

(1) 'Many Wounded'...

But some protesters threw stones at the Afghan intelligence agency office in Maimana and the intelligence agency forces retaliated with gun fire.

Junbish said the government should free Qaisari immediately or face serious problems.

Asadullah, one of the protest organizers, said Qaisari should be released today otherwise the protesters would occupy government offices and the government would be responsible for whatever happened.

Abdullah, another demonstrator, claimed many of his colleagues sustained bullet wounds in the intelligence forces' firing. However, the claims could not be confirmed from local officials. (Pajhwok)

(2) Positive Changes...

secretary said: "We hope the Taliban will introduce an authoritative and powerful delegation for intra-Afghan talks with government and optimism in this regard is growing with each passing day."

He reiterated all preparations for direct talks with the Taliban had been made by the HPC and there existed no handicap.

Once time for the second phase of negotiations arrived, the method how to involve people, politicians and the parliament in the process would be made clear.

Khapalwak did not identify the venue of talks, but said such talks would not take place in Pakistan.

He said a high level international ulema conference on peace in Afghanistan will be held in Saudi Arabia, in which 24 qualified religious scholars from Afghanistan will participate.

The people of Afghanistan would witness major changes related to peace talks in coming weeks, Khapalwak maintained.

It is worth mentioning the Taliban have categorically ruled out talks with the Kabul government and instead want the US to enter such talks with them. (Pajhwok)

(3) U.S. Supports...

contribution to NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence Mission in Lithuania through the end of 2020. On Monday, Trump met with Rutte at the White House on bilateral cooperation as well as issues of regional and global concerns.

The document offered Tuesday by the White House said Trump "welcomes the Netherlands' leadership role on the international stage including as a key member of NATO, and thanks Prime Minister Rutte for Dutch participation in critical NATO operations."

While affirming that the NATO alliance remains the cornerstone of their common security, they recognized "the need to share the burden for their common defense and security."

The statement also said that on Monday the two governments reached a Chapeau Agreement Establishing a Framework for bilateral Defense Cooperation Activities.

"This agreement will greatly facilitate their ability to enhance cooperative defense activities," they said.

The statement said the two countries also agreed to step up cooperation on cyber issues, as "malicious cyber activity and disinformation campaigns pose an increasing threat to national security and prosperity."

Meanwhile, they reaffirmed their commitment to expanding trade and investment. The Netherlands is one of the largest foreign direct investors in the United States, and the United States enjoyed some 24 billion U.S. dollars' worth of trade in goods surplus with the Netherlands in 2017, according to the statement.

Rutte has vowed to increase cooperation in trade and

investment so as to support one million jobs in the United States in the coming years, up from the estimated 825,000 in 2018.

According to the statement, the Netherlands will co-host the Ninth Global Entrepreneurship Summit, a platform for U.S. entrepreneurs and investors to connect with international counterparts. This is the first time the event will be held in the European Union. (Xinhua)

(4) Pakistan, US...

continued engagement at multiple levels," dawn.com reported a statement from the army media wing Inter-Services Public Relations.

Amb Wells was on a three-day visit to Pakistan to again seek Pakistani authorities' help for the Afghan peace process. She met Finance Minister Shamshad Akhtar, Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua, Chief of the Army Staff Gen Qamar Bajwa and Chief of the General Staff Lt Gen Bilal Akbar.

She also met business leaders and ambassadors from other embassies in Islamabad.

During her visit to Kabul, which preceded the Islamabad trip, Amb Wells said Taliban's refusal to join the political process was "unacceptable". She had further accused the "Taliban ...who are not residing in Afghanistan" of being obstacle to the peace talks. She was apparently referring to Pakistan-based Taliban against whom the US has long asked for action.

During her meetings, she reminded her interlocutors of Pakistan's commitment to take action against all terrorist groups that might be found on its territory. "Ambassador Wells discussed Pakistan's stated commitment to eliminating all terrorist groups present within its borders," the US embassy said in an apparent reference to the Taliban elements claimed to be present in Pakistan.

The embassy said that Amb Wells' discussion was consistent with the Trump administration's South Asia and Afghanistan strategy. The strategy announced last year signaled that Washington might take coercive steps to push Pakistan to crack down against the Taliban and Haqqani network. (Pajhwok)

(5) US Releases...

by President Donald Trump in August.

In February, US Central Command designated Afghanistan as its main-effort mission and allocated additional combat enablers such as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets; attack aviation; fire support; and medical evacuation assets to support Afghan national defense and security forces and coalition forces, officials said.

