

(1) Possible Peace...

recent years and the suffering across this country, here in Balkh and across the north, that people would be skeptical about the Taliban's real intentions," Bass said. "So, a key piece of any settlement process is going to be the way in which any commitments that are reached in a negotiation, are verified and implemented. And I think it will be quite important for all of the citizens of Afghanistan, but importantly for your audience and citizens of Balkh and surrounding areas, to have confidence that there are measures in place, there are guarantors or impartial observers in place who can hold the parties to a settlement to account for the commitments they have made," Bass said.

Commenting on the Afghan peace talks, Bass said the US wants the Afghan government and politicians to form an inclusive negotiating team that includes delegates from all layers of the society and that they should represent Afghanistan in any peace talks with the Taliban.

"We want to help the current government and wider society form that inclusive team that can support and properly represent the entire society in any discussions with the Taliban about settling the conflict," Bass added.

He said that there is a need for collective support to Afghan forces as they are defending the country against any threat from the Taliban if the group chooses to fight like it did in the previous years.

Talking about recent tensions in Balkh between security forces and former Balkh governor Atta Mohammad Noor's supporters over the appointment of the new police chief, Bass said changes in a democratic system are made based on assessments of government and that these changes are required to be made peacefully. (Tolo news)

(2) UN Picks Afghan...

said in remarks to the committee last month.

"Afghanistan is ready to continue its effective role in the committee, and look forward to a productive year ahead of us," the Afghan mission to the UN posted on Twitter.

Raz was selected as Afghanistan's first female permanent representative to the UN in December 2018. (AA)

(3) After Drought...

or not, it is harmful to us," he said, referring to the double damage inflicted by drought and flood.

"I hope I can get good results this year."

Floods in March complicated the recovery. Heavy rains killed at least 63 people and destroyed or damaged more than 12,000 homes, affecting 119,600 people, according to the United Nations' Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Some 243,000 people remain displaced from last year's drought in the western provinces of Herat, Badghis and Ghor, according to OCHA. Many have moved to urban areas where they live in tents on public and private lands, creating tensions with landowners.

"If the harvest is OK, that will help communities come out of a terribly bleak period. If it's not OK, we'll need a massive injection of food quickly," said Toby Lanzer, the U.N.'s deputy special representative for Afghanistan.

The winter wheat harvested in June and July will need to help feed displaced people and some 10.6 million people who are struggling to find enough food where they live, Lanzer said.

Farming accounts for one-third of the country's economy, although only 12 percent of its land is arable. The wheat crop's outlook remains uncertain, said Agriculture Minister Nasir Ahmad Durrani, in an interview on March 20. If the temperature warms too rapidly, melt-

ing snow could create floods that wipe out ripe crops, he said.

It is also unclear how much wheat farmers were able to plant last autumn, said Rajendra Aryal, the representative in Afghanistan for the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Many farmers used wheat seed to make bread to survive, rather than save it for planting, Aryal said.

"The people were already poor," he said. "It will be very difficult if the harvest fails, so I don't even want to think that way."

The floods also damaged critical farm infrastructure, such as irrigation canals, reservoirs and wells.

The Afghan government is working to repair damaged infrastructure, especially in the provinces of Kandahar and Farah, Durrani said. Afghanistan produced 3.6 million tonnes of wheat last year, down 25 percent from the five-year average, according to the FAO.

The country dipped into its grain reserve last year for 190,000 tonnes of wheat, leaving just 50,000 tonnes left, Durrani said.

The expected shortfall between supply and demand this year will be made up through wheat imports from countries including Pakistan and Kazakhstan, he said. (Reuters)

(4) Afghan Ambassador...

outlets and picked up in Afghanistan, had been taken out of context. Kabul has demanded an explanation from Islamabad three times in just over a month for comments related to peace talks aimed at ending 17 years of war in Afghanistan. U.S. and Taliban officials have held several rounds of talks but the Taliban have refused to talk directly to the Afghan government, which they consider an illegitimate "puppet" regime.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's mandate officially expires in May and he faces a re-election battle. But the date for the vote has been postponed twice and is now set for Sept. 28.

Ghani has been shut out from the peace talks and is under pressure from rivals to step aside and allow a caretaker government to take over, a suggestion he has rejected. (Reuters)

(5) Talks Should...

civilian casualties in Taliban attacks and government forces airstrikes and operations.

