# Pakistan should bring Taliban to negotiating table

As efforts towards maintaining peace and stability are underway in national and international level, unfortunately serious fighting and Taliban's violence causing civilian casualties are continuing across the country.

A number of Afghan political experts and government officials say Pakistan should convince the Taliban group for negotiating table with Afghanistan government to end the continued war and violence in the country.

President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani in sideline of Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity, Challenges and Opportunities said 10,000 fighters from Pakistan and other regional countries have entered Afghanistan and are fighting beside Taliban against Afghan defense and security forces.

"Intelligence estimates indicate the influx of over 10,000 jihadi fighters from Pakistan and other places in the last month, as well as, support from their affiliates and the transnational terrorist organizations," President Ghani said, adding that there is a consensus among credible international observers that the Taliban has not taken any steps to sever their relationship with terrorist organizations.

"Contrary to the repeated assurances by Prime Minister Khan and his generals that Pakistan does not find a Taliban take over in Afghanistan in Pakistan's interest, and assured of its use of force will use its power to influence to make the Taliban negotiate seriously, networks and organizations supporting the Taliban are openly celebrating the destruction of assets and capabilities of the Afghan people and state," he said.

President Ghani asked the region for sense of urgency, adding, Lessons learnt are clear as without regional consensus, and support peace does not break out. This come amid surge in Taliban attacks and violence across the country.

A number of Afghan experts believe that Pakistan should honestly play its active role in maintaining peace and stability in Afghanistan.

"Afghanistan is a country which has seriously endured harms from its neighboring countries particularly Pakistan; therefore, exerting pressures by the international community particularly US on supporters of terrorist groups can convince them towards honestly cooperation with Afghanistan," said Jamal Farahmand, an Afghan political expert.

Expressing serious concern over increasing terrorist groups and their activities in Afghanistan, Farahmand stressed peace would be maintained only if Pakistan stopped funding and supporting terrorist groups.

After Joe Biden took oath as the US President, there have seen changes in the region and now it is time that all regional countries should make use of opportunities in an effective way for maintaining peace and security in the region.

So far, Afghanistan has been able to raise its voice in national and international level for maintaining peace and stability in the country. Besides, the government has taken practical steps towards starting direct peace talks with the Taliban group. Therefore, the world should not leave Afghanistan alone in maintaining peace and stability to the country. It is worth mentioning that world continued support and cooperation with Afghanistan government can help maintain peace and stability in the country. **Suraya Raiszada**

# Eid al-Adha; concerns over increasing positive cases of COVID-19 in Afghanistan

Afghanistan health officials have warned of increasing positive cases of COVID-19 during Eid days if people do not observe health instructions. Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has asked the people to celebrate Eid al-Adha in home as there's still serious of increasing threat of coronavirus in the country.

Afghans are on the threshold of arriving and celebrating the Eid days. Crowds and influx of people are seen on streets, markets and superstores where they do observe social distance and other health instructions at all.

"I've recently recovered from COVID-19 disease and have no fear of the virus anymore; therefore, I would like to fully celebrate Eid days with my friends," said Mohammad Rafi, a Kabul resident.

He believes that there's still coronavirus in the country, but it is not so dangerous for which the people don't celebrate Eid ul Azha, while the day is special among Muslims around the world. He asked aged people to celebrate the Eid days at home.

But, another Kabul resident Nasir says he will celebrate Eid days with his family with observing all health instructions.

"Coronavirus is not so much dangerous. My family has successfully defeated the virus and recovered and now there is no fear from the virus anymore," Nasir said, but asking the people to be careful during the Eid days.