Optimism for Political Settlement "The assets and authorities to implement the South Asia Strategy in Afghanistan are now in place and continue to generate optimism within the Afghan government and [the Afghan defense and security forces] that a political settlement with the Taliban is possible," the Pentagon statement said.

"The key to success remains sustained military pressure against the Taliban in order to eliminate the idea that they can achieve their objectives through violent conflict. The targeted investment of US assets and personnel have increased the lethality of the [Afghan forces] this fighting season," the statement read.

At the second Kabul Peace Conference in February, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani offered peace negotiations without preconditions to the Taliban, an unprecedented initiative that opened the door for meaningful negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban, the statement noted.

During this reporting period, Afghan forces remained in control of all provincial capitals and quickly defeated the Taliban's attempt to take control of the provincial capital of Farah in May, the Pentagon statement said.

The mild winter allowed for sustained military pressure against insurgent and terrorist forces and built positive momentum heading into the 2018 fighting season.

Combined Afghan Special Security Force and conventional force operations demonstrate increasing Afghan tactical and operational ability on the battlefield, officials said. (Tolo news)

(6) Saudi Arabia...

locally produced and as symbol of the representation of the culture of Afghanistan to the people of Saudi Arabia and those gifts were warmly accepted and welcomed by the Saudi envoy.

High ranking officials of the Hajj and Religious Affairs Ministry were present during the meeting, the statement said. (Pajhwok)

(7) World Cup...

with Denmark, Didier Deschamps' team finally caught fire in a seven-goal Round of 16 thriller that saw it knock Lionel Messi's Argentina out of the World Cup.

Teenage sensation Kylian Mbappe was the star of that show, bursting down the field with belief-defying speed to win the penalty that opened the scoring and netting two second-half goals to effectively end Messi's hopes of ever winning a World Cup. With the likes of Mbappe, Antoine Griezmann, Blaise Matuidi and Olivier Giroud, France boast one of the most formidable attacks left in Russia.

But if France is an unstoppable force, Uruguay might be the closest thing to an immovable object we've seen in this World Cup. The South American nation, which last won the World Cup in 1950, has a lockdown defense anchored by the Atletico Madrid centerback pairing of Diego Godin and Jose Gimenez. In four matches at the World Cup, Uruguay has given up just one goal. With Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani spearheading the attack, it also boasts what could be the deadliest strike partnership in the tournament.

The worry for Uruguay is whether Cavani will be able to recover from the injury that saw him limp off against Portugal. Even if Cavani is fit, this France team has quality in every area of the pitch and seems to be hitting its stride at just the right time.

Prediction: France over Uruguay, 1-2
Brazil vs. Belgium - Friday, July 6 2:00 p.m. EST

After not entirely convincing in the group stage, Brazil looked comfortable in the Round of 16 as it brushed aside the same Mexico side that opened its tournament by beating Germany. Having seen the team largely being carried by Philippe Coutinho in the early going, the match against Mexico gave us a glimpse of what a fully fit and motivated Neymar is capable of. With players like Coutinho, Neymar, Willian and Gabriel Jesus, Brazil's attack is second to none. But its defense is equally formidable, with just one goal given up so far at this World Cup.

But Belgium has been almost as impressive, coming through the group stage unscathed and fighting back from two goals down to win its knockout tie with Japan. Striker Romelu Lukaku is two goals behind England's Harry Kane in the race for the Golden Boot and the 12 goals Belgium has scored have come from seven different players.

The concern for Belgium is that we've seen it leak goals against far

lesser teams than Brazil. Fighting your way back from two down to Japan is one thing, doing it against Brazil is entirely different. If Brazil scores first, Belgium could find itself exposed as it presses for an equalizer. Belgium is also a team that enjoys possession, and as we saw against Mexico, this is a Brazil team that looks very comfortable letting the opposition possess, soaking up pressure and then choosing its moment to strike. (Agencies)

(8) England reverses...

unfolding. Falcao stepped up and powered the opener past Pickford, right down the middle. Kane answered by finding the bottom corner. Juan Cuadrado and Marcus Rashford both held serve. Colombia's Luis Muriel did as well. Then David Ospina flew to his left to deny Jordan Henderson and give Los Cafeteros the lead.

