

**(1) Taliban and...**

for hosting & #Pakistan in facilitating travel. Now the work begins in earnest," Khalilzad tweeted.

The main topics of the talks would be the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan, ensuring that Afghanistan's territory is not used as a threat against any other country, a comprehensive ceasefire and direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, according to President Ghani's spokesman Haroon Chakhansuri. Sources close to the Taliban said the group will likely refrain talking on other issues if the two sides do not reach a conclusion about the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan.

The sources said that the US and Taliban negotiators will discuss the outcome of the work of their working groups.

The working groups from the two sides will share their assessment about two issues including the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and the assurance that no threat will be posed from the Afghan soil against any other country. According to sources, to convince the Taliban for a ceasefire and face-to-face talks with the Afghan government, the two sides should first agree on the two issues.

"Ceasefire and the release of prisoners are marginal issues. I don't think that they will talk about other issues unless there is clarity on the withdrawal of foreign forces," said Sayed Akbar Agha, a former Taliban member.

But, officials from the High Peace Council (HPC) said the Taliban will not be able to achieve their objectives unless the group endorses negotiations with the Afghan government.

"All demands the Taliban has will be addressed through an intra-Afghan dialogue," said Abdul Khair Ochqon, deputy head of HPC.

Meanwhile, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah said at the Council of Ministers' meeting that Taliban's denial to engage in talks with the Afghan government is a major obstruction on the way of peace in the country.

"So far, the Taliban has not been ready to talk with the government of Afghanistan. We also have the responsibility to remove the hurdles from the way of peace talks, in areas which are relevant to us. Still, lack of Taliban's honest preparation for direct talks [with the Afghan government] is a key barrier [to the peace process]," Abdullah said as he addressed the weekly meeting of the Council of Minister.

Abdullah, however, mentioned that if the issue is about how to negotiate with government and with which type of a team, then "we should be flexible".

The Afghan women who passed through severe restrictions under the Taliban regime have been constantly calling for a constructive role in the peace process with the resurgent group.

"Unfortunately, no woman is taking part in this meeting. Even in other formal talks, women are not present," said Habiba Sarabi, deputy head of the HPC.

Leading the Taliban delegation in Doha this time is Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, a co-founder of the Taliban who was released last year from a Pakistani prison.

Baradar's presence in Doha and his lead role in the talks with Khalilzad is considered important because of his important role within the Taliban.

Since his appointment in September 2018, Khalilzad has traveled to various countries in the region and Europe where he has stressed the need for ending the conflict in Afghanistan through diplomatic means. (Tolo news)

**(2) Govt to Make...**

of lasting peace in the country.

A week earlier, according to Presidential spokesman Haroon Chakhansuri, President Ashraf Ghani and US Peace Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad agreed on new mechanism to move forward the peace talks.

But today a well-placed source told Pajhwok Afghan News that President Ghani had launched fresh negotiations with political parties regarding formation of a team which would hold talks with the Taliban on behalf of the government.

According to the source, the president has been discussing the fresh team and its members and hoped a final decision in this regard would come at the end of this week.

The president also met with former president Hamid Karzai on Saturday night as part of consultations on the new negotiating team.

The source said the government wanted to include political figures involved in the Afghan politics since the 90s and post 2001.

"If there is the possibility of intra-Afghan talks, the names of the new team may be announced before the launch of Consultative Loya Jirga and if the need is not felt, the government may seek the input of peace Jirga which may be convened in mid-March," according to the source.

The fresh round of talks between the US and the Taliban is expected to begin tomorrow in Qatar. The two sides have claimed progress in their previous talks. (Pajhwok)

**(3) Abdullah Criticizes...**

called on the Afghan government to form an inclusive and national negotiating team in order to move forward the peace process. The Afghan government has already formed a team, but Khalilzad says new figures show be included in the team to make it inclusive and national.

Meanwhile, Abdullah pointed out to the consultative Loya Jirga, a traditional assembly, on peace which will be held on March 17, and said people will welcome any initiative which is aimed at moving the country closer to a sustainable peace.

According to the High Peace Council, the Jirga will have almost 2,000 delegates and it is more likely that the US in coordination with the Afghan government will ask Taliban in Qatar talks to send a delegation to the consultative meeting.

The chief executive, meanwhile, called on Afghan forces to reduce harm to civilians in their operations by applying proper measures. "I would like to have the attention of security and defense officials in this regard," Abdullah added.

