

UK Trade Minister Says '50-50' Chance Brexit may be Stopped

LONDON - Britain's trade minister Liam Fox said there is a "50-50" chance that Brexit may be stopped if parliament rejects the government's divorce deal with the European Union next month.

"If we were not to vote for that, I'm not sure I would give it (Brexit) much more than 50-50," Fox, a leading supporter of leaving the EU, told the Sunday Times newspaper. With three months left until the United Kingdom is due to leave the EU on March 29, May's Brexit deal



is floundering, opening up a range of possibilities from a Brexit with-

out a trade deal to calling Brexit off. (Reuters)

World's Tallest Empty Hotel Lit Up with N. Korean Propaganda

PYONGYANG, North Korea - The 105-story Ryugyong Hotel has long been a blot on the Pyongyang skyline. The world's tallest unoccupied building has towered over North Korea's capital since 1987, a grand but empty pyramid entirely dark except for the lone aircraft warning light at its top.

Outsiders saw the unfinished building as the epitome of failure, while people inside the country took care to rarely mention it at



all. That is, until light designer Kim Yong Il made the building once again the talk of the town. (AP)

(1) Access to Information...

"If organizations do not provide information to people, then they can easily hide their corruption and escape from justice," he said.

Danish said all government organizations including the Presidential Palace were responsible to the OCAI and access to information law. The OCAI and access to information law paved a fair way for fighting corruption, the VP said.

Three laws including the law on access to information, support to ex-posers of administrative corruption and the law on fighting against corruption were approved this ongoing year and they all must be enforced, he said.

"A number of government institutes have probably did not study these laws," he said, adding that the OCAI should watch the enforcement of laws and introduce violators to justice.

Sayed Akram Afzali, former OCAI head, supported the newly-introduced members and said, "If you implement the law, I will be on your side, but if you act in violation of the law and fail to implement it, we (former members of the commission) would stand against you first."

About budget problems of the commission in the past, he said, "All required facilities for the OCAI should be provided in future, we do not want billions of dollars, we want the budget which is estimated around 50 million afghanis."

Afzali asked government departments to shun the negative thinking that 'information belongs to the government and should not be shared with others'. He said information was people's right and any office that refused to share it violated the law. Pointing to creation of information sources in offices, he said that such sources had been created in 50 government departments so far but some offices did not need them.

Hasina Safi, acting information and culture minister, said that 15 from 117 candidates for OCAI membership had been introduced to the president who selected five of them as members of the commission based on their profession and gender. She said OCAI members had no right to work in other organization.

Najiba Muram, one of the new OCAI members, talking on behalf of her other colleagues, thanked former members of the commission and promised to be honest in their duties and would not allow any organizations to violate the law.

About secrecy of information, she said departments should know categorizing information was OCAI responsibility.

She added access to information should not be confined only to the capital but it should be provided in provinces as well. (Pajhwok)

(2) Pentagon...

the country to become a haven for terrorists who would once again pose a threat to U.S. national security.

"I share the American people's frustration. I also share their frustration over a foreign policy that has spent too much time, energy, money and

most importantly lives, trying to rebuild countries in our own image," President Trump said at the time, promising to end nation-building and focus instead on U.S. national security interests.

Trump said the new U.S. strategy would shift from a timeline-based approach to a condition-based one. (Pajhwok)

(3) Senate Suggests...

secretariat to send a suggestion to the government form a separate force to the security of forests.

Kunar Governor Spokesman Abdul Khani Musamim told Pajhwok Afghan News the smuggling and cutting of forests had been stopped largely in areas under government control.

He said with the support of agriculture department, 80 tribal councils had been created for the protection of forests. (Pajhwok)

(4) Taliban Dismisses...

Mujahid accused media outlets of spreading "baseless" rumours that the group would hold talks with the Kabul administration in Saudi Arabia.

It also stressed the Taliban position "remains the same and has not changed".

The armed group has insisted on first reaching an agreement with the US, which it sees as the main force in Afghanistan since US-led forces toppled the Taliban government in 2001.

"We are advancing [the] negotiations process [with] the US under a strong and extensive plan to bring an end to the occupation of our country Afghanistan," the Taliban says.

Diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict have intensified after Taliban representatives started meeting US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad earlier this year.

Officials from the warring sides have met at least three times to discuss the withdrawal of international forces and a ceasefire in 2019.

But the US has insisted that any final settlement must be led by the Afghans.

According to data from the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission published in November, the government of President Ashraf Ghani has control or influence over 65 percent of the population but only 55.5 percent of Afghanistan's 407 districts, the lowest since 2001.

The Taliban says it controls 70 percent of the country.

A close aide to Ghani said the government would keep trying to establish a direct line of diplomatic communication with the Taliban.

"Talks should be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned," the aide said on condition of anonymity. "It is important that the Taliban acknowledge this fact."

US President Donald Trump has announced a pullout of American troops from Syria, a decision that prompted the resignation of Defense Secretary James Mattis, and there have been reports that he is considering a partial pullout from Afghanistan. (Aljazeera)

(5) No Discussion on...

for personal purposes, personal fame, creating personal grouping, meeting ministers, ambassadors, political leaders and then spreading its visuals or photographs.

It is worth mentioning the new interior minister has issued strict orders since being appointed as minister. (Pajhwok)

(6) 455 Kilograms...

drugs in the country. The production and smuggling of illicit drugs play a key role in financing the anti-government armed militant groups in Afghanistan. (KP)

(7) Pakistan's FM...

Qureshi said that Doha had played a role in the peace and reconciliation process in the past and it was therefore important to get their opinion on the matter.

Last week, Qureshi embarked on a whirlwind, three-day four-nation tour of Afghanistan, Iran, China and Russia in connection with the Afghan peace process. (Pajhwok)

(8) New Budgetary...

on whether let the new departments remain as independent authorities or they should not remain and should be dissolved.

