to lasting peace," Sima Samar, AIHRC chairperson, said.

Mantyskiy's remarks about future Afghan government and a possible establishment of an interim government expressed after Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Monday said that an interim government possibly can end problems in Afghanistan.

His remarks, however, was sharply criticized by Afghan government officials and were labeled as obvious interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs. (Tolo news)

(3) Liu Jinsong Met...

United Nations to play an active role on Afghan affairs, supports UNAMA to extend its mandate. On March 15th, China voted in favor of the resolution on the technical extension of the mandate of UNAMA at the United Nations Security Council. The Permanent Mission of China to the UN has made an important explanatory statement in this regard, which should be taken seriously by all parties.

Ambassador Liu pointed out that China should not take any responsibility for such a technical extension UNAMA mandate for 6 months which is not ideal. However, it is all because of the stubborn position of one UNSC member. That member rejected the Security Council consensus reached over the years on the Afghanistan issue, attempting to impose its own stereotypes and policies on others while refusing to accept constructive views of other member states, which seriously undermined the atmosphere of consultations and resulted in the divergences that can not be resolved. The representative of that member also pointed finger to the Belt and Road Initiative in its explanatory statement. It is worth mentioning that it is the same country voted in favor of previous UNSC resolutions containing the Belt and Road Initiative as well as a Community of Shared Future for Mankind over the past three years. Its representatives attended the 1st Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation held in Beijing two years ago. They expressed the interests of their enterprises' participation in relevant projects. Why this country changed its policy overnight and went back on its own words? How could this country heap curses on the Belt and Road Initiative, which is obviously beneficial to Afghanistan, actively supported by all walks of life in Afghanistan, and enthusiastically participated by countries in the region? How could this

country shoulder off their responsibility while rejecting other countries' efforts to help Afghanistan's peace reconstruction? We are very much confused by such an approach which only hurts others without necessarily benefiting itself. We hope that the major countries will cooperate in Afghanistan. We hope all parties can respect Afghanistan's efforts to choose its own development path and promote connectivity as a sovereign country. We hope all parties will work together to support the UN and its relevant agencies and make their due contributions to peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

Ambassador Liu said that Afghanistan's active participation in the joint construction of the Belt and Road Initiative is not pushed by China, but for this initiative has benefited and will continue to benefit Afghanistan in six aspects, which can be summed up as six "promoting". First, promoting trade. In just 4 months Afghanistan has exported more than 15 million US dollar pine nuts to China through 64 cargo flights after launching the program "Charted cargo flight for Afghan pine nuts exporting to China" in November 2018. Although the global trade declined last year, China-Afghanistan goods trade volume maintained the 1.1 billion US dollars, and Afghan carpets, marble and saffron are all selling very well in China. Second, promoting Chinese investment in Afghanistan. Although the security situation in Afghanistan is not good, China still invested some projects with nearly US \$500 million accumulative investment in Afghanistan. Recently, a Chinese private company invested in Bamyan province to help the local people grow and sell saffron. Dozens of families benefited directly. Third, promoting education opportunities. Afghanistan is an important partner to China on the joint construction of Belt and Road Initiative. To this end, China provides more than 150 scholarships and about 1000 training opportunities to Afghan every year, which is very helpful to youth and professionals in Afghanistan. Fourth, promoting the sense of security of the Afghan people. China's economic and trade cooperation with Afghanistan and all kinds of donation to Afghanistan have increased employment, helped Afghanistan in poverty alleviation, and are conducive to eradicating the social soil of terrorism and extremism. The security cooperation between China and Afghanistan has also protected the people and struck the evils. Fifth, promoting Afghanistan's international visibility and cultural influence. For example, the Afghanistan's national treasure exhibition, which has been in China for more than a year, with more than 2 million Chinese visited, has a great influence. Sixth, promoting Afghanistan's international access and diplomatic options, which is crucial for Afghanistan and other landlocked countries.

