

**(1) Rabbani Stresses...**

as the Heart of Asia, Afghanistan was a natural land-bridge in the SCO region, connecting the member-states with each other and providing land-routes for goods from East Asia to Europe, as well as serving as a hub for the Silk Road's trade and transit routes.

He added Connectivity could improve regional economic cooperation, spurring economic growth and development of the region for integration.

"In the coming years, we look forward to achieving full membership of the SCO, on which we need the support of all of you, as you rendered such support to India and Pakistan, which acquired full membership in 2017," he said.

"With these potentials for security and economic cooperation in mind, I renew our call for your kind support to expedite Afghanistan's full membership of the SCO," he said. Referring to the war against terrorism he said, "Our region is facing numerous security challenges. Terrorism remains our primary concern, as the Afghan people have borne the brunt of attacks by terrorist networks, which continue to find easy and safe havens in the region."

"That is why we must cooperate under the SCO umbrella to fight this transnational menace," he stressed.

The protocol on counter-terrorism cooperation was signed between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) of the SCO in 2015.

He said Afghanistan was committed to fighting terrorism, separatism and extremism, while exchanging our experience and public information analysis with the RATS.

"I am confident that our full membership in the SCO would enable us to do more, working with others more closely to achieve the intended goals of the RATS against the common security threats facing the SCO member-states," he believed. (Pajhwok)

**(2) Afghanistan...**

But despite the increase in the prices, the airlines said they have failed to prevent losses in revenues.

The Civil Aviation Authority's Chairman Mohammad Qasim Wafaeezada, said there were six air routes through Pakistan's airspace between Kabul and New Delhi.

More than 250 flights crossed Afghanistan's airspace towards Pakistan on a daily basis when the airspace was opened but now the number has reduced to nine right currently.

"We hope this issue is resolved as soon as possible; otherwise, we will lose a big amount of revenue we get from transit flights," he said.

Some foreign media outlets reported late in March that Pakistan had reopened its airspace to Afghanistan airlines, but officials from Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authority said they had not received any confirmation from the authorities in Pakistan regarding the reopening of Pakistani airspace for Afghan flights.

Airlines and passengers called on the Afghan government to engage in talks with the Pakistani government and resolve the matter in line with international laws and regulations.

"Most of the people don't have the capacity to purchase tickets with higher prices. The government should resolve it," said Bahram, a Kabul resident. (Tolo news)

**(3) Afghan Chief...**

Mohammad Omar Daudzai, President Ashraf Ghani's envoy for peace, said the delegation would serve only to swap views with the Taliban, and its members would not necessarily be the same as a formal negotiating team.

Officials will meet Wednesday in Kabul to finalise delegates, and to decide who might comprise an official negotiating team.

In a statement, the Taliban said the upcoming Doha talks would clarify participants' "views and policies and sharing their stance".

"The said conference is not a negotiations summit or meeting," the Islamist extremist group said.

The Taliban and Afghan opposition groups held a similar meeting in Moscow in February.

US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad spent last week in Afghanistan as part of an ongoing push for a peace deal.

His visit came against the backdrop of strains between Washington and Ghani's administration, which has complained bitterly of being sidelined in peace talks.

Khalilzad has repeatedly called on Ghani to form a strong negotiating team to reach a deal before the country's delayed presidential elections, now slated for September.

On Friday, during a side trip Khalilzad made to Pakistan, Prime Minister Imran Khan said he had some "brotherly advice" for Afghanistan, suggesting an interim government in Kabul to help smooth the talks process.

It was not the first time Khan had made such a suggestion. Kabul was again furious, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned a Pakistani diplomat to explain the remarks.

The notion of an interim government to tide things over between the end of Ghani's term in May and an election has sparked controversy in Afghanistan, and there is as yet no clarity as to what will happen.

An "interim government for the sake just of interim government, I am not for it, (it) will not solve anything," Abdullah said.

"An interim arrangement as a result of the package for peace that is agreed upon between both sides -- why not?"

Khalilzad left Afghanistan on Sunday following what the US embassy called "productive" talks.

"Khalilzad was pleased to see the Afghans with whom he met, inside and outside government, coming together to put peace first," the embassy said in statement. (AFP)

**(4) Experts Suggest...**

said Abdul Zahir Shakib, head of the Academy of Sciences.

Other speakers said the only way to overcome the challenge is that government should take firm action against corrupt elements regardless of their positions.

"Corruption will not be eliminated until there is corruption in high levels," said Mohammad Yusuf Azimi, member of the academy.

