

(1) Afghan Government...

"No power in the country can dissolve the government," said Ghani, who added he was ready to "stand and defend our country".

"Rest assured that no one can push us aside," he said.

With both sides hailing progress in talks in Qatar last month, U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad is due to meet Taliban representatives there again on Feb. 25.

Ghani's comments were some of the most extensive since he met Khalilzad in Kabul last week after the latest round of talks.

He said on Twitter early on Wednesday he had received assurances by phone from U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo about Washington's commitment to an "enduring partnership" with Afghanistan.

Their military partnership was "unwavering" and would remain until a lasting and inclusive peace was achieved, he said. (Reuters)

(2) Pakistan's...

has a unique opportunity to make good on its promises of support to US efforts focused on finding a negotiated settlement to the Afghanistan conflict," he said.

If Islamabad played a positive role in achieving a settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan, the US would have an opportunity to help Pakistan fulfill that role, as peace in the region was the most important mutual priority, Votel remarked.

As a state possessing nuclear weapons that sits at the nexus of Russian, Chinese, Indian, Iranian and US geopolitical interests, Pakistan would always be a of importance to the US, he noted.

"However, Pakistan's actions are often a source of frustration to US regional efforts in Afghanistan," Votel said, blaming Islamabad for not taking concrete actions against militant safe havens inside its borders.

The suspension of US security assistance to Pakistan remains in place, according to the CENTCOM chief, who is likely to retire later during the current year. (Pajhwok)

(3) Moscow Talks...

ex-president Hamid Karzai is attending the talks in the Russian capital.

On Tuesday, Taliban chief peace negotiator Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai said the current Afghanistan's constitution was not 'valid' and they wanted an Islamic constitution and 'an inclusive Islamic government system.'

Speaking at a gathering with senior Afghan politicians, the Taliban representative stressed the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

Stanikzai said the insurgents did not want a "monopoly of power" but "an inclusive Islamic system". He said a formal Taliban office in Afghanistan and a credible guarantee for peace was vital.

About women's rights, Stanikzai said Islam gave all basic rights to women such as their participation in business, property ownership, inheritance, education, work, security, health and having a good life. Mohammad Younis Qanoni, who is contesting the July presidential election as first vice-presidential candidate of presidential hopeful Mohammad Hanif Atamr, hoped the meeting would yield a positive outcome.

He supported reforms in Afghanistan's judicial and justice organs but said having an Islamic republic was the Afghan nation's demand, which should be supported.

Participants of the meeting shared their thoughts with media on Tuesday.

Ex-president Hamid Karzai told media persons that they had detailed discussions and all participants expressed their views about the peace process.

Karzai said the first day talks went satisfactory and more discussion would take place on Wednesday (today).

He also hoped the Afghan government and the Taliban would sit down to talk peace in future.

Stanikzai also termed the yesterday' meeting as productive and friendly and hoped today's meeting would also be concluded on a positive note and said such meetings should continue until the people of Afghanistan achieved lasting peace in their country.

He said, "I am hopeful about the outcome of our discussions. I hope we will have fruitful result because we had almost similar views during the discussion and this could be a clear example of optimism for future."

Jamiat-i-Islami party chief executive and former Balkh governor Atta Mohammad Noor also expressed hope about positive outcome of the Moscow talks.

He said, "Our today meeting had two good points, first it was intra-Afghan meeting and secondly prominent figures sat face to face and had a great discussion, I am satisfied with the meeting."

Former deputy chief executive officer Mohammad Mohaqiq also expressed similar views and said he also addressed the meeting.

He further said the Moscow meeting was portrayed good inside the country and people wildly supported the talks on social media.

Sayed Mansoor Nadari, a political expert and participant of the conference, said: "Besides other political figures, I also took part in the ongoing meeting and held detailed discussions with Taliban representative and I hope the countrymen would hear a positive result from our meeting." (Pajhwok)

(4) Kabul Ready...

party and it could do the same with the Taliban under an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led dialogue.

He said terrorism was a common threat the region faced and the role of regional countries and international allies of Afghanistan was important to overcome the threat.

