

### (1) U.S. Freezes Out...

to fulfil a vow by President Donald Trump, undermining its ability to reach a political pact with the Taliban that preserves gains, such as women's education, won since the 2001 U.S. invasion ended the militants' harsh version of Islamic rule.

The former Afghan official said he saw the move as an effort to compel Ghani to "oust" Mohib, who became the president's national security adviser after serving as his envoy to Washington.

A second source, a congressional aide, agreed that pressuring Ghani to end contacts with Mohib was "one way of looking at this" because the State Department provides funding for the Afghan president's national security council staff.

The State Department declined to comment. The Afghan embassy did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Simmering tensions over the Afghan government's exclusion from the U.S.-Taliban talks in Doha, Qatar, erupted with Mohib's attack on Khalilzad, an Afghan-born U.S. diplomat, at a news conference in Washington.

He accused Khalilzad of giving the Taliban legitimacy while "delegitimising the Afghan government." He added that Khalilzad perhaps was trying to create "a caretaker government of which he would then become viceroy."

Viceroy was the title of the colonial administrator of British-ruled India.

The State Department responded with a strong statement quoting Hale as telling Mohib later Thursday that his comments "only serve to hinder the bilateral relationship and the peace process." The latest round of peace talks ended on March 11 after 16 days. The sides reported progress, but no accord on a withdrawal of U.S.-led international forces and the Taliban's counter-extremist assurances.

U.S. negotiators also are pressing the insurgents to accept a ceasefire and talks with Afghan society representatives, including government officials. The Taliban have refused to talk to Ghani's government, which they deride as a U.S. puppet. In an interview on Monday with Reuters, Afghanistan's ambassador to Qatar, Faisalullah Kakar, said that another country should not be negotiating on the use of Afghan territory by militants.

"It is the government that should be deciding, whoever the government is, that the territory is used or not used against another country," he said. (Reuters)

### (2) Political Tensions...

four hours, causing financial losses.

Haji Mohammad Aslam, owner of a hotel near Roza Mubarak (Hazrat Ali's shrine), told Pajhwok Afghan News he would have more guests in the past but the number of visitors had considerably declined. Three days ahead of Jashn-i-Nawroz, he said, not a single huest had visited his hotel to celebrate the festival. He believed the friction over the police head's appointment had negatively affected the celebrations.

In the past, the hotlier recalled, people would arrive in the city 10 days before the festival. But this time around, not a single guest has so far visited his 40-room guest-house.

Jan Mohammad, a resident of the provincial capital and a taxi driver, confirmed the number of guests and visitors had dwindled. He said people were worried about the tensions and evinced little interest in celebrating the event.

He urged officials to beef up security for Nawroz.

But Adil Shah Adil, provincial police spokesman, insisted they had taken tight security measures for Nawroz festivities, beginning on Thursday. The situation was currently under control, he added.

Many other residents of Mazar-i-Sharif held similar views and urged the security officials to pay greater attention to their protection. (Pajhwok)

### (3) Kabul's Expanding...

once-ony streets patrolled by police and private security.

It grew from a cluster of fortified embassies after the Taliban's 2001 overthrow by U.S.-led forces. In 2017, a truck bomb near the German embassy, one of the green zone's entry points, killed or wounded hundreds, prompting further enlargement.

Its rapid expansion reflects the Taliban's increasing attacks on Kabul in recent years, in a strategy shift to counter its disadvantages against U.S.-backed air power outside the capital.

Kabul police commander Sayed Mohammad Roshandil said in an interview that the green zone has been a major success. Since the Germany embassy attack, there have been no security breaches of the zone, which spans three police districts, he said. A maximum of 150 trucks are allowed inside per day, with drivers verified by biometric scanners.

EXPANSION PLAN

Police are now preparing to create a "blue zone" to surround the green zone, stretching the fortified area by between 1.5 and four kilometres, said Roshandil.

The number of closed-circuit cameras throughout Kabul would more than double to 800 within the same period, he said, helped by a \$42 million contribution from the Australian government.

But beyond the grey concrete "T-walls" that surround the green zone, some Afghans resent the dangers and hassles they say such secure enclaves create.

Taxi driver Mohammad Taher, 37, avoids the area around the green zone because of police checkpoints that grind traffic to a halt, though he adds that Afghans working in the foreign offices collect "huge salaries", giving the economy a much-needed boost. (Reuters)

### (4) Herat Activists...

The fifth round of the talks between the US and Taliban negotiators in Qatar ended after 16 days on March 12 with agreement in draft between the two sides on some key issues under debate.

