

(1) Registration Process...

The IEC has not yet announced winning candidates for Wolesi Jirga from Kabul, Paktia, Baghlan and Nangarhar provinces. But Ibrahim said preliminary results from the remaining provinces would be announced this week. (Pajhwok)

(2) We Are in...

Afghanistan and we certainly support our security partners and as I have said many many times, the Afghan people have every right to be very proud of their security forces for all the sacrifices they are making," he added.

Meanwhile, Farah officials said many areas in the province have been secured over the past few months - especial some areas on outskirts of Farah city.

"Farah people get morale when they see security forces. The situation has changed compared with the past. Security is improving and those who are the enemies of Afghanistan have escaped," said Mohammad Shoaib Sabit, the governor of Farah.

"On behalf of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, I am assuring Farah residents that we all the forces including the NATO's Resolute Support forces will leave no stone unturned to work for people's welfare and safety and there will be no safe place for militants," said Zakaria Mirzazada, Army's Commander in Farah.

Reports indicate that Farah has been an insecure region in the west of Afghanistan over the past months. Some parts of the province have been disputed and exchanged between government forces and the Taliban during this period. (Tolo news)

(3) Planned Drawdown...

priority is for the United States to leave Afghanistan," said Campbell, now an analyst with the RAND Corp think tank.

Trump unveiled a South Asia strategy in August 2017 calling for an open-ended deployment of U.S. forces with the goal of compelling the Taliban to negotiate peace with the Kabul government.

But with the insurgents controlling large swaths of territory and chronically understrength Afghan forces suffering thousands of casualties a month, even a partial U.S. withdrawal reduces pressure on the Taliban to strike a deal, the experts and officials said. It also threatens to erode Afghan troops' willingness to fight.

Richard Olson, a former U.S. special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, said that Trump's plan severely weakened Khalilzad's negotiating hand.

"It's easier for them (the Taliban) to envision waiting us out," he said.

MILITARY FIGHT

Late last year, Trump reluctantly agreed to deploying thousands of additional U.S. troops.

The United States has about 14,000 troops in Afghanistan as part of a NATO-led mission, known as Resolute Support, and a U.S. counterterrorism mission largely directed against groups such as Islamic State and al Qaeda.

Some 8,000 troops from 38 other countries are participating in Resolute Support.

The planned drawdown, according to a Pentagon adviser who spoke on the condition of anonymity, blindsided top U.S. military and allied commanders.

U.S. commanders now will have to scramble to re-balance the international forces remaining in Afghanistan between training and advising Afghan security forces and fighting al Qaeda and Islamic State's South Asian branch, according to Ronald Neumann, a former U.S. ambassa-

dor to Kabul.

Thursday's news of the planned drawdown followed Trump's order on Wednesday to withdraw all 2,000 U.S. troops from Syria. Trump said Islamic State had been defeated and there was no longer a need for U.S. forces in Syria.

"The Syrian and the Afghan withdrawals together mark the United States as a power too large to ignore and too fickle to trust," said Neumann.

The departure of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who announced his resignation on Thursday over policy differences with Trump, could also affect coordination with allies.

Mattis twice drafted letters over the past two years asking NATO allies to increase or maintain their troop levels and many countries agreed, said Campbell, the former Pentagon official.

"He was very influential and personally involved in doing that," Campbell said.

A U.S. official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the military has begun planning the details of a drawdown, which could include reviewing what bases the United States would keep and what type of troops would be removed. The official acknowledged it would be difficult to maintain the same military missions with half the troops. (Reuters)

(4) Australia...

cannot be complacent about this threat, including the threat of resurgence by Daesh," the statement said, vowing to continue to provide security, humanitarian and development assistance in the region.

Australia last month reiterated its ongoing commitment to support Afghanistan's transition to stability and self-reliance, and welcomes recent progress towards a political settlement.

"Like our coalition partners, Australia recognises there is no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan."

"The mooted withdrawal from Afghanistan would leave the Afghans to deal with the Taliban essentially on their own. It is cynical and the results would be ugly," said David Kilcullen, Australian strategist and counterinsurgency expert. (Pajhwok)

(5) Wali Massoud...

ongoing crises. He believed a national and accountable government could drive the country from a bad to a better situation.