A new UN report on Sunday reveals that more civilians were killed in the Afghan conflict last year than any time since records have been kept. The report documented 3,804 civilian deaths, including 927 children, in 2018.

In total, UNAMA documented 10,993 civilian casualties (3,804 deaths and 7,189 wounded), representing a five percent increase in overall civilian casualties and an 11 percent increase in civilian deaths compared with 2017. (Tolo news)

**(4) Saleh's 'Tour of...**

who challenges others on a country tour, I am ready to pay the cost and let's go to Bot Khak [an area on the outskirts of Kabul] with me, to Chahar Asiab [district in Kabul] or to Hootkhail [area in Kabul] at a night," Khalid, a Kabul resident, told TOLONews.

"Then you travel in armored vehicle in Kabul which is the biggest city of Afghanistan and you stop traffic while travelling around," said Abdullah, a resident in Balkh province.

"Have you so far travelled from Kabul to Kandahar by road?" asked Zia Ahmadi, a social media user.

Meanwhile, Saleh came up with a response to the comments and said his matrix for measurement is population by bringing a comment as an example which says "You rightly said, yesterday I & my friend drove from Kabul all way to Kunar province. We saw farmers planting, girls going to school".

Recently, a report by Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) said that the Afghan government's sovereignty is currently on the lowest compared to the last 18 years. (Tolo news)

**(5) Afghanistan...**

hardline rule imposed by the Taliban in the 1990s, with its harsh punishments and restrictions on women's rights, were unacceptable for Afghanistan's broader society.

"We will discuss in the jirga that the gains, particularly the rights of women and freedom of speech are not up for debate or concession," Daudzai said.

Participants invited to attend the jirga would be chosen by special committees to provide a voice for a cross-section of Afghan society from across the country.

On Monday, U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad is due to meet a Taliban delegation in Qatar for the latest in a round of meetings that started last year, with the focus likely to be on how to implement a ceasefire and the possible withdrawal of international troops.

The Taliban's political chief Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar will be the most senior figure attending the talks.

The U.S. side has been trying to persuade the Taliban to talk to the government in Kabul. Daudzai, who would lead any negotiations with the Taliban, said the insurgents would eventually have to engage with the government to address their demands for the exchange prisoners and removal of international travel bans on senior leaders. With civilian casualties hitting record levels last year and more than 3,800 people killed, Daudzai said the momentum for peace was fast building and he hoped direct negotiations with the Taliban could start within two to three months. (Reuters)

**(6) Ghor Passengers...**

Meanwhile, Najeeb Paiman, Kam Airlines director, told Pajhwok they planned to carry passengers through a small plane but due to some technical problem, it was delayed. (Pajhwok)

**(7) US Likely to...**

people out of government's sovereignty and the opponents come and participate in this Jirga, it would be effective," said Nader Baloch, member of Afghanistan's Meshrano Jirga, the Upper House of Parliament. "In this Jirga, women from 34 provinces with diverse views should come and explain it and this will help us to move towards a settlement," said Farkhunda Zahra Naderi, former advisor to President Ghani.

On February 11, President Ghani proposed the idea for such a Jirga which he believes will help to achieve a "dignified" peace in the country. (Tolo news)

**(8) Rashid Shines...**

to make 1,000 runs in the shortest format of the game.

He fell to Rashid Khan on the last ball of the 16th over, caught by wicketkeeper Shafiqullah Shafaq. Khan bagged his second scalp (Shane Geftake) before dismissing Simi Singh. (Pajhwok)

**(9) Around 8...**

activists, provincial council members and local officials of Laghman province about the illegal payment to associations.

Documents obtained by Pajhwok Some documents Pajhwok Afghan News obtained from the Laghman transport department show rick-

shaw drivers initially paid money to associations voluntarily but now the associations force drivers to pay.

The documents also show two associations manage rickshaw activities in Mehtarlam.

According to Mehtarlam traffic department, 423 rickshaws are operating in Mehtarlam city.

Mehtarlam municipality says they lost hundreds of thousands afghanis revenue each month due to illegal payments to associations.

Laghman provincial council says the money taken by associations was an illegal practice that had faced rickshaw drivers with problems.

The amount of money collected by associations

Rickshaw drivers in Mehtarlam say associations collect money from them without giving any legal receipts because the money ends up in personal pockets.

Laljan, a resident of Mehtarlam city and a rickshaw driver for one and half a year, said people associated with some unions took money from them without any law involved. He said he took passengers from their station five times a day on average and each time paid 20 Pakistani rupees to the union's men.

