

(1) Intense Fighting...

Short videos circulating on social media, purported to be from Ghazni, show a number of heavily armed Taliban patrolling in the city with a large plume of smoke and flames coming out from the town.

"It is over and the city is taken," says a man standing outside his home, with several Taliban insurgents nearby.

The videos could not be independently verified by Reuters but they generated heavy commentary by social media users that underlined the shock caused by the attack.

U.S. military headquarters in Kabul said sporadic clashes were occurring and American aircraft had conducted five strikes on Saturday and four more on Sunday.

"The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces continue to hold their ground and maintain control of all government centers," Lt Col Martin O'Donnell, U.S. Forces Afghanistan spokesman, said in an emailed statement.

The attack on Ghazni leaves the future of peace talks with the Taliban uncertain. The government had been considering a ceasefire over this month's Eid al Adha holiday to match a similar truce during June's Eid al Fitr holiday. (Reuters)

(2) Afghan Taliban...

forces for control of the central city of Ghazni, adds to a mixed series of signals since an unexpected three-day truce during the Eid al-Fitr holiday in June. Taliban representatives have met U.S. officials to talk about the framework for possible peace talks and the Western-backed government is considering offering a second ceasefire during the Eid al-Adha holiday later this month.

But at the same time, fierce fighting has continued in different parts of Afghanistan, inflicting heavy casualties on soldiers and police and threatening the security of parliamentary elections scheduled in October.

The attack on Ghazni, which controls a vital highway between the capital Kabul and southern Afghanistan, has given the insurgents their highest profile success since they came close to taking the western city of Farah in May.

The rail and power links from Uzbekistan are vital both for cross-border trade and for maintaining Afghanistan's shaky power supplies, which are already subject to frequent blackouts.

The Taliban, fighting to topple the Western-backed government and drive out international forces, have generally refrained from sabotaging vital infrastructure and have sought to reassure neighbouring countries about their aims.

A senior Taliban official said the movement had established a political office in the Uzbek capital Tashkent aimed at developing better ties and showing that they did not intend to support local insurgent groups. (Reuters)

(3) Ancient Silver...

British Museum held on to the flask while security forces waited to see whether anyone tried to claim the piece. No arrests have been made.

Its return to Kabul is particularly significant. About 75 percent of the museum's antiquities have been destroyed or looted. They reflected the rich heritage of a land that was once a crossroads

of eastern and western ancient civilisations.

Afghanistan continues to be blighted by deadly violence. But, since the civil war period of the 1990s, the museum has been restored and is open to the public. Simpson said that it is secure and "quite heavily visited", particularly by Afghan school groups and families.

The British Museum sees this case as another significant milestone in the identification and return of stolen cultural heritage. Working closely with the police, the UK Border Force and other agencies, it has helped to recover thousands of looted antiquities from Afghanistan alone since 2003. (Tolo news)

(4) Farmers in War...

of farmers like Abbas have already given up hope, abandoning their land and moving their families to towns and cities to survive.

The UN estimates more than 70,000 people have been displaced to urban areas due to the drought.

"Three years ago it rained and snowed well in our village," Abbas said.

"The crops yielded well and I made more than 300,000 afs (afghanis, or nearly \$4,300). But this year, even though I sold my sheep and goats, I made less than 100,000 afs (about \$1,400)."

- Not enough help -

The lack of precipitation in Balkh has left most of its farming and grazing land parched, Zabiullah Zoobin, provincial director of crops and cultivation management, told AFP recently.

More than 450,000 farmers and nomadic herders in the province have slaughtered their cattle, goats and sheep, or sold them for a pittance, he added.

"All villagers are wondering what to do with their livestock and how to keep them alive because that is all they have in life," Haji Sorab, a sheep and goat herder in Dawlat Abad district, told AFP.

The drought adds to Afghanistan's woes as its security forces struggle to beat back Taliban and Islamic State militants, and civilian casualties remain at record levels.