Ambassador Liu concluded by saying that Afghanistan presently is facing a lot of big events, as well as many difficulties and uncertainties. The dawn of peace is approaching while the risks and challenges are also accumulating. Afghanistan should no longer be an arena of great powers rivalry, nor should bear conflicts and wars any more. China is ready to sincerely cooperate with the UN and its relevant agencies, and continue to make its due contribution to the peace reconciliation and reconstruction of Afghanistan while respecting the will and needs of the Afghan people.

Mr. Yamamoto appreciated Ambassador Liu for his introduction, and said that China has always been supporting the United Nations, especially the UNAMA, in playing an important role in Afghanistan. China has provided strong support and assistance for the smooth adoption of the draft of resolution for the technical extension of UNAMA mandate. Mr. Yamamoto was also satisfied with UNAMA's communication with the Chinese Permanent Mission to the United Nations and the Chinese Embassy in Afghanistan.

The two sides also exchanged views on issues related to Afghanistan peace and reconciliation and relevant multilateral mechanisms. (PR)

(4) Khalilzad Embarks...

Khalilzad's arrival in Islamabad on Thursday morning.

The US representative is expected to meet with Pakistani officials and discuss with them the Afghan peace during his four-day visit to that country.

The Pakistani media reported that Afghan President Ashraf Ghani telephoned Prime Minister Imran Khan to discuss the ongoing international efforts for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

Ghani "expressed his gratitude for Pakistan's sincere facilitation of these efforts" initiated by Khalilzad, a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office in Islamabad said.

It said Khan assured the Afghan president that Pakistan was making "sincere efforts for a negotiated settlement" of the Afghan conflict through an inclusive peace pro-

cess, "as part of shared responsibility". "Both leaders also agreed to remain engaged and create an environment for resolving all outstanding issues," the press release said. (Pajhwok)

(5) Rula Ghani...

distributing the money to the women, but she sharply rejected the claims and said there was no political motives behind the move insisting that she is not interested in political issues.

"Why do you burn the money from treasury? Don't you have shame? You do not know mercy, Allah count mercy important," Rula Ghani said.

Some members of Nangarhar provincial council, however, criticized Rula Ghani over spending the money for electoral campaigns. They said for supporting poor people, there are channels that can do it instead of distribution through Rula Ghani's office.

"If they give gift or provide aid to the people, there are departments that the money can be distributed through them. If they spend the people's money in electoral campaigns, then it is a big deal," Nasir Kamawal, member of Nangarhar provincial council said.

"If the money should be distributed, there are ways to do so. I think this is big a big deal to the people of Afghanistan," Suhrah Qaderi, another member of the council said.

Rula Ghani said following the financial clearance of last fiscal year, she encouraged the ministries of Finance and Public Health to distribute an amount of money from the government budget to women in need in Nangarhar.

"It was decided that the finance ministry along with the public health ministry start a program and give each poor woman Afs500, so that the money can facilitate their visit to health centers," she added.

Meanwhile, head of public health department of Nangarhar province Nasir Ahmad Durrani said they distributed Afs91 million to poor women in the province in collaboration with the ministries of Finance and Public Health.

"In total, it is over one billion Afghanis and Afs91 million has been allocated for Nangarhar," said Durrani.

An official of the Ministry of Finance in a telephonic call to TOLONews said the total amount distributed to women was one billion Afghanis and the ministry had a facilitative role in the process.

The Directorate of Public Health in Nangarhar says that distribution of the money was a decision made at the Council of Ministers, but Chief Executive's spokesman Mujib Rahman Rahimi said they do not have any information about the issue. Council of Ministers is chaired by Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. (Tolo news)

(6) Khalid Vows...

with our enemies. Khalid further said that he is committed to work for the professionalization of the country's military forces.

"The army cannot be divided based on ethnicity. Our objective is to strengthen and make the army more professional," Khalid vowed.

He also blamed politicians for broadcasting propaganda, saying that the army will maintain the security and stability in the country and it will keep the achievements of the last 17 years.

"Politicians are making propaganda about insecurities because of their own interest. I request them not to touch in our affairs," Khalid added.