"Khalilzad is a foreign envoy, his role is limited and he is talking to the Taliban regarding the pullout of foreign forces," he said. (Pajhwok)

(6) Militants' Attack in...

who have lately stepped up attacks in different parts of the country. But the provincial authorities are yet to comment on the incident.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the fighters overran the Khuda Dad police station and killed six policemen. A seventh one was captured, he claimed.

The rebels later ambushed reinforcements on the way to the police post, he said, adding 10 policemen were killed. The attackers also seized weapons and ammunition, Mujahid added. (Pajhwok)

(7) First Training for...

which merges the capabilities of Focus Humanitarian Assistance, the Aga Khan Planning and Building Services, and the Aga Khan Development Network's Disaster Risk Management Initiative, focuses on preparing for both sudden and slow-onset disasters.

AKAH works to ensure that poor people live in physical settings that are as safe as possible from the effects of natural disasters; that residents who do live in high-risk areas are able to cope with disasters in terms of preparedness and response; and that these settings provide access to social and financial services that lead to greater opportunity and a better quality of life. Initially, priority areas of AKAH will include Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan,

and India.

In Tajikistan, Focus Humanitarian Assistance (FOCUS), a part of the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat, engages with communities living in precarious mountain environments to increase their resilience to natural disasters and complex emergencies and to support them in utilizing an enabling habitat to enhance their health, education and economic development. (Trend)

(8) US Trying to...

Afghan politicians and Taliban. He suggested that the meeting should be held after the consultative Jirga on peace which is scheduled for April 29.

"There is possibility that those who were absent in Moscow meeting will be present in Doha meeting," said political analyst Nazar Mohammad Mutmaen.

Other sources said that former President Hamid Karzai will meet President Ghani next week to ask him to introduce a delegation from the Afghan government for Doha meeting.

"Qatar meeting will be held in an appropriate time. We hope that delegates from the Afghan government will attend the meeting," said Ahmadullah Alizai, a political commentator from Kabul.

This comes as US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad has started another multi-nation trip on Afghan peace.

In his visit to Kabul, the US Department of State said in a statement, Khalilzad will consult with the Afghan government and other Afghans about the status of US talks with the Taliban, encourage efforts to form an inclusive negotiating team, and discuss next steps in intra-Afghan discussions and negotiations. (Tolo news)

(9) Afghan Govt...

were to stop coming because of a loss of financial support, this could pose a serious threat to Afghanistan's stability," Sopko added.

The prospect of peace raised its own risks to rebuilding efforts, the report said, referring to the reintegration of Taliban fighters. Boosting the economy and safeguarding women's rights will become difficult.

Sopko remarked: "A peace agreement would be welcomed by the long-suffering Afghan people. But it could bring its own challenges to sustaining what the US, coalition partners and the Afghan government have achieved."

Due to the presence of other insurgent outfits, the report said, Afghanistan might remain unstable even if the war with the Taliban came to an end.

Widespread insecurity, underdeveloped civil policing capability, endemic corruption, sluggish economy, a burgeoning opium trade and threats to women's rights are listed as the main concerns.

Donor countries are likely to fund about 51 percent of Afghanistan's 2019 government spending of \$5bn. Yet the Kabul's capabilities were generally weak, the report pointed out.

Over the past 18 years, the US has given Afghanistan more than \$780 billion in aid. At least 15 percent of this assistance has been spent on reconstruction schemes.

About 63 percent of the aid (\$83.1 billion) was spent on Afghan security services, including salaries, equipment, infrastructure and training. (Pajhwok)

(10) Ghani Inaugurates...

potatoes have good markets in Azerbaijan. I don't want it to be sent to Pakistan anymore and sent back to us (from there)," said Ghani.

"With consideration of economic importance of pine nuts, Mr. President this year, we will plant more than 8.2 million pine nut saplings," said Nasir Ahmad Durrani, Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and

Livestock.

Head of Maihan Steel, Naqibullah, said trade violations by some neighboring countries are affecting domestic products.

"The reduction of products of neighboring countries and their violations in the prices in markets are at a scale which is not even equivalent to our domestic consumption and this could push our factories to the verge of recession," said Naqibullah.

"All relevant institutions should be directed to take step towards preventing the smuggling of pine nut," said Yahya Khan Zadran, head of pine nut exporters union.

At the same event, Chinese Ambassador to Afghanistan Liu Jinsong said that China is looking to import more products from Afghanistan in the future and will help Afghanistan in areas of industry and processing of the products.

"In the future, China will import more Afghan featured products," Liu said. "We are also contributing more towards the peace, reconciliation and economic reconstruction of Afghanistan." (Tolo news)

(11) Fire in Turkish...

in our country," Biyikli said.