Agriculture is the backbone of the Afghan economy. Nearly 15 million people are employed in the sector in the 20 provinces worst affected by the drought, according to the UN.

With already high unemployment made worse by record numbers of Afghans returning from Iran and many more internally displaced by the conflict, their chances of finding other work are grim.

Prices of sheep and goats have plunged as farmers rush to sell their animals before they become even weaker, agriculture and livestock ministry spokesman Akbar Rustami told AFP.

At the same time, the cost of fodder has soared. Rustami said most of the country's livestock are in "urgent need of food".

Afghan authorities have so far provided limited assistance to farmers and international aid agencies are struggling to meet the growing demand.

UN food and other assistance has reached more than 460,000 people in drought-affected provinces in recent months, Lanzer said -- less than a quarter of those who need it.

An agreement between international agencies and the Afghan government to release 60,000 tonnes of wheat currently held in the country's strategic grain

reserve and turn it into mineral-fortified flour will help.

"It won't be enough for what is needed, but it's a very good start," Lanzer said.

If much-needed aid does not reach farmers soon, more might turn to more drought-resistant crops such as opium poppies, Abbas warned.

Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of opium, despite billions of dollars being spent on counternarcotics efforts since the US-led invasion in 2001.

"A government which is hardly able to pay its soldiers to fight cannot reach out to help people in these remote areas," Abbas said. (AFP)

(5) Government...

message termed the role of youth as vital in economic, social, cultural and political areas.

Dostum also termed insecurity a huge hurdle in the way of youth development and stressed greater role of the youth in the country's development.

"We want the Taliban and specially the youth who are busy in fighting to put down their weapons and join the reconciliation process," said Dostum.

Referring the peace efforts, Dostum said the steps taken for reconciliation were moving in the right direction and hoped it would yield positive result.

He said the national unity government was paying special attention to the youth as evident from their representation on top government level. (Pajhwok)

(6) Group of 50...

he security of the province.

"Today we are glad that a large group of our unhappy brothers who fought against the government stopped the war and handed their weapons to government and joined the peace process and by them joining the peace process the security of Badghis will improve," said Qaim.

Meanwhile, the Taliban group commander, Abdul Ghafar, known as Tofan, said that neighboring countries are helping to mobilize Taliban groups for their own benefit.

"Fifty of us today joined the government, and soon more than two hundred of our colleagues are supposed to be with the government, and now we want jobs from the government," said Tofan.

Badghis Provincial Council has called on other Taliban fighters to join the peace process in order to ensure the security of the country altogether.

"We also call on the Taliban's other group to join the government like this group and return to their normal life," said Abdul Aziz Bek, head of the Badghis provincial council.

"By joining the group, the Taliban in Badghis are weaker and will no longer have the power to fight against the government forces," said Abdul Rahim a member of parliament. (Tolo news)

(7) Riyadh Ready...

continued cooperation with Afghanistan in various fields.

Atmar termed the role of Saudi significant in the quadrilateral meeting and stressed implementation of the mechanism. Separately, the Saudi envoy met a number of Afghans who would perform Hajj at the invitation of King Abdullah.

Alkhaleedi called the expansion of economic relations with Afghanistan and pledged support for an Afghan-led reconciliation process. (Pajhwok)

(8) Kofi Claims She...

private security personnel. The 16 people called her private militia were workers of the Education Department, she insisted.

She had appealed against the decision of the commission, which agreed to put her name back on the list of candidates, the legislator added.

But despite clearance, the commission received a call from the Presidential Palace at 2:00am. The caller ordered the panel to remove her name from the list of candidates, she alleged.

"I don't want to buy my way to parliament. When asked for money, I rejected the offer," she disclosed.

Mullah Tarakhel Mohammadi, Ziaul Haq Amarkhel and Dr. Asadullah Ayub are the other candidates who have denounced the commission's decision as unfair. (Pajhwok)

(9) 'Humanitarian Crisis...

Ghazni City as of 11:30am Sunday. "The situation is terrible, both the warring sides and civilians have suffered casualties."