Mateus Uribe, however, gave England second life. He followed Ospina's save by smacking his shot off the crossbar. Kieran Trippier then found the top corner to level the shootout at 3-3. Pickford, who hadn't played in a single competitive game for England before the World Cup, saved from Carlos Bacca. And Dier snuck his winner past Ospina. (Agencies)

(9) Afghan-German...

commerce and industries minister Kamela Sediqui said Germany had carried out multiple economic projects and schemes for Afghanistan's uplift.

She welcomed the creation of Afghan-German Economic Council and added the government could not do everything alone and asked the newly established council to make efforts at improving the quality and quantity of trade between Kabul and Berlin.

Haji Sifatullah, a businessman and ACCI member, said Afghanistan and Germany enjoyed cordial relations historically and added the Afghans living in Germany owned 150 million pounds wealth and they could help create jobs through a proper mechanism. (Pajhwok)

(10) Ceasefire...

government's peace strategy to tribal elders who then held meetings and talks with the Taliban.

However, the Taliban rejected holding any talks with tribal elders in the Azra district. Their spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said no Taliban provincial official had talked about peace in Azra district and their insurgency and policy remained the same throughout the country.

Azra district is situated 90 kilometers east of Pul-i-Alam, the provincial capital. (Pajhwok)

(11) Torkham Customs...

He said their four employees were abducted recently and one of them was freed against money and a fifth was kidnapped on Tuesday whose salary was only 6000 afghanis per month.

Members of the Torkham customs commissioners association said they supported the boycott because they faced the same problems.

Hazrat Ali Tor, the association head, said they used to shift entrepreneurs' money but most of the time they confronted masked robbers on the highway.

On the other hand, the governor's spokesman, Attaullah Khojgyani, also confirmed the issue on the Jalalabad-Torkham highway and said the issue had been shared with the president.

He further added to solve the issue properly they were working on a mechanism to ensure security of travelers. (Pajhwok)

(12) Afghanistan's First...

about migration and the conditions for migrants. The information is available in Pashto,

Farsi (Persian) and English and everyone can benefit from it," said Fariha Jabbarkhail, another coordinator at the center.

The management of the center is expected to be overseen by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and the relevant Afghan government institutions.

After Afghanistan and Pakistan, similar centers are expected to be established in Bangladesh, Iran and Iraq.

Meanwhile, officials from the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation described the initiative as a step towards curbing illegal migration.

"Lack of law is one of the key factors behind illegal migration; therefore, the Migrant Resource Center has been established in Afghanistan. The level of illegal migration will be reduced significantly with the creation of this center," said Hafiz Miakhail, an advisor to the ministry.

Based on government statistics, in 2017, over 46,000 Afghans sought asylum in European countries. But the figure indicates that the number of Afghans requesting asylum in Europe significantly dropped compared to 2016 when over 200,000 Afghans sought refuge.

The Migrant Resource Center which is run by the Ministry of Refugees and funded by the EU is aimed at providing clear and accessible information to potential migrants on possibilities for orderly migration, rules and regulation.

This comes after the Afghan Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, Sayed Hussain Alemi Balkhi, said last month that more than 300,000 Afghan refugees have returned home in the first five months of this year.

Balkhi said that since the beginning of 2018 more than 900 Afghan migrants returned home voluntarily just from Europe and another 246 were deported.

He said that at the moment more than six million Afghans are living as migrants or refugees in other countries.

Afghanistan Has Second-Largest Refugee Population Globally

The UNHCR in a report released on June 17 said Afghanistan is the source of the second-largest refugee population globally with 2.6 million people having fled by the end of 2017.

The UN Refugee Agency's annual Global Trends survey found 68.5 million people had been driven from their homes across the world at the end of 2017, more people than the population of Thailand. Refugees who have fled their countries to escape conflict and persecution accounted for 25.4 million.

This is 2.9 million more than in 2016, also the biggest increase UNHCR has ever seen in a single year.

New displacement is also growing, with 16.2 million people displaced during 2017 itself, either for the first time or repeatedly. That is an average of one person displaced every two seconds, the report stated.

The number of asylum-seekers awaiting the outcome of their applications for refugee status had also risen by about 300,000, to 3.1 million, by the end of December 2017.

People displaced inside their own country accounted for 40 million of the total, slightly fewer than the 40.3 million in 2016.

Large-scale displacement across borders is also less common than the 68 million global displacement figure suggests. Almost two-thirds of those forced to flee are internally displaced people who have not left their own countries.

Two-thirds come from just five countries: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia. (Tolo news)