Afghans Insist on ‘Flexible’ Peace Talks

KABUL - As hopes for peace in the country grow among Afghans, government officials, religious scholars and residents of Nangarhar and Badakhshan in separate gatherings in the provinces said that the talks should show more “flexibility” and that they should accelerate the efforts for bringing peace to the country. However, they said that the details of the talks should be shared with the people and that the Afghan government should not be sidelined from the discussions. The tribal elders and religious scholars in Badakhshan and Nangarhar provinces said Afghans are tired of war and that they are of the opinion that the peace is the only way that can bring them together and can ensure the development of the war-ravaged Afghanistan.

The activists and tribal elders from Badakhshan and Nangarhar provinces said a golden opportunity has been created for peace and it should not be left unused. “Both sides (the Afghan government and the Taliban) should not insist on their positions. Both sides need to lose something to reach an agreement,” said Emamullah Shinwari, a religious scholar from Nangarhar.

The Afghan government and Taliban officials last week agreed in principle to continue talks aimed at ending the conflict for the Afghan peace as the US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad put it. The US and Afghan governments are said to have agreed to continue the talks in Qatar.

Urea Factory Resumes Production as Gas Pipeline Fixed

MAZAR-E-SHARIF - A fertilizer and power factory in northern Balkh province has resumed production after its gas pipeline was reconnected, officials said on Saturday. The Urea and Power Factory had stopped production 15 days ago after Taliban militants took it up in gas pipeline in the Chamtal district of the province. A few days back, officials claimed the militants demanded the factory pay them four million afghani and warned that it would stop production after 15 days.

The Afghan government has made efforts to accelerate the efforts for bringing peace to the country. In reaction to Moscow’s bid to host peace talks, US officials and Taliban negotiators reconfirmed the round of talks in Doha, the capital of Qatar, to discuss ways of ending the United States’ 17-year war in Afghanistan. More talks are due to resume in Doha in late February. In comments given to The New York Times and confirmed to CNN by the US Embassy in Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, the US special representative for Afghanistan, said Monday that the two sides have agreed in principle to a framework for moving forward. Khalilzad said a series of events Thursday about the talks, saying, “We made significant progress on two vital issues: counter terrorism and troop withdrawal. That doesn’t mean we’re done. We’re not even finished with these issues yet, and there is still work to be done on other vital issues like intra-Afghan dialogue and a complete ceasefire.”

Tehran Supports Afghan-Led Peace Process: Iran Envoy

LONDON - Iran envoy to the International Contact Group meeting on Afghanistan expressed support for peace process led by Afghanistan government.

During the meeting which was held in Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Rasool Esfandi referred to main role played by the Afghan government in peace attempts and underlined the importance of government and other political parties’ participation. He also stressed the effective role played by Afghanistan neighbors in this process. Referring to the fact that military approach has brought no peace and security for Afghans, he said presenting a time table for foreign forces’ withdrawal from Afghanistan is a reasonable step to pave the way for start of peace process. Esfandi also alluded to the role of Afghan government in peace process and emphasized the importance of holding upcoming presidential elections in due time. International Contact Group meeting was held with the attendance of representatives of over 50 countries, regional and international bodies in the UK. In the meeting which was co-chaired by Afghanistan Deputy Foreign Minister in Political Affairs Edir Zaman and Special Representative of the Germany Federal Government for Afghanistan Markus Potzel, participants reviewed political and security conditions in Afghanistan, recent parliamentary elections, upcoming presidential elections, danger of ISIS and terrorism in Afghanistan and separate gathering, illegal drugs and publishing economic cooperation with Afghanistan.

It is worth mentioning that after six days of negotiations between US and Taliban, some unverifiable news have been released as regard US forces’ withdrawal from Afghanistan, establishing truce and Taliban’s guarantee not to threaten. (From Outlook)