The statement said National Security Advisor Hamdullah Mohib, who attended the meeting, said foreign countries' envoys could play a crucial role in strengthening their countries' relations with Afghanistan. (Pajhwok)

(5) \$325 Million...

package would be used in line with the requirements and priorities of the government and the people of Afghanistan.

"The financing agreement of the three projects signed today with the World Bank totally worth \$325 million. It will be implemented to support economic empowerment, service delivery and institutional reforms," the acting Finance Minister said.

"The new financial package includes \$200 million grant to the Eshteghal Zaiee - Karmondona (EZ-Kar) Project, \$50 million grant to the Cities Investment Program (CIP) and \$75 million grant to finance the Tackling Afghanistan's Government HRM (Human Resource Management) and Institutional Reforms (TAGHIR)," he added, acknowledging what he said valuable contribution by the World Bank to fund these major projects.

The new financial package includes:

- \$200 million grant to the Eshteghal Zaiee - Karmondona (EZ-Kar) Project, which aims to

strengthen the enabling environment for economic opportunities in Afghan cities where there is a high influx of displaced people. The grant includes \$150 million from the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank Group's fund for poorest countries; and \$50 million from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), administered by the World Bank on behalf of 34 donors.

• To improve the sustainability and livability of nine provincial capital cities by strengthening municipal capacity, management, and infrastructure. The grant comprises \$25 million from IDA and \$25 million from the ARTF.

• \$75 million grant to finance the Tackling Afghanistan's Government HRM (Human Resource Management) and Institutional Reforms (TAGHIR) project, which will strengthen the capacity of selected line ministries. The grant includes \$25 million from IDA and \$50 million from ARTF.

Shubham Chaudhuri said access to job opportunities and better services remained the most crucial need of Afghan people specially the returnees and internally displaced Afghans at this particular time.

"These new grants are significant step forward in the path to help the Government of Afghanistan strengthen its service delivery capacities and meet its key policy objectives through boosting institutional reforms," he said. (Pajhwok)

(6) I Have 'Accelerated'...

Trump also told CBS News on Sunday he was open to leaving a small military presence in Afghanistan.

"Yes. And I'll leave intelligence there. Real intelligence, by the way. I'll leave intelligence there and if I see nests forming, I'll do something about it."

"We'll come back if we have to. We have very fast airplanes, we have very good cargo planes," he added. "We can come back very quickly, and I'm not leaving. We have a base in Iraq and the base is a fantastic edifice."

News reports in December said the president planned to draw down the U.S. troop presence from roughly 14,000 to 7,000. Although those reports were not confirmed, hawkish Republican senators last week voted for an amendment criticizing Trump's intentions to withdraw forces from Afghanistan.

Trump during the State of the Union Address spoke of the toll the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have taken on the U.S. military and hearkened back to his campaign pledges to end the war in Afghanistan.

"Our brave troops have now been fighting in the Middle East for almost 19 years. In Afghanistan and Iraq, nearly 7,000 American heroes have given their lives. More than 52,000 Americans have been badly wounded. We have spent more than \$7 trillion in the Middle East," he said.

"As a candidate for President, I pledged a new approach. Great nations do not fight endless wars." (Monitoring Desk)

(7) No Ceasefire...

Currently in Moscow for a meeting on Afghanistan, he acknowledged problems in reaching a settlement. He believed achieving peace was more difficult than war. However, he hoped the conflict could be ended.

The Moscow meeting is separate from the US-Taliban peace parleys in the UAE and Qatar, according to Stanikzai, who told participants that the group did not want "a monopoly of power".

After the announcement of a US troop withdrawal, he indicated,

representatives of the Afghan government and others could join talks on a future government. (Pajhwok)

(8) Kabul Consumers...

"DABS should not take the 10 afghanis stationery charge because most of the consumers are poor people."

Rahim Gul, another resident, termed the extra charge as corruption, saying: "Our people are poor and charging 10 afghanis is not fair, the DABS should charge two afghanis as printing cost."

But a private printing company said one electricity bill with all specifications was printed against 1.25 afghanis.

Wahidullah Tawhidi, spokesman for DABS, about the 10 afghanis said: "People who are working in this section are paid salaries and the costs on transport, color for printer, computer and electricity, therefore we should collect 10 afghanis."

Tawhidi said DABS was a commercial firm, which supported its employees, calling the 10 afghanis charge as appropriate.