Hours after the news broke on Qatar talks, US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad said in a tweet that he wrapped up a marathon round of talks with Taliban in Doha.

Khalilzad said peace requires agreement on four issues: counterterrorism assurances, troop withdrawal, intra-Afghan dialogue, and a comprehensive ceasefire.

"In January talks, we 'agreed in principle' on these four elements. We're now 'agreed in draft' on the first two," he said in a tweet.

He said the conditions for peace have improved and that it is clear all sides want to end the war. "Despite ups and downs, we kept things on track and made real strides," he said.

Khalilzad said when the agreement in draft about a withdrawal timeline and effective counterterrorism measures is finalized, the Taliban and other Afghans, including the government, will begin intra-Afghan negotiations on a political settlement and comprehensive ceasefire. (Tolo news)

### (5) Afghan Refugees...

and their rights were also signed during the conference.

Balkhi said he also had meetings with Turkish authorities on the sidelines of the conference and Turkish officials promised that Afghan refugees would be no longer forcibly deported to their country and instead would be provided with needed facilities.

Afghans who plan to voluntary return to their country from Turkey would be provided work opportunities in Afghanistan by the Red Crescent Society and Tika, a Turkish company, he said.

Balkhi said the situation of Afghan refugees based in Turkey and Greece was improving compared to their situation in the last two years and a joint committee for addressing Afghan migrants' problems between Afghanistan and Greece was expected to be created in near future.

Currently 16,000 Afghan refugees live in Greece as some of them are accepted while others are rejected or are in waiting list, he concluded. (Pajhwok)

### (6) UAE, Azerbaijan...

with me promised the UAE would buy Afghanistan saffron," he said.

He said Azerbaijan had also showed readiness to buy Afghanistan almond, grapes and onion.

Ghani asked Afghan traders to use the opportunity in international markets particularly the UAE for Afghanistan products and invest in the area and define a clear target for Afghanistan exports.

He said important reforms in different government sectors were in effect and the process was ongoing.

Ghani said banking crisis had been created by the private sector, not by the government. Misuses caused the banking system weaken in the country.

Ghani also said monitoring the banking sector by international companies was important and the Ministry of Finance would work on the issue. (Pajhwok)

### (7) Afghan Refugee...

football fields," Nadim told AFP.

"Every day after school me and other refugee kids used to go and watch these other guys train. One day I asked if I could join in, and the coach was like 'yeah, of course,'" she explained.

Away from the turmoil of her homeland at that time, her teenage years in Denmark were peaceful and she enjoyed comics, school – and especially sport.

"I feel happy and I feel grateful every day. I am fortunate to be in a situation where I can play football, be the player I want to be and meet new people all the time," she says.

Nadim, who has embarked on studies to become a surgeon after her football days are over, feels the sport is a wonderful social leveller.

"There were a lot of kids from different areas ... Arabs, Iraqi, Bosnian, Somali, nobody could speak the language, and no-one spoke English, so the only way we communicated was with the game," she recalled of her early days in Denmark.

"Everyone was included, nobody would say 'No' because you are different ... that is what I still love about the game, everyone can be a part of it. It doesn't matter if you're black, white, Christian or Muslim, it's a game."

- Pushing boundaries -

While women's equality is relatively advanced in Denmark, Nadim concedes that the situation is far more complicated in Afghanistan.

"In Afghanistan girls are not supposed to do sports, not supposed to wear shorts," she says. "But you can use sports to change points of view... I have seen this myself."

"When I was younger my Mum would be like don't play football with the boys because the women, my friends, think that there is something else going on. "I used to hide myself on the street -- we used to play street football -- because my Mum was like, if they see you they are going to start talking."

"That was so stupid."

Nadim went on to become a full Denmark international and played in the European championships final in 2017 where she scored the opening goal but could not prevent her side losing 4-2 to the Netherlands. However, to her enormous chagrin, Denmark did not qualify for the World Cup, which kicks off in France in June. "I was so disappointed," she says.

She is circumspect when asked if she thinks the World Cup is going to be a "turning point" for the growth of women's football. "I don't think there's one tournament or one point that's going to change everything," she said. "I don't think that's how it works. It's going to take time, but we're on the right path."

When she hangs up her boots, the woman who was forced to flee conflict herself says she hopes to combine her burgeoning medical career with humanitarian work.