"Why would someone collect paper from the trash if it weren't for poverty?" he said, as authorities cordoned off the site behind him.

The death toll in the fire may increase, local news agencies said, adding that efforts to identify the victims were underway. (Reuters)

(12) South Korea's...

a 5-megawatt reactor there has not been operational since late last year.

Ahead of the Trump-Moon summit, South Korea said it was sending its foreign and defense ministers, and other senior officials, to meetings in Washington.

Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha is set to meet U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday to discuss ways to move forward after the failed Trump-Kim summit. (Reuters)

(13) Venezuelan Opposition...

The only body that can appoint a comptroller is the legitimate parliament," he said at a rally Thursday. "We're going to continue in the streets."

The United States, which has backed the opposition leader and disavowed Maduro's presidency, also dismissed the ban.

"That's rich and ridiculous," U.S. State Department spokesman Robert Palladino said.

Meeting in Ecuador, delegations from a group of European and Latin American countries also criticized the Venezuelan government's move.

"Such a political decision without regard to due process is yet another demonstration of the arbitrary nature of judicial procedures in the country," said the International Contact Group on Venezuela. The group says it seeks the peaceful restoration of democracy to the country. (Fox News)

(14) 20,000 Attend New...

the gunman's actions, his faith teaches him to see everyone as a brother, including the gunman.

The Friday service was the third memorial held since the massacre. The gunman, who Fox News is not naming, has been charged with murder in the attacks.

Foreign officials and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison attended the memorial service. Morrison said it was "a thing of absolute beauty."

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern meanwhile called for an end of extremism in the world, invoking the stories of impacted by the attacks.

"They were stories of bravery. They were stories of those who were born here, grew up here, or who had made New Zealand their home. Who had sought refuge, or sought a better life for themselves or their families," she said. "These

stories, they now form part of our collective memories. They will remain with us forever. They are us." (Fox News)

(15) Pentagon Warns...

The military earlier noted that it is currently tracking around 270 objects left from the destroyed satellite.

Shanahan's concerns were met with reassurances from India. G. Satheesh Reddy, who leads the nation's Defense Research and Development Organization, said that all the debris will burn up in about 45 days.

"That's why we did it at lower altitude, it will vanish in no time," the official told Reuters. (RT)

(16) China, Pacific...

between China and Pacific Island States", the ministers said that they discussed issues of common interest relating to agricultural development and adopted the Nadi Declaration of the Agriculture Ministers' Meeting of China and the Pacific Island Countries.

"We believe that China and the Pacific Island States enjoy a great potential for agricultural cooperation thanks to our mutual complementarity, and our further cooperation will be significant to enhancing peoples' well-being and deepening our comprehensive strategic partnership that features mutual respect and common development," the ministers said.

The ministers agreed to better align with each other's agricultural development strategies and plans, and jointly formulate the 2020-2022 Action Plan on Agricultural Cooperation of China and Pacific Island Countries, which will identify the direction and priorities for their agricultural cooperation, facilitate resource pooling, leverage complementary strengths, and promote shared growth in agriculture.

They also agreed to strengthen cooperation in agricultural technology and encourage and support agricultural research institutes in enhancing exchanges, building joint laboratories, jointly applying for funds from international organizations and the Chinese government, and carrying out collaborative research, with a view to serving agricultural development of China and Pacific island countries.

They agreed to expand cooperation in agricultural investment and trade. Upon mutual agreement, they will hold agribusiness meetings as deemed necessary in China and the Pacific Island Countries to build business cooperation platforms. Upon mutual agreement, they will encourage and support Chinese enterprises in investing in tropical crops, e-commerce, and logistics in the Pacific Island Countries, and expanding the export of local produce to China, so as to help host countries to extend agricultural value chains.

The ministers also agreed to strengthen South-South Cooperation (SSC) in agriculture with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Agricultural experts and technicians will be selected and dispatched to the Pacific Island Countries for technology demonstration and training with financial support from the SSC Trust Fund contributed by the Chinese government.

They also stressed the importance of fisheries cooperation.

"We will conduct fishery policy exchange and cooperation in regional fishery management organizations, step up fisheries resource and marine biodiversity conservation and capacity building, and jointly combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing," the ministers said.

They agreed to encourage businesses of China and Pacific Island Countries to conduct investment cooperation in fisheries to build infrastructure, develop mariculture and fish processing and trade, and increase value addition of the fishery sector. (Xinhua)