Performance of the national unity government

Ahmad Wali Massoud called the government under President Ashraf Ghani 'a failure' and said in addition to failing in building a state of unity, commitment and strong force, the current government also damaged national confidence and fueled tribal, linguistic and regional discrimination.

He said the president had failed to improve the country's economy, security and social life of people as well as to ensure peace.

The government's failures also forced thousands of Afghan youth to leave the country, he said.

Ties with neighboring countries About his election policy about neighboring countries, Massoud said peace in Afghanistan could be ensured if the rights of all ethnic groups were equally preserved.

"A foreign understanding of the future of Afghanistan is essential and regional and cross-regional countries should improve their relations with Afghanistan," he said.

He said Afghanistan should have positive relations with foreign countries and his team's policy would maintain active and balanced ties with regional and other

countries.

Neighboring countries' policy regarding Afghanistan Ahmad Wali Massoud says Afghanistan's foreign policy is unbalanced and Afghanistan should also not expect a balanced foreign policy from regional and cross-regional countries.

He said basic principles of the country's foreign policy should be prepared first which would assess foreign policies of other countries regarding Afghanistan over time.

"We currently have no fundamental lines and that is why most of issues are based on reactions, we should follow a good policy that should be in the interest of Afghanistan," he said.

CE post

Pointing to the Chief Executive post, Massoud said the position was created based on the millions votes people and an agreement.

He said the CE post should be approved by a Loya Jirga and added to the country's Constitution.

Prime Minister post

In response to a question about whether he has agreed with the Jamiat-i-Islami Afghanistan party's suggestion of creating a Prime Minister post, Massoud said the CE post should be changed into a Prime Minister post.

He said that the Prime Minister post was important for any government of Afghanistan.

"Afghanistan experienced the presidential system in three elections, we saw huge problems and frauds that weakened the country. We should go for a system in which all ethnic groups see themselves in, this can be done through amending the Constitution by a Loya Jirga," he added.

Reforms in the election commissions

About the performance of election commissions, Massoud said that the Wolesi Jirga elections showed their management was very weak and they in general had no capability to hold presidential poll properly. He said that the election bodies needed drastic reforms.

"There are many problems in the election commissions, the election system is not healthy, we saw bad management, the parliamentary polls showed that there is a serious need for reforms in the election system," he said.

Withdrawal of foreign forces

Massoud said it was the authority of the people of Afghanistan to decide about the withdrawal of foreign forces. "I cannot talk about this because it relates to the public and national interests, we can talk about it in future."

Peace process

About government's performance to ensure peace in the country, Ahmad Wali Massoud said the government's had no achievements regarding peace in the country in the past 17 years.

He said peace was one of Afghanistan's primary needs but the current government had no advancement in the area over the nearly last five years.

Massoud called the current government 'a fragile one' which he termed a reason why the Taliban were refusing to hold talks with it. He criticized President Ghani for failing to ensure peace in the country and said the main sides of the current crisis should be considered in the peace process. "The main side to the Taliban is not President Ashraf Ghani, but the people." (Pajhwok)

(6) Balkh IECC Agree...

in the past eight years while in power had once again succeeded to the lower house.

He added 800 complaints had been registered on the election day but

the complaints commission was yet to address them.

Sorya Bawar, another candidate who is also not among the winners, alleged bribe and political deals marred the Wolesi Jirga elections in Balkh. She said the people should come forward and defend their clean votes.

Balkh IEC head Ezzatullah Arman pledged to resolve all issues raised by the protesting candidates.

He said the demands of the protesting candidates had been registered and steps for their solution would be taken soon. (Pajhwok)

(7) US Senator...

and protecting America from another attack and it's too many to be hostages and sitting ducks" there.

The United States went to war in Afghanistan in 2001 in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, seeking to oust the Taliban militants harboring Saudi-raised militant Osama bin Laden, who led plans to carry out the attacks. (Tolo news)

(8) 4,400 Afghan...

by the International Organization of Migration.

He said the refugee department was responsible to provide shelter to the returning families, but this job had not been done so far.