"I think Doctors Without Borders do a great job and I'd love to be there for a couple of years to gain experience, but also be in an area where you probably are the only person who can help these people." (AFP)

### (8) Singapore Companies...

a digital mindset. Desired behaviours vary for jobs at different levels, but qualities such as digital communication, strategic solutioning, drive to succeed, and mental endurance are common expectations across the board. Still, while 59 percent of Singapore organisations say they face a challenge attracting quality talent, only 33 percent of them are using technology-enabled assessments covering personality, cognitive ability, and behaviours to seek candidates with the right competencies.

Only 18 percent of Singapore companies are currently using mobile-enabled assessments, 14 percent using video-based assessments, and a mere 5 percent using gamified assessments. The good news is that these numbers are expected to rise significantly in the future, with a 31-point increase in organisations looking to adopt mobile-based assessments (49 percent), 21-point increase for video-based assessments (35 percent), and 22-point increase for gamified assessments (27 percent).

Ishita Bandyopadhyay, Practice Lead, Assessment Solutions, Singapore, Aon, says: "To build a workforce of the future, companies must target the candidates with the skills and competencies to achieve elite results. AI-enabled sourcing and candidate relationship management tools are key to doing this successfully. Talent acquisition professionals must deliver a candidate experience that is in sync with their customer-facing brand, and have the skills to use social media to engage passive job-seekers effectively." (PR)

### (9) Over 3,700 Militants...

to defend the country and the people to the last drop of their blood.

"We do not lack anything in terms of equipment and we are ready to stand against the enemy in any situation," said Zamir Sayedkhali, a security force member in Balk.

"We are ready to defend our soil and our country. We will not allow anyone to destabilize the country," said Toi Mohammad, an Afghan soldier.

The remarks come as that according to local officials who talked to TOLONews, Kohistan district in Sar-e-Pul, Zarab district in Jawzjan and some other parts of the northern provinces are under the control of Taliban.

Military analysts said the battles will increase with the arrival of the new war season. (Tolo news)

### (10) UN ESCAP and...

dialogues and knowledge exchange. The partners will conduct studies that identify existing and potential inclusive business

companies in each country and analyze the overall context in which they operate. Based on this analysis, the studies will provide recommendations for policymakers and institutions to encourage inclusive businesses. The partners will provide policymakers with technical and advisory services to help them design inclusive business policies. ESCAP will also convene member States and promote policy dialogues and endorsements at the regional level.

"The United Nations recognize the importance of businesses in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the right policy environment needs to be in place to incentivize them to be more inclusive. Innovation is not just about technology but also innovative business models and changes in mindsets. One could argue that the most impactful innovation for the SDGs could be the shift from business as usual to inclusive business" said Mia Mikić, Director of Trade, Investment and Innovation at ESCAP. (PR)

### (11) One of 7 Kidnapped...

to the government of Afghanistan for its support in securing the release and repatriation of the Indian national," it added. The Indian engineers working on a project for the construction of a power sub-station and they were kidnapped by militants from Cheshma-i-Sher area.

External Affairs Minister SushmaSwaraj had taken up the issue with the Afghan government on multiple occasions. India has been carrying out reconstruction activities in the war-torn country. It has already provided at least \$2 billion in aid to Afghanistan. (Pajhwok)

### (12) Cuban Doctors...

Some of the doctors, such as Dr. Carlos Ramirez, a dental surgeon, grew so disgusted they defected when they had the chance.

Ramirez at first relished providing medical care in a nation where the system was in chaos.

But then his job changed to include strong-arming patients into supporting Maduro and his candidates, he told the Times. They were told to focus on the most vulnerable patients, such as the elderly or people with chronic conditions.

"You arrived with vitamins and some pills for blood pressure," said Ramirez, who defected to Ecuador. "And when you started to gain their trust, you started the questions: 'Do you know where your voting place is? Are you going to vote?'" (Fox News)

### (13) India's Aircraft...

form, China would almost definitely be in the mix," he warned, acknowledging that such scenario would be a problem for New Delhi.

As for the deployment of Indian naval assets, it is "about as no-nonsense a message, as you can send," he said, adding, however, that "war is realistically and hopefully a very remote possibility in the circumstances."

Dozens of Indian warships, including the INS 'Vikramaditya' aircraft carrier and several nuclear-powered submarines, were withdrawn from maritime exercises and sent close to Pakistani territorial waters on Monday.

In the meantime, Aroor said, deploying a naval group this powerful to "deny area – or in extreme events, create blockades across crucial shipping channels" isn't entirely "off the table."

"Nobody thought India would conduct air strikes inside Pakistani territory," the journalist added. "That line has been crossed... The ball in most ways is in Pakistan's court now."