These comments come as reports emerged that Taliban and the U.S. representatives have agreed on troop withdrawal plan from Afghanistan. (KP)

(7) US Announces...

in order to restore peace in strife-torn Afghanistan, US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad embarked on a seven-country, beginning visit March 25. (ANI)

(8) 20 Journalists...

18 journalists were injured and 14 received death threats.

He noted there were 12 cases of physical abuse, 10 cases of insulting, 64 cases of denial to access to information over the past 12 months.

According to Quraishi, 13 out of 20 murder cases of journalists had been claimed by Daesh (IS), five involved unknown armed men and two involved the Taliban. In addition, from 11 out of 18 incidents of injuries, Daesh was responsible for 11 and unknown armed men for the rest.

"These attacks demonstrate clear disregard for journalists' lives and undermine public's right to know and create an environment of self-censorship, especially in insecure southern and eastern provinces," the AFJC Executive Director added.

AFJC's findings show of 18 incidents of attack on journalists and media outlets, 13 were carried out by unknown armed men, four by the Taliban and two by Daes. The findings reveal government officials

mostly the National Directorate of Security (NDS), the main intelligence body, were involved in all 12 incidents of beatings and abuse of journalists during the last 12 months.

Problems and Challenges

In addition to the shrinking number of media outlets mainly due to financial challenges and terrorist attacks, the unknown status of the ongoing peace talks with the Taliban, who denied freedom of press during their five-year rule, remains a major concern for future status of nascent free Afghan media.

Meanwhile, non-existence of job security and health insurance were among serious problems Afghan journalists faced during last year.

Media workers are being employed without work and health insurances. Owners of media outlets sometimes interfere in professional activities of reporters, which is against the law and they also irresponsibly fire reporters whenever they want, the findings show

Despite quantitative growth of media organizations in recent years, journalists and media personnel in Afghanistan, specifically in Afghan-owned media, lack job security. Few media organizations can be found to have signed standardized contracts and paid suitable salary to its employees.

The AFJC findings indicate a number of media managers pressurized their journalists to work in a way that is against journalistic standards and is unprofessional. If the journalists resist against such biased demand of their managers, they would lose their jobs and in light of such severe rules, cannot seek job for a long time.

Most national media still lack medical insurance. While facing medical problems, some media employees do not even have money for their treatment.

Though, Afghanistan is ranked first in the world in terms of right to information by the Centre for Law and Democracy and Human Rights index 2018, limited access to information in particular in provinces remains a major challenge for Afghan journalists.

The article 50 of the Constitution states that the citizens of Afghanistan shall have the right of access to information from state departments in accordance with the provisions of the law. This right shall have no limit except when harming rights of others as well as public security.

According to article 34 of Constitution, freedom of expression shall be inviolable. Every Afghan shall have the right to express thoughts through speech, writing, illustrations as well as other means in accordance with provisions of the constitution. Every Afghan shall have the right, according to provisions of law, to print and publish on subjects without prior submission to state authorities. Directives related to the press, radio, and television as well as publications and other mass media shall be regulated by law.

Meanwhile, most media outlets in Afghanistan have been reliant on foreign aids, which were facing financial challenges during the last 12 months. Since withdrawal of most foreign troops in 2014 and then shortage of international assistance and advertisement due to intensifying war and shrinking of business opportunities, dozens of media outlets in provinces were closed or forced to limit their staff.

While culture of impunity continued in 1397 solar year (2018), most cases had not been investigated seriously. AFJC's findings show in more than 95% cases, the perpetrators remain at large and justice is not observed.

Achievements and Progress

The leaders of the National Unity Government have repeatedly announced the government's commitment to promoting and empowering press freedom and freedom of speech.

Part of the political wills, the joint government and media committee continued its regular monthly meetings during the last 12 months to review cases of violence, threat and harassment occurred against journalists on monthly basis. The committee - a body working to combat impunity - chaired by Second Vice President Sarwar Danish, reported that tens of incidents have been referred to the Attorney General Office, except in some cases - mostly are awaiting final court decision.

The launch of Media Support Fund by President Ashraf Ghani, an initiative aimed at helping bereaved families of journalists and reporters, was a bold move to support journalists.

