



Belgium, Austrian envoys assure continued cooperation with Afghanistan

KABUL: President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and his foreign minister, Philippe Busquin, Belgium's non-resident ambassador for Afghanistan, assured the continued cooperation of Belgium and Austria with Afghanistan over the past two decades, especially the country's cooperation in the framework of the Koford Support Mission for Afghanistan.

The non-resident ambassador of Belgium said that he was satisfied with the relations between Belgium and Afghanistan, and the international community, according to presidential statements.

While Philippe Busquin, Belgium's non-resident ambassador, President Ghani praised Belgium's assistance and cooperation in Afghanistan over the past two decades, especially the country's cooperation in the framework of the Koford Support Mission for Afghanistan.

The non-resident ambassador of Belgium said that he was satisfied with the relations between Belgium and Afghanistan in various fields.

Govt. finalizes 'Anti-Corruption Strategy'

KABUL: Second Vice-President Mohammad Sarwar Danish chaired the National Anti-Corruption Strategy special meeting, his office said Wednesday.

The meeting was attended by the director of Anti-Corruption Commission and other members of the Commission, representatives of the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Interior, Deputy Minister of Justice, the Supreme Audit Office, the Supreme Audit Office and the Administrative for Education and Civil Service Affairs, said Vice-President's office in a statement.

The vice president called fighting against corruption the most important national priority and international commitment of Afghanistan and called on all departments to make every effort to implement the legal framework to counter corruption, reforms in the security and providing services to all citizens and providing the most effective monitoring in this regard and some other issues.

The participants expressed their comments and suggestions on the issues that were confirmed during the meeting, the statement said.

In a huge shift, India opens channels with Taliban leaders

KABUL: India, for the first time opened channels of communication with Afghan Taliban leaders, including the group's deputy leader Mullah Ghani Buzdar, the Hindustan Times reported on Wednesday.

The report said the new channel "is a significant shift" from New Delhi's previous stance of engaging with the Taliban in any way.

The channel is being being by Indian security officials and has been limited to Taliban leaders and Indian officials are perceived as being "neutral" to avoid the sphere of influence of Pakistan and Iran, one of the people cited above said on condition of anonymity.

The communication has been underway for some months, though it continues to be exploratory in nature, sources told the Hindustan Times.

In the case of Mullah Buzdar, the first person cited above said messages were exchanged by the two sides though there was no confirmation of meeting, the report said. There have also been conversations with other Taliban factions despite a lack of trust on both sides, the source told the Hindustan Times.

India is a long-standing contributor to Afghanistan's reconstruction and development efforts with pledges of \$3 billion but has largely shied from regional programs such as Russia, China and Iran.

India, largely because of the group's long-standing ties with the Pakistani military establishment, according to the report.

There has been a huge shift in the relations between India and the Taliban leaders, another source told the Hindustan Times. The people who speak to the Hindustan Times "make it very clear that India's interests do not include the Taliban network, who are seen as proxies of the Pakistan military." There was no formal response from the Indian government to this report.

A visit to Kabul last month by joint secretary JP Singh, the external affairs minister's personal person for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, was part of the continuing engagement with Afghan leaders. "Singh engaged with various groups and made an assessment of the situation on the ground and got a first-hand sense of things," a source told the Hindustan Times.

Kabul will not accept non-peaceful solutions: NSA Mohib

KABUL: In a telephone conversation with human rights activist for Afghanistan, National Security Advisor, Hamdullah Mohib said Kabul would not accept any solutions which are based on non-peaceful means.

He also emphasized the need to stand up to the fresh wave of violence in Afghanistan.

This comes as Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif issued his country's readiness to set the ground for peace-oriented talks in Yemen and Afghanistan.

Zarif, following on his meeting with UN representatives for Yemen and Afghanistan, wrote on his Twitter account that Tehran is prepared to ease the peace process in Yemen and Afghanistan. He raised one key international intervention in the region, adding that peace in the region will be settled by the regional countries.

Zarif emphasized that his message on Yemen should be lifted and the peace process in Afghanistan should be continued with intra-Afghan talks.

The ministry says that the total known COVID-19 cases in Kabul, and the total number of reported deaths is 1,336.

Meanwhile, grossed figures showing that a large number of the Afghan population is infected with the Coronavirus and that of the reported by the Ministry of Public Health does not represent a complete picture, according to the number of cases in each high-impact area of the country.

USAF prepares for 'Over the Horizon' operations after Afghanistan withdrawal

KABUL: US Air Force is preparing an ongoing presence across the Middle East as the US prepares for "over-the-horizon" operations following the withdrawal from Afghanistan, a report from Air Force Magazine said yesterday.

The Air Force magazine reported that the department will budget about \$10 billion for an "enabling presence" in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

"We have a variety of air bases, they will stay for the time being, that's where our over-the-horizon capability will come from, both what is needed by the Air Force's continuing direct war effort of \$100 billion is \$2.5 billion for the area of responsibility."

Both sides had funding for "enabling operations" decision about a billion-dollar in 2022, though the department will budget about \$10 billion for an "enabling presence" in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

Ministry reports 1,843 new COVID-19 cases, 257 recoveries in Afghanistan

KABUL: Ministry of Public Health reported 1,843 positive cases of COVID-19 out of 5,844 samples tested in the last twenty-four hours, according to the ministry said in a statement.

The report also suggests that 257 people have died in Afghanistan as a result of the Coronavirus in the past 24 hours and 257 other recoveries.