



## NPC approves some projects



KABUL: Chaired by the

IEA Deputy Prime Minister Mullah Abdul Ghani Beradar, the National Procurement Commission (NPC) held its weekly meeting, approving some projects, a statement from the Marmarin Palace said Saturday.

The meeting approved some projects including the construction of Bakhshabad

dam's diversion tunnels in Farah province, the completion of the Nural Jihad substation in Herat province, and supplying services for the airports of Kandahar and Herat provinces, the statement said.

According to a statement from the Deputy PM office, after discussing 31 procurement issues, including infrastruc-

ture, health, food and service projects related to different departments, the meeting also approved proposals from the ministry of justice, ministry of interior, ministry of finance and Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat agency in the country's eastern province of Herat as well.

The Kabul Times

## Minister Khairkhwa meets EU special representative for Afghanistan

KABUL: Acting Minister of Information and Culture Mullah Khairkhwa met with the Special Envoy of the European Union for Afghanistan Tomas Niklasson and his accompanying delegation, here in Kabul, a statement from the ministry said Saturday.

In the meeting, both sides exchanged views on various issues, including the political developments in Afghanistan, preservation of cultural and historical heritages, freedom of expression, particularly, the activities of the me-



dia violation commission, with the EU representative praising the efforts of the IEA in this field, according to the statement.

Minister Khairkhwa said that the ministry of information and

culture was committed to supporting the freedom of media in Afghanistan in accordance with the Islamic values and the national interests of the country, the statement quoted.

"The Ministry of Information and Culture pledged to keep in mind the Islamic values and high national interests of the country and that it will continue to fully support the freedom of expression and free activity of the mass media, as well as is committed to preserving cultural and historical heritage," the statement quoted the Khairkhwa as saying.

He asked the EU special representatives for economic cooperation with media institutions and journalists in the country, the statement concluded.

The Kabul Times

## Journalists' rights should not be traded, Hammad

KABUL: Director of Publications of the Ministry of Information and Culture, Mawlawi Abdul Haq Hammad said that some media-supporting organizations receive significant amounts of money in the name of journalists but do not use the funds appropriate-

ly.

Speaking in a meeting held by Afghanistan's Journalists Organization and Media Federation to find ways for the improvement of the media and nation, Hammad asked media-supporting institutions to distribute the money col-

lected in the name of journalists in a transparent.

Hammad warned if the entities supporting media were not brought under one umbrella and the rights of journalists continued to be violated, the government will cancel all these institutions.

"Either you all get united or we dissolve all and establish new organizations so that the rights of journalists are not misused and all collusions in this area are stopped," the official warned.

The projects and funding must transparently be received by all deserved journalists publicly in front of the camera, Hammad reiterated.

Meanwhile, the Journalists Organizations and Media Federation of Afghanistan said that there has now more access to information than in the past.

"Access to information has increased in the second half of 2022 and the spokespersons for government agencies are providing more information to media," said Taj Mohammad Ahmadzai, head of Afghanistan's Journalist Organizations and Media Federation.

The Kabul Times



## National tree planting campaign kicked off in Kabul

KABUL: The Kabul Municipality and the National Environment Protection Authority (NEPA) have jointly launched the national tree planting campaign by planting a tree on the Nadir Khan hill here in the capital Kabul.

In the ceremony held late on last week, the Kabul Municipality's Greenery Department Mawlawi Abdul Wakil Mutawakel spoke about further coordination between the people and the relevant departments for the development and greening of the capital city.

Mutawakel called planting trees important and effective for the protection of environment and health of human beings and said that the Kabul Municipality was ready to plant 600,000 saplings in various parts of the capital.

"Thousands of saplings have been planted in various recreational parks and green areas of the city since February 21," said the official asking the people for fulfill-

ing their religious and national duties for the greening of the Kabul city. The Kabul Municipality said it had to plant thousands of trees including fruit ones in vari-

ous parts of Kabul city and will work together with the people for the irrigation and protection of the planted trees.