About the private printing company's claim, Tawhidi said they had several reasons to show why DABS charged 10 afghanis as stationery cost. (Pajhwok)

(9) Afghanistan...

important saffron sector.

She believed the strategy's implementation would boost Afghanistan's exports specially saffron.

Atiqullah Nasrat, head of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (CCI), said the national export strategy's main purpose was to improve the export and quality of saffron.

He asked the Afghan envoys to facilitate the Afghan saffron exhibitions in the countries where they had been stationed.

He said some businessmen imported Iranian saffron to Afghanistan and exported it to the world's markets as Afghan brand. (Pajhwok)

(10) Atmar Upbeat...

We all of us agreed on the withdrawal of foreign forces and the establishment of an Islamic government and making a constitution - an Islamic constitution," he said.

On Tuesday, former president Hamid Karzai said the existence of the current government was vital in terms of seeking a negotiated settlement to the ongoing conflict in the country and insisted on the need for the Taliban to engage in dialogue with government.

Delegates share views:

"We understand that the government in Kabul needs to be part of these negotiations, we wish that they would have been here today," said Karzai adding it was an "issue that the Islamic Movement of Taliban and the Afghan government have to resolve."

Meanwhile, Taliban's chief negotiator Abbas Stanakzai said after Tuesday's session in Moscow that "ninety nine percent of the whole population of Afghanistan are Muslims. So any government that comes into power would be an Islamic government; we would call it an Islamic government according to Islamic rules. So the constitution would be Islamic, there would be no doubt - it would be for a long time and it would be after this also. So he means that the future government would be called an Islamic government."

Stanakzai said: "And today's discussion as we said before, it was very good, in a good atmosphere and fruitful. It was a sort of conference - every body was exchanging their own views regarding peace."

"So this is the first step which will

take us to peace, in future we will have more meetings and we can go further. We are hopeful that we will achieve that goal, which is peace forever in Afghanistan," he added.

Another delegate attending the talks was Fawzia Kofie. She said: "They (the Taliban) came up with a 13 article position about women's rights.

"They said women can work, women can be educated, women cannot be presidents though - they can be prime ministers.

"The important thing is we don't bargain about positions here, we bargain about the fact that women in Afghanistan are respected, as equal human rights holders, and I think that was important that they listened to this voice. I think their views were changed to some extent but we have to carefully watch the situation," she said.

"The atmosphere of the talks (on the first day) was very constructive," said Mohammad Mohaqiq, the second deputy of CEO Abdullah Abdullah.

"Today we had a very productive and good meeting, the Afghans who had differences with each other gathered here in order to reach a solution to end the problem in their common country Afghanistan and for lasting peace.

"There was unanimity of views among all participants that the war was not the solution and we should resolve our problems through intra-Afghan dialogue," said former vice president Mohammad Younus Qanooni.

Government Says Moscow Talks Hold No Weight

Earlier this week, President Ashraf Ghani said the Afghan politicians attending the Moscow Talks have no executive authorities and are not officially representing Afghanistan.

Ghani also questioned the mechanism of the Moscow Talks and said: "With whom, what will they agree upon there? Where is their executive power? Let hundreds of such meetings be held, but these would only be paper (agreements) unless there is an agreement by the Afghan government; Afghanistan's national assembly and Afghanistan's legal institutions."

In addition, a number of civil society activists on Wednesday demonstrated outside the Russian embassy and came out in support of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and opposed the proposal for the establishment of an interim government.

In other civil society action, residents in Nangarhar, Paktia and Helmand provinces organized separate meetings where they slammed Stanakzai over his recent remarks about the Afghan security forces - which he said would be dissolved if peace was agreed on. (Tolo news)

(11) Bridge benefiting...

a tribal elder of Almar district, said the project would help people a lot in their movement.

"Whenever there had been flooding, our children could not go to school, elders could not attend weddings and funeral ceremonies, this bridge would help us a lot," he said. Samiullah said Asmar people supported the government in all parts. (Pajhwok)

(12) Ajmal Ahmady...

He has eight years of experience in investment management with the newly established and small markets and has also worked with Booz Allen Hamilton, World Bank, EM Group, US Treasury Department and Ministry of Finance of Afghanistan. (KP)