"The government has responsibility to fight corruption. The question that how much we will be successful in this mission is a separate matter," said Burhanullah Niazi, member of the academy.

Corruption has been one of the key challenges which has brought the Afghan government under local and global pressure over the past several years. (Tolo news)

**(5) Loya Jirga's...**

instead of complicating the situation," the statement said.

Earlier in the day, a former Wolesi Jirga member and founder of the Mawj-i-Tahawal Afghanistan termed the Consultative Loya Jirga 'an extravagant election campaign' and against the country's interest. She told a press conference in Kabul that in a country like Afghanistan where above 50 percent of people lived under the poverty line, the arrangement of a costly jirga was unfair.

She suggested the money allocated for the event should be distributed among unfortunate people.

Some two thousand people are invited to attend the Consultative Peace Jirga scheduled for April 29 to represent political parties, civil

society, tribal elders, and members of parliament. (Pajhwok)

**(6) Ex-Minister...**

minister of finance, have also been sentenced to two to four years in prison.

On January 14, Wahidi told TOLONews that the accusations are based on "baseless documents".

Wahidi said the AGO has accused him of violating his job description when he was deputy finance minister. (Tolo news)

**(7) IEC Decides...**

said Hamayoun Jareer, a member of the Hizb-e-Islami political party led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

Based on findings, the biometric devices which were used in 2018 parliamentary elections have not the ability to differentiate two people's fingerprints at the same time. Meanwhile, electoral experts believe that scanning ten fingers in the existing biometric devices is time-consuming on the polling day.

"If we go for the presidential election using the existing offline biometric devices and do not use an online biometric system, we will create a crisis which will not be manageable neither by the IEC nor by the government," said Dawood Ali Najafi, former chief of IEC Secretariat.

The Afghan presidential election is scheduled to be held on 28 September 2019. Originally it was scheduled to be held on 20 April, but later it was delayed to July 20 after problems raised in using a biometric system and finalizing results of Afghan parliamentary elections. (ATN)

**(8) Battles Continue...**

such as Ab Kamari, Muqur, Jawand and Qadis.

"It is a strategically important location, so it has strategic importance for the Taliban," said Abdul Basir Osmani, an MP.

A former MP from Badghis, Qazi Abdul Rahim, said the appointment of "corrupt" figures in security leadership of the provinces has led the district with the fate it faced today.

"They (security agencies) appoint 'smugglers, thieves and useless people' as commanders or officials in the province and they cannot come together with the people," Rahim claimed.

Security officials still argue that the evacuation of the district was aimed at preventing further harm to civilians.

"We tried to protect the innocent people there to avoid casualties, so we had a tactical retreat from there to avoid harms to people's lives and properties," said Mohammad Ibrahim Fazli, Commander of 2nd Brigade of Afghan National Army in Badghis.

Last time, Bala Murghab came under Taliban attack early in March and was under siege for more than two weeks, leaving more than two dozens of security forces dead and almost 28 of them gone missing.

This comes as the conflicts have intensified in different parts of the country with the arrival of the spring season - which is deemed as a usual fighting season for insurgents fighting the Afghan government forces. (Tolo news)

**(9) Politicians, Warlords...**

many challenges.

"This is the money of the nation. The government must act against those who denies to pay the electricity bill," said Sakhi Ahmad Payman, the Head of AIA. (ATN)

**(10) Kandaharis Push...**

and the Taliban.

The gathering organized by a local movement called the Voice of Peace from Kandaharis where the main speakers said that people in the southern provinces have suffered the most from the war and violence and that it is the time to ensure sustainable peace in the country.

"Who benefited from the war in the past 40 years? No one. Let's think about rebuilding and development," said Sardar Mohammad, a tribal elder from Kandahar.

"We suggest that our leaders and elders talk about the main reasons behind the war and about the main obstacles on the way of peace," said Abdulhaq, a tribal elder in the province.

Other attendants said a good opportunity has been created for peace which should be used through an all-inclusive process.

"The Voice of Peace from Kandahar wants that lasting peace should be ensured in the country while considering the current political situation. We are ready to expedite our efforts in support of the peace process in the country," said Sher Ahmad Haqyar, head of Kandahar Peace Council.

Kandahar governor Hayatullah Hayat, meanwhile, stressed the need for face-to-face talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

"Peace will not come unless Taliban sits at the table of negotiations with the Afghan government. We are giving sacrifices for this war, not Pakistan or other countries. Afghans are the main victims. Direct talks will provide the ground for peace in the country," he said.

This comes as Afghan politicians are preparing to attend Qatar meeting with the Taliban in the middle of this month where the Afghan government will also send a delegation.