"My rickshaw can carry seven people at once and the fare I charge each time is 140 rupees of which 60 rupees is fuel cost and my net earning amounts 60 rupees a trip after I pay 20 more to the association men," he said.

Another rickshaw driver, Farhad, said if they refused to pay money to the unions' people, they barred them from entering the bus stand and traffic police also did not allow them to stand on road.

"The money we pay is illegal because we do not receive any payment receipt and we have to use stations because traffic police do not allow us inside the city," he said.

Provincial council believes strongmen, officials behind the illegal practice

Laghman provincial council says a number of powerful figures and officials have paved the way for the illegal payment by rickshaw drivers and the money collected goes to pockets of the powerful figures.

Atiqullah Abdurahimzai, the provincial council head, said both the charges and driving rickshaws in Mehtarlam city were illegal.

He said the associations had been active for years in the city, taking money illegally from people, a practice he added prevented tax collection.

A provincial council member, Mohammad Zahir Hussainkhel, said that some figures who had connections with strongmen and officials extorted rickshaw drivers in the name of associations. The government did nothing so far against these powerful figures, he said.

Civil society activists

Civil society activists in Laghman see mafia circles behind the illegal collection of money and accuse the provincial administration of keeping mum over the issue.

Zabihullah Bahar, a civil society activist, told Pajhwok they had several times shared the issue with the governor's house, but no action could be taken so far.

He said a large amount of municipality tax ended up in personal pockets due to the illegal charges.

Hanifullah Shahab, another civil society activist and Laghman representative in the Youth Parliament, said he had shared the problem with the transport ministry, but the issue remained unsolved due to involvement of powerful figures in the process.

"Some strongmen who have relations with officials are involved in this extortion, each strongman collects around 6,000 or 8,000 rupees and then the money is divided be-

tween figures associated with the process," he said.

Officials' reaction

Mehtarlam city mayor Eng. Nazifullah Alokozay confirmed that some associations collected money from rickshaw drivers every day, discouraging payment of legal taxes.

"Rickshaw drivers do not pay taxes to municipality officials because associations take money from them", he said, adding as a result of the practice the municipality lost hundreds of thousands of afghanis each month.

Ahmad Hussainullah Yar, Laghman transport director, refused to talk about the issue with Pajhwok, but he in a written form replied that associations could take some money from rickshaw drivers and the money should be paid willingly. He said the payment was part of efforts to regulate the associations.

But the money is taken from rickshaw drivers as mandatory.

Laghman traffic department head, Col. Abdul Samad Sadiqyar, said it was their responsibility to enforce the law on rickshaw drivers who violated traffic rules, but it illegal extortion from drivers was not relevant to transport department.

Laghman governor's spokesman, Asadullah Dawlatzai, also said some associations illegally charged rickshaw drivers but no action could be taken against them because drivers had so far not complained in this regard.

He said the governor's house would take legal steps if rickshaw drivers formally complained about the extortion.

Response of officials of the associations

The associations in Mehtarlam manage rickshaw transport activities and take 20 Pakistani rupees from each rickshaw against each turn.

Esmat, who belongs to one such association that manages rickshaw turns and Samiullah Jan, head of the association, confirmed they took 20 rupees from each rickshaw against each turn.

He said the money was spent on salaries of eight workers of the association and some other expenses. However, he did not provide explanation under which law they charge the money.

He said 80 rickshaws were registered with them at the station near the governor's house.

"Each rickshaw has five turns a day and the money paid by each rickshaw to the association amounts to 100 rupees a day and collectively it amounts to 240,000 rupees per month."

Mohibullah, another worker of the association, told Pajhwok that they received 300 rupees in daily charges, which amounted to 9,000 rupees a month.

Samiullah Jan, head of the association, said he had eight workers and he paid 9,000 rupees as monthly salary to each. The association pays a total of 45,000 rupees to its workers in monthly salaries, while it is unclear where the rest of the money goes.

Experts: Legal companies should be created instead of associations

Economic and transport experts believe that legal companies should be created instead of associations for management of traffic activities in order to increase the government's revenue and create transport facilities for passengers.

Eng. Mohammad Agha Mubariz told Pajhwok that transport services in other countries were offered by legal companies and fare and taxes were also explained there.

He said legal companies in Afghanistan should be tasked with preventing illegal extortions. (Pajhwok)

**(10) Ambassador of...**

the visit, the Ambassador Khairullah Spelenai and the accompanying persons were given a tour around the BHOS campus. (Trend)