The Indian Defense Ministry explained that the move was intended "to prevent, deter and defeat any misadventure by Pakistan in the maritime domain." It indicated that the flare-up between the two countries, which began after a suicide attack on Indian troops by a Pakistani-based terror group in February and led to shellings and even aerial engagements in the border area, is far from over.

India's relations with its other major neighbor, China, are also rather strained, as the two of the world's most populous countries and fastest growing major economies are bound to compete. In 2017, skirmishes between Chinese and Indian troops broke out over China's road construction in the disputed Doklam plateau in the Himalayas, but a major escalation was avoided. (RT)

### (14) Russia, US Set...

spacecraft 'Vega 2' touched down on its surface in July 1985. The 'Venera-D' program dares to fill that gap. The project has been led by Russia for almost two decades. In 2015, NASA got involved and a joint research team was established.

Apart from the lander, the mission is also expected to be equipped with an orbiter, a long-life station, and an aerial platform.

The latter, according to Zasova, would also include a special microscope to look for traces of bacterial life in the planet's atmosphere.

Technical details of the actual program are, however, yet to be defined. "We're not at that nuts-and-bolts stage," said Tracy Gregg, co-chair of the US-Russian committee for Venera-D. She added that "the earliest possible launch date we'd be looking at is 2026, and who knows if we could meet that." (RT)

### (15) 'NATO Solidarity...

In January, Germany's Ministry of Defense officially ruled out purchasing the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter to replace its aging Tornado fleet and is currently considering upgrading its air power to a fourth-generation Eurofighter Typhoon. Competing against the Franco-German armaments cooperation is Boeing's F-18 Super Hornet. Unlike the Typhoon, the F-18 is certified to carry US-made nuclear bombs as part of NATO's nuclear sharing agreement.

While stressing that France and other NATO allies will do their "best" to spend two percent of their GDP on defense, Parly also called on the US to respect the "autonomy" of European nations to build up their own defense bloc independent of NATO.

"Building a European autonomy should never be seen as a move against the United States," Parly told the Atlantic Council, in reference to the idea of a joint European Defense Force as advocated by French President Emmanuel Macron. "We need to step up to help without waiting for the US to always foot the bill."

Weary of Donald Trump's NATO diplomacy and use of European security as a bargaining chip, last year French President Emmanuel Macron resurrected a decades-old idea of creating a "real European army" independent from its key partner on the other side of the Atlantic. While Germany voiced support for Macron's proposition to better protect the continent against the perceived Russian threat, Trump found the idea simply "insulting," reiterating that NATO members must spend two percent of GDP on their protection. (RT)

### (16) Merkel on Huawei...

its allies to reject working with Huawei. In Germany's case, US Ambassador Richard Grenell sent a letter to the country's Economy Minister Peter Altmaier, warning of security concerns linked to Huawei's role in building critical infrastructure.

Ignoring Washington's warning may result in downgraded intelligence-sharing between the two nations, Grenell's letter said. Berlin has protested against US objections, noting that Washington has failed to provide any evidence that Chinese products would pose a security threat.

Former German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder lambasted Grenell's letter as "blatant extortion."

The Chinese electronics giant has not been sitting quietly as Washington moves to push it out of the international market. Huawei announced in early March that it was filing a lawsuit against the US government over its decision to ban federal agencies from using its products. (RT)

### (17) Turkey Escalates

But in November, Yigit Aksakoglu was detained and is now facing trial with 15 other civil society figures, writers and actors. For a while Aksakoglu's family hoped he would soon be released, but then on March 4, a 657-page indictment was released saying they had masterminded an attempt to overthrow Erdogan's government.

"I say to her, 'I promise I and your daddy's friends will get him out. Don't worry. This misunderstanding will end.' But a part of me is really scared," Unzile said. Supporters of the detainees say the indictment contains no evidence and many bizarre accusations, and marks a new low for a country where 77,000 people already been jailed in a crackdown following a failed military coup in 2016.

The European Union said that by seeking life sentences, prosecutors were creating a climate of fear in Turkey, while the U.S. State Department has said Washington is gravely concerned.

The arrests are the latest step in a crackdown which Turkey says is a necessary response to security threats that the country faces and which has involved widespread purges in the armed forces, ministries and state organisations. (Reuters)

### (18) Physicist Marcelo...

well surpasses that of the Nobels. The physicist focuses on at making complex subjects accessible. He has written on climate change, Einstein, hurricanes, black holes, the human science -- tracing the links between the sciences and the humanities, including philosophy. (AFP)