According to the High Peace Council, the meeting is a platform for exchanging of views between the delegations of the two sides. (Tolo news)

**(11) Concerns Raised...**

journalists in Ghazni and resolve their problems.

Jameel Waqar, head of the Journalists Protection Committee in Ghazni, said they often strived to help women journalists address their issues besides their men colleagues.

"The fact is that some women journalists perform duty despite the existing level of insecurity, it is a big achievement for women and media," he believed.

He said talks with all authorities concerned and institutions of journalists had been launched and advised them to address problems being faced by women journalists. Rahmatullah Marjankhel, head of a private Radio Station, said after the Taliban attack on Ghazni City, media outlets plunged into huge financial problems.

He said the media outlets incurred some losses during the attack and some after the attack as businessmen stopped their businesses and there were no commercials.

"In the past, if there was no external revenue, local commercial ads were a source of income but now media outlets are deprived of local commercials as well," he said.

Bashir Mohammadi, director of Ghazni Information and Cultural Affairs Department, acknowledged the problems being faced by women journalists and added the problems increased in recent past. Work load, not paying salaries, not giving them formal positions and discriminatory behavior were some of the issues women journalists were facing.

Governor's spokesman Mohammad Arif Noori said they fully supported women journalists and would provide them every possible help.

He said after the Taliban attack, some local media outlets left Ghazni after suffering financial losses.

Besides women journalists, men journalists also face multiple problems in Ghazni and receive no attention from journalist associations in Kabul.

Farida Nekzad, head of the Women Journalists Association in Kabul, also expressed concern over the deteriorated situation of wom-

en journalists in Ghazni.

She said investigation into problems faced by women journalists in Ghazni had been launched and the individuals concerned would be advised to improve conditions for female journalists.

She said their representative tasked to assessing the situation was threatened by some people and this problem had been shared with the government and the joint media committee. (Pajhwok)

**(12) May to Meet...**

with Brussels, something May consistently ruled out as it would prevent Britain striking trade deals with the rest of the world.

The talks broke down last week, with Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn saying, "I'm waiting to see the red lines move". (AFP)

**(13) Bibi-Trump Bromance...**

told American Jews in Las Vegas that Bibi was "their" prime minister. It's safe to assume that if the Israeli PM stays in power despite all the corruption scandals surrounding him, Trump will keep a powerful and vocal ally in Israel.

This could come handy in 2020 when he seeks re-election as US president. The unprecedented level of Israeli support may be a strong argument to vote Trump for many Americans, including Jewish people and Christian Evangelicals. RT's Caleb Maupin takes a closer look at the Trump-Netanyahu political bromance and how it affects the two nations. (RT)

**(14) 'Ruxit' Would Be...**

and "discriminatory." Since that time, Moscow has sought the full reinstatement of its delegation's rights, as well as a change of the "discriminatory" regulations. In 2015, PACE reviewed the issue twice but eventually ended up imposing even harsher restrictions against the Russian delegation.

This development prompted Moscow to first cease its participation in the PACE sessions and, eventually, to stop paying its instalments to the Council of Europe back in 2017. The move sparked another row between Russia and the CE as Moscow had been one of the major contributors to the organization's budget.

In 2017, Russia contributed €33 million (\$37.07 million) to the CE budget out of a total of €454 million (\$509.96 million). Moscow's decision forced the CE to freeze nine percent of its budget expenditures and still left the organization with a deficit of €1.5 million (\$1.68 million). (RT)

**(15) Seoul Confirms...**

to Pyongyang, with Moon, a long-standing advocate of engagement with the North, regularly pushing inter-Korean cooperation projects.

Moon faced a heavy backlash last month after tapping Kim Yeon-chul, chief of the state-run Korea Institute of National Unification, to head the unification ministry which handles inter-Korean affairs.

Kim, also a vocal supporter of dialogue with Pyongyang and Moon's longtime confidante, has a record of challenging generally held views on highly emotive issues involving the North.

In a 2010 newspaper column, Kim wrote that the shooting dead of a South Korean tourist by a northern guard at the North's Mount Kumgang resort was a "rite of passage" that Seoul had to undergo in the early stages of cross-border cooperation.

All South Korean tours to the North were suspended following the 2008 killing.

Kim is also a vocal critic of sanctions against Pyongyang.

Shortly after Seoul's 2016 closure of the Kaesong Industrial Complex, where Southern firms used to be staffed by Northern workers, he told an interviewer that "sanctions and pressure was a failed approach". (AFP)