The president pledged AFN five millions from his private account and AFN 10 million (About \$200,000) from government budget for the purpose, which was warmly welcomed by the media community.

The president also instructed the Minister of Finance to allocate a certain amount to the Fund annually based on available resources, which was a further step in this regard.

In October 2018, AFJC campaign efforts paid off and Afghanistan as member of United Nation Human Rights Council supported HRC resolution on the safety of

Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

Also, Afghan Cabinet endorsed the AFJC proposal-supported by the Journalists federation and joint government and media committee - on recognition of Hoot 27th (March 18) as National Day of Journalist and ordered the relevant government institutions to insert it into the national days calendar.

Expectations from Government and International Community

Media organizations call on the Afghan Government and international donors to continue supporting the Media Fund and journalists in order to prevent the collapse of independent free media in Afghanistan. The Afghan Government should end the impunity for crimes committed against journalists by creation of a special court and make sure that justice is served in all the incidents.

Additionally, the Government should amend the Afghan Media Law and the Access to Information Act as proposed by journalists. In addition to believing in freedom of press and freedom of expression, the Afghan institutions should be committed to promoting and empowering these important values.

The achievements of the Afghan media made over the last 18 years (after collapse of the Taliban regime) should be a priority in the peace talks with the Taliban. Peace will only be sustainable if it is built on full respect for human rights in particular freedom expression and freedom of media. International community is also expected to continue the flow of its aids to free and young Afghan media as much as needed. The international community should protect this important achievement against any harm. (Pajhwok)

(9) Kandahar Exports...

He termed fresh fruit exports to neighboring Pakistan as important and said if this way was closed, then there was no alternate route.

Hopeful about the Lapis Lazuli route, he said the route was beneficial for the Afghan exports and Kandahar fruits could reach Central Asian countries and even Turkey and EU.

According to him, Afghanistan's particularly Kandahar's fruits owned natural test and color and therefore they have high demand in global markets.

He said if exports were started through the Lapis Lazuli way, farmers would pay special attention to their production's quality. He also expressed concern over the lack of cold storages and electricity to preserve fruits for a long time.

He said if the government constructed some cold storages, farmers would keep their fruits for good market.

Fresh Fruit Traders Union head Haji Nana Agha told Pajhwok that every day from 35 to 40 vehicles carrying pomegranates entered Pakistan through the Spin Boldak district and then reached India.

He said this year traders did not face with any issues but previously Pakistan would sometimes shut the border crossings under different excuses.

Meanwhile, Haji Mohammad Zahir, who owns pomegranates garden in Arghandab district, expressed happiness over good production of pomegranates despite shortage of water this year. He urged the government to address the water shortage issue. Sayed Hafizullah Sayedi, the provincial agriculture department head, said this year 150,000 tons of pomegranates were harvested compared to last year's 125,000 tones.

He said in recent years pomegranate trees were cultivated on above 8,000 hectares of land by the Agriculture Department with people's cooperation.

Currently, over 10,000 farmers were engaged in pomegranate gardens in the province, he added.

He said last year his department provided 1200.5 acres of land for establishment of pomegranate gardens. (Pajhwok)

(10) Taliban Collect...

Tagab, Khwaja Sabzposh and parts of Pashtunkot districts.

He said approximately 30 million afghanis ended up in Taliban pockets during each period of bills collection in the mentioned areas. Sultan Mohammad Sanjar, chief of Andkoi district, said the Taliban would previously collect power bills in areas under their control in Andkoi, Qarghan and Qaramqol districts but they now threatened electricity workers to also give them bills in areas under government's control. He said power bills of more than 10,000 consumers in the three districts went to the Taliban pockets and the group has recently threatened to death the DABS head to let them collect all electricity bills or he would be killed.

Sanjar asked the government to find a solution before the situation could worsen and urged the Taliban not to damage welfare projects.

The DABS main office in Kabul said they could not comment immediately on the issue. The Taliban also did not respond to Pajhwok about the issue despite several attempts to contact them. (Pajhwok)