So far, five commissions of parliament have confirmed establishment of these departments and three other commissions have rejected it, the MPs said.

"It is fine that President (Ashraf Ghani) has made them independent. We have the authority to merge these two departments (the National Authority on Disabled and Heirs of Martyrs' Affairs and Technical and Vocational Education and Training Board of Afghanistan) to ministries," MP Abdul Sattar Khawasi said.

Other MPs meanwhile said question the process through which the newly established departments got budgets in the last fiscal year.

"Where the budgets of these departments have been supported from as it is about five to six months that these departments have been established?" asked MP Fawzia Kofi.

Officials of some of these new established departments meanwhile said the departments have been established for offering better services, bringing more transparency and accountability and more efficiency in their activities.

"The labor and social affairs ministry's work field is big. In the labor area, lots of works needed and the social affairs section is also very complicated. Thus, it was considered by the ministry to separate these sections (the disabled and martyrs sections)," Laluddin Aryoubi, director of the National Authority on Disabled and Heirs of Martyrs' Affairs, said.

"Currently, over 12 ministries and other departments have technical and professional trainings in different ways and different support sources are used for conducting these trainings," said Nadima Sahar, head of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Board of Afghanistan.

The MPs said before approving the national budget document, they have to reach an agreement regard-

ing these newly established departments. (Tolo news)

(9) NDS SPECIAL...

the security forces.

The anti-government armed militant groups including Taliban have not commented regarding the operation so far.

Maidan Wardak is located in central parts of Afghanistan which is among the relatively volatile provinces.

The Taliban militants are active in some of the districts of Maidan Wardak province and often attempt to carry out attacks against the government and security institutions. (ATN)

(10) Candidates...

a candidate from Paktia province, alleged the parliamentary polls in his province were massively rigged.

He complained government officials especially district administrative chiefs and police chiefs, had not been impartial and worked in favor of specific hopefuls on the election day.

He said they would not accept the preliminary results and demanded a recount of the votes.

Atiqullah Urgoni, another protesting candidate from Paktika, said the elections were in the province were full of rigging which involved powerful individuals. He said candidates who bagged more votes had criminal cases against them.

Ghazi Khan Ahmadzai, a candidate from Logar, accused the provincial IEC office of registering votes in polling centers where no voting had happened.

He said he had submitted documents and proofs regarding his claims to the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission.

"I have documents to show how strongmen in some districts stole ballot boxes and stuffed them in favor of specific candidates," said Abdul Wali Wahidzai, who spoke on behalf of others from Khost province.

He said he had handed over videos of rigging to the IECC.

The candidates urged the president to prevent corrupt people from finding their way to the Wolesi Jirga.

Homaira Haqmal, IEC deputy head, said last week that 50 to 100 percent changes would come in the primary results after audit. (Pajhwok)

(11) Lapis Lazuli...

"The Afghan cargo received good support and cooperation by the member countries of the Lapis Lazuli," said Mohammad Yahya Akhlaqi, head of transit department in the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. The International Chamber of Commerce and Industry said considering the past years problems with Pakistan, Afghanistan needs to look for alternatives to the Pakistani transit routes.

"The Lapis Lazuli route has its own advantages and benefits. The Karakoram route was a better and more secure way in the past, but unfortunately, the problems were emerged for Afghan investors who suffered hundreds of millions of dollars loss," said Abdul Qadir Bahman, CEO of the chamber.

The first shipment of the Afghan goods arrived in Turkey on Friday. Their last destination is Europe. It in-

cludes more than 175 tons of cotton, dried fruit and sesame.

The Lapis Lazuli Route agreement was finalized after three years of talks and was signed during the 7th Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA VII) in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.

According to ACCI statistics, Afghanistan's annual import volume from Europe and Turkey through Iran is \$900 million but the country's exports to European nations totals \$6 million a year.

The Lapis Lazuli corridor connects Afghanistan through Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia to the Black Sea and ultimately through Turkey to the Mediterranean Sea and Europe. The Lapis Lazuli corridor is a historic corridor. Almost 2,000 years ago, lapis lazuli stone was exported from Badakhshan in northeastern Afghanistan through this route to Europe. (Tolo news)

(12) Kandahar...

and some other problems caused many prisoners to fall ill.

Several inmates are kept in a small room and many sleep in the corridor of the jail due to space shortage, he said.

The jail had been attacked several times in the past years and as a result, many prisoners escaped and nearby residents suffered financial and human losses, he said.

Ahmad said any incident in the area could cause serious damage to civilians who could be saved if the jail was shifted elsewhere.

The jail officials have also repeatedly complained that the current building of the prison has not the capacity to accommodate the large number of inmates.

Kandahar governor's spokesman, Aziz Ahmad Azizi, acknowledged the problem and said the local administration was working on a plan to shift the jail from its current position to a new building as soon as possible.

He said a General Directorate of Prisons delegation from Kabul last week met with Kandahar jail officials and deputy governor, Abdul Hanan Munib.

The delegation said the Ministry of Finance had allocated 315 million afghanis for construction of a new building for Kandahar Central Jail and work on the project would start soon.

Kandahar deputy governor Abdul Hanan Munib said that 75 acres of land was earmarked for the new jail building in Daman district of the province.

He said the construction process on the new building should start as soon as possible and according to the needs of inmates.

Militants had waged many attacks on the Kandahar Central Jail in the past, enabling hundreds of inmates to escape in each attack. (Pajhwok)

(13) Several Nangarhar...

Some residents expressed their happiness over the clearing operation in their areas.

Gul Mohammad, a resident of the area, said they were ready to guard areas cleared of insurgents on their own. (Pajhwok)