He said land plots for construction of townships for refugees had been demarcated in two districts of Kandahar province --- Panjwai and Daman. He said maps and other related works had been done, but the process to distribute the land was yet to be initiated, awaiting a presidential decree in this regard.

He said the Kandahar refugee department was all poised to distribute 1076 land plots to refugee families in Panjwai district.

Rahimi said the Panjwai township was not enough and a second township would be built for the refugee and returnee families in Daman district. He said 3000 acres of land had been allocated to the township in Daman district and the plots would be distributed to deserving families once a presidential order was issued in this regard.

He said a number of international donor organizations had promised assistance with the refugee families in building their homes under a program called "Shelter" which would commence once plots were distributed to the refugee and returnee families.

About internally displaced persons in Kandahar, he said, the province was currently hosting nearly 30,000 families who had been displaced from districts and neighboring provinces.

He said they had been able so far to provide food and non-food items to 20,500 displaced families with the help of aid giving organizations. (Pajhwok)

(9) 3 Dead...

governor's spokesman, said 17 injured people had been evacuated to civil hospital from the site.

He added five of the injured were evacuated to the Jalalabad Civil Hospital in critical condition. (Pajhwok)

(10) Number of Girls...

for going to schools.

"There were less girls who were going to schools in the past, but now the number has increased," said Nazifa, a student.

"Currently, a low number of people are believing in wrong traditions when it comes to allowing their girls to go to schools," said Negina Rabbani, a Nangarhar resident.

Nangarhar activists said that unwanted traditions still remain a challenge for girls' education in the province.

"Progresses have been made in girls' education in the past 17 years, but some problems still exist," said Naqibullah Ahmad, a civil society activist in Nangarhar.

Figures out by Ministry of Education in September show that 3.7 million children are deprived of education in the country.

According to figures by UNESCO in September, Afghanistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world, currently estimated at about 31 percent of the adult population (over 15 years of age).

Female literacy levels are on average 17 percent, with high variation, indicating a strong geographical and gender divide, the UNESCO indicate.

The figures show that the highest female literacy rate, for instance is 34.7 percent, found in the capital, Kabul, while rates as low as 1.6 percent was found in two southern provinces of the country. Male literacy rates average about 45 percent, again with high variation. The highest male literacy rates are in Kabul, at 68 percent, while the lowest is found in Helmand, at 41 percent. (Tolo news)

(11) Works Minister...

Only 100 out of 229 lawmakers were present in today's session. Despite the lack of quorum, the lower house made its decision about Yari after 60 lawmakers raised green cards to expressed satisfaction. Thirty-four MPs raised red cards and five lawmakers stayed away from the voting.

According to Article 92 of the Constitution, the lower house, on the proposal of 20 percent of all its members, shall make inquiries against ministers. If the explanations given are not satisfactory, the house shall consider a no-confidence vote.

Based on the Wolesi Jirga's panel heads committee decision, the house would summon ministers of justice and counternarcotics on Monday and ministers of transport and IT and telecommunication on Wednesday. (Pajhwok)

(12) Interest In...

"There are some problems which will be resolved in the near future, but the banks are ready to offer Islamic banking services," said Najibullah Amiri, head of the association.

An economic affairs analyst said government should develop Islamic banking services in order to put people's money into circulation.

"Attention should not only be paid to development of Islamic banking, but also in other areas such as electronic payments. These kinds of developments will help in decreasing the distance between Afghanistan and developed countries in terms of economic development," said Hamidullah Farooqi, Head of Kabul University.

Back in April, Afghanistan's Central Bank has granted a license to the Islamic Bank of Afghanistan (IBA), the first lender in the country to apply the interest-free principles of Islamic finance in all its operations.

The IBA was previously known as Bakhtar Bank and operated under a conventional banking license since it was acquired by Azizi Bank in 2009.

The IBA had paid-up capital of \$25 million USD and held \$187 million USD of deposits as of December, offering its services across a network of 59 branches, Reuters reported.

IBA estimates that only 5.7 percent of the population has dealings with the banking sector.

According to Afghanistan Banks Association, up to 11 percent of the population in Afghanistan keeps their money in banks, and if the Islamic banking system is expanded in Afghanistan, more money will start circulating and Afghanistan's financial system will benefit. (Tolo news)