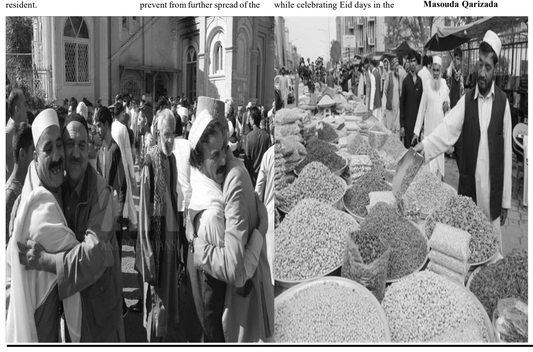
Nevertheless, most Afghans consider coronavirus as dangerous and advice others to observe all necessary health instructions to prevent from further spread of the virus in the country.

"I love to celebrate Eid ul Azha, but my health is more important than marking the Eid days outside. If celebrating Eid days threaten the life of my family members, I won't celebrate it," said Mahmoud, a Kabul resident.

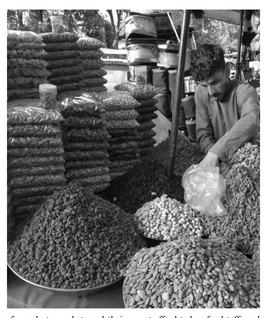
He added that COVID-19 would possibly increase if the people ignored health instructions during Eid days, saying that the people should observe social distance, wear mask and wash their hands regularly. Meanwhile, a number of Ulema have asked the people to take COVID-19 as serous and celebrate Eid al-Adha at their homes rather than outside as coronavirus is a deadly disease. The country's health officials have also asked the people to observe all necessary health instructions while celebrating Eid days in the country.

Eid al-Adha falls on the 10th day of Dhu al-Hijjah, the twelfth and final month in the Islamic calendar. This festival is celebrated throughout the Muslim world as a commemoration of Prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice everything for God.

It is worth mentioning that the Ministry of Public Health reported Saturday 378 new positive cases of COVID-19 out of 1,759 samples tested in the last 24 hours. The ministry also reported 49 deaths and 649 recoveries from COVID-19 in the same period. Data by the Public Health Ministry shows that the total number of cases is 140,602, total deaths stand at 6,147 and total recoveries are at 87,612. **Masouda Qarizada**



# Eid al-Adha; hopes for peace, hike of food prices



Following wave of concerns over increasing violence and surge in Taliban attacks almost in all parts of the country, Afghan citizens want to celebrate Eid al-Adha with increasing concerns over peace and other problems in the country.

In their interviews with The Kabul Times correspondent, a number of Kabul residents say celebrating this year's Eid is different comparing to previous Eids as all hope of positive results of peace talks between Afghanistan government and Taliban in Doha.

"As we're on the threshold of celebrating Eid al-Adha, firstly we're asking from both sides of the ongoing conflict to end war so that the people celebrate Eid days in a peaceful environment," said Murad and Arian, two Afghan citizens.

According to the people , they won't enjoy celebrating Eid days if violence continues in the country.

With arriving in Eid al-Adha, crowd of people are seen in each street of Kabul and other big cities of the country.

On other hand, a number of Kabul residents by complaining that shopkeepers and owners of supermarkets have increased price of foodstuffs, asking the people to control the price of foodstuffs and address problems of the people.

"The price of all key staples including foodstuffs is increasing in all wholesales; therefore, shopkeepers have to increase the price too," said Miraj, an Afghan shopkeeper. Increasing the price of foodstuffs comes amid surge in Taliban attacks and violence and arriving of Eid al-Adha.

A number of Afghan economists consider that turning influx of people to markets and their huge demand to buy necessary things is the main reason of increasing price of stuffs in Afghan markets. Nevertheless, a number of other experts believe that some traders and shopkeepers themselves increase the price of foodstuffs without consideration to any justice. "Today our people are on the threshold of arriving and celebrating Eid ul Azha; therefore, all supermarkets, clothing and food markets are full of visitors and purchasers buying foodstuffs, cookies and clothe to celebrate Eid days, but price of all things is trifold comparing to previous years," Arian said.