He said currently only the Governor's House, Haram Sary, the National Directorate of Security (NDS) department and the police headquarters were under control of the security forces and other parts of the city had been captured by the Taliban.

Private and government institutions, including the traffic department, had been set on fire and hospitals which lacked medicines were filled with dead and injured persons. "There is no electricity and no telecommunication facilities."

Another PC member Naseer Ahmad Faqiri acknowledged the information Jamuradwal's account and added a human catastrophe would happen if the situation was not brought under control in Ghazni City.

He said local representatives had informed the Ministry of Interior (MoI) 18 hours before about the Taliban's imminent attack but no steps were taken to beat back the Taliban attack.

Civil society activist Ahmad Bilal Wajed said the situation had worsened in Ghazni as bodies were lying on the streets and residents had no access to basic facilities.

But MoI spokesman Najib Danish said fresh forces had reached Ghazni City and the security situation was under control while intermittent gunfire could be heard in parts of the city.

He said 30 bodies of civilians and security personnel had been dispatched to hospitals. He rejected a possible catastrophic situation and that bodies were lying on the roads. (Pajhwok)

(10) ARG Palace Reacts...

respect to the enforced laws of the country.

This comes as the independent electoral complaints commission on Saturday announced that the names of at least 35 candidates have been dropped from the upcoming parliamentary elections. (KP)

(11) Design Framework...

President Ghani said the projects that could be implemented over a short period of time should be referred to the specific institutions and the duties and responsibilities of each institution must be specified.

Kabul Municipality's plan and policy Chief Sahar Hamdard shared information regarding the distribution of the alternative properties in order to start work on the expansion of Shahid

Mazari and Urfani roads.

She said the two plans have been prepared for the Qoragh Mountain which includes land for 403 plots with all facilities and the second plan includes 163 acres of land for 455 commercial and residential plots.

According to ARG Palace, the meeting participants approved the second plan after comprehensive talks but it was emphasized that the types of the residential plots (yards or blocks), green areas, and commercial plots should be specified and issues related to the identification of soil, water supply, waste water management, and solar system should also be considered. (KP)

Steve Bannon Weighs in on UK Burqa Debate, Boris Johnson

LONDON — Republican strategist Steve Bannon weighed into British politics Sunday in a wide-ranging interview in which he defended former Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson's comments about Muslim face veils and praised a controversial British far-right leader.

The former aide to President Donald Trump said Johnson had "nothing to apologize for" and should not "bow at the altar of political correctness" after he was criticized for saying women who wear burqas look like "letterboxes" and "bank robbers." Johnson made the comments in a newspaper column that argued against banning full-face veils, as Denmark has done.

"Excuse me, didn't he actually support the wearing of the veil?" Bannon told the Sunday Times. "His entire argument revolves around not wanting to ban the burqa, but arguing that he agrees that it's an oppressive garment and that there is no scriptural basis for it in the Quran, which is true. I think the substance got lost because of his throwaway line."

Johnson has been criticized by Muslim groups and politicians, including Prime Minister Theresa May, who urged Johnson to apologize. Johnson's representatives have said he won't apologize.

"The hysterical mainstream media can never separate the 'signal from the noise' — fortunately, the populists can," Bannon said. Bannon has said he wants to establish a Europe-wide movement uniting populist and nationalist voters in the European elections next year. He has said he plans to spend 70 percent of his time in Europe following the November midterm election in the United States.

Johnson, a former mayor of London, is one of Britain's best-known politicians and is often cited as a potential candidate for prime minister. He quit May's Conservative government last month in a dispute over the country's departure from the European Union, accusing the prime minister of killing "the Brexit dream" with plans to continue close economic ties with the EU after the U.K. leaves the bloc in March.

Bannon suggested that Johnson need not copy Trump to be successful.

"Boris just needs to be Boris — true to his nature and his calling — and I think he has potential to be a great prime minister, not a good one," he said. Bannon also praised another controversial U.K. figure — Tommy Robinson, founder of the now-defunct English Defence League. (AP)