He said that poor people could not afford to buy foodstuffs and other necessary materials of life with this high price, asking the government to address their problems.

Each year prior to arriving Eid days, price of foodstuffs and other necessary staples of life increase unprecedently comparing to normal days in Afghanistan.

It is worth mentioning that Eid al-Adha falls on the 10th day of Dhu al-Hijjah, the twelfth and final month in the Islamic calendar. This festival is celebrated throughout the Muslim world as a commemoration of Prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice everything for God. **Shukria Kohistani**

# Award-Winning Indian Photojournalist Killed in Afghanistan

Officials in Afghanistan said Friday an international award-winning journalist from India had been killed during pre-dawn fighting in embattled southern Kandahar province.

Danish Siddiqui, a Reuters photojournalist and Pulitzer Prize winner, was covering clashes between Afghan government forces and the Taliban in Spin Boldak district, which fell to the insurgents earlier in the week.

"Deeply disturbed by the sad news of the killing of a friend, Danish Siddiqui in Kandahar last night," tweeted Farid Mamundzay, Kabul's ambassador to New Delhi.

"The Indian Journalist & winner of Pulitzer Prize was embedded with Afghan security forces. I met him 2 weeks ago before his departure to Kabul. Condolences to his family & Reuters," added Mamundzay.

Ross Wilson, the acting U.S. ambassador in Kabul, expressed his condolences to the family of the deceased journalist and his organization, reiterating Washington's call for a comprehensive Afghan cease-fire.

Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani also expressed sympathy, saying in a statement he was "saddened with the shocking reports that Reuters Photojournalist Danish Siddiqui was killed while covering the Taliban atrocities in Kandahar.

Siddiqui last tweeted from Kandahar on July 13, when Afghan forces launched a counteroffensive to try to retake Spin Boldak.

The slain photojournalist was based in the Indian city of Mumbai and won the Pulitzer Prize in 2018 for feature photography on the Rohingya refugee crisis.

"We are urgently seeking more information, working with authorities in the region," Reuters President Michael Friedenberg and Editor-in-Chief Alessandra Galloni said in a statement.

"Danish was an outstanding journalist, a devoted husband and father, and a much-loved colleague. Our thoughts are with his family at this terrible time."

Siddiqui told Reuters he had been wounded in the arm by shrapnel earlier on Friday while reporting on the clash. He was treated and had been recovering when Taliban fighters retreated from the fighting in Spin Boldak.

Among other major events he covered were the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests in 2019 and 2020, and the Nepal earthquake in 2015. At home, Siddiqui extensively reported on India's COVID-19 pandemic.

Global and local media watchdogs list Afghanistan as one of the worst for journalists.

"Afghanistan remains one of the most dangerous countries on earth for journalists," said Najib Sharifi, president of the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC).

The Kabul-based AJSC tracks attacks and threats against the media across Afghanistan and says violence has been increasing.

"Last year, particularly with the onset of targeted killings of journalists, opened a new chapter of threats against Afghan journalists. And we lost many journalists as a result," Sharifi told VOA.

At least eight journalists were killed in car bombings or shootings in the country between the start of in Intra Afghan Peace Negotiations in September 2020 and May of this year.

Can Afghanistan's Free Press Survive?

Assassins are killing Afghan journalists and forcing others to quit. The planned US pullout could make things worse.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan also described Siddiqui's death as "a painful reminder of mounting dangers faced by media in Afghanistan." In a tweet Friday, the mission called on authorities to investigate.

Spin Boldak is a major border crossing between landlocked Afghanistan and Pakistan, facilitating travel and trade activities.

The insurgents have recently captured Afghanistan's seven trade routes with neighboring countries, including Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, China, Iran and Pakistan.

The Taliban have stepped up battlefield attacks since the United States and NATO-allied militaries formally began withdrawing from Afghanistan on May 1, overrunning scores of districts and dramatically expanding insurgent influence to wide swaths of the country. **Monitoring Desk**