The Kabul Times



## FM Muttaqi eyeing EU embassies reopened in Kabul



KABUL: Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi met with the European Union (EU) delegation Raffaele Iodice and the EU special representative Tomas Niklasson for Afghanistan, the other day, according to a statement from the

ministry.

In the meeting with the EU delegation, Amir Khan Muttaqi asked for the reopening of the EU embassies in Kabul and assured of ensuring full security of their diplomatic missions in the country, the statement said.

Meanwhile, the office of the Kandahar governor published a statement and said: "Raffaele Iodice and Tomas Niklasson have also met with the deputy provincial governor Mawlawi Hayatullah Mubarak and a number of officials in the province."

Mubarak asked both European officials to cooperate with the Islamic Emirate in health sectors, supporting orphaned children, alternatives to poppy cultivation and construction of dams in the country.

After the resumption of power by the Islamic Emirate, most of the foreign countries closed their embassies and consulates in Afghanistan, while Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Pakistan were the only countries that kept their diplomatic missions operational in the country. **The Kabul Times**

## Agriculture minister seeking Turkish cooperation

KABUL: Acting Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) Mawlawi Ataullah Omari, in a meeting with Cihad Erginay, Turkish Ambassador to Kabul, discussed bilateral cooperation in the development of agriculture and livestock in Afghanistan, a statement from the ministry said the other day.

Omari said that Türkiye had a wide experience in the agriculture sector and asked for its cooperation in the agriculture sector, according to the statement.

Meanwhile, Turkish ambassador Erginay said that with my trips to several provinces of Af-



ghanistan, I have found this country to be a suitable place for agriculture and my country will co-

operate with Afghanistan in this area.

The Kabul Times

## Afghan Tour to build longest cable car in Nuristan



KABUL: With the efforts of the Nuristan local government, the Afghan Tour Corporation of the Ministry of Information and Culture wants to start work on a cable car project in the near future. The Afghan Tour Corporation and an engineering team of Kabul's Technical and Vocational Institute have already arrived in the province to start preliminary work on the project.

The team's members accompanied by Nuristan provincial director of information and culture have recently met with the provincial director of human resource-

es to share more information about the project with him.

According to the engineering team, the cable car will connect two hilltops of Nuristan Mountains with 1,500 meters long and 400 meters high.

Provincial director of information and culture Mawlawi Samiulhaq said that the ministry of information and culture will provide sufficient budget for the project, adding that practical work on the project will be soon started after the engineering team finishes with the survey and assessment.

The engineering team consid-

ers the cable car project as unprecedented and says that with the cable cars, tourists will easily tour the highest peaks of the Paroon's mountains.

Nuristan is located in the eastern part of Afghanistan. The province is known for its beautiful mountain hilltops. Nuristan people praise continued efforts of the province's local government towards starting work on the cable project and other steps that have been taken for attraction of local and foreign tourists to the province.

The Kabul Times



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# IEA committed to fulfil Doha agreement with U.S.



Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Mullah Abdul Ghani Beradar during the celebration of the 3rd anniversary of the Doha agreement said that the Islamic Emirate was committed to fulfilling the agreement with the United States and called it a positive step for the world and Mujahid people of Afghanistan.

Doha agreement was signed between the former United States special representative for Afghanistan's reconciliation Zulmay Khalilzad and the Islamic Emirate's former representative Mullah Abdul Ghani Beradar, on 29 February 2020 in Doha the Capital of Qatar, which paved the way for bringing sustainable peace and withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan.

"During the talks the Islamic Emirate's political commission by consideration of all national values and full faith to Almighty Allah, the negotiations did with the United States and small and big issues in accordance with the Sharia and national interests were discussed," Beradar said.

Beradar added, nothing was signed in Doha agreement which is hidden from the Afghan people, while, in the negotiations, we were told a lot that you have made a deal with the United States, be-

cause it is a great power in the world level and now, we proved that no deal has been made with the United States, there are no foreign military bases in the country and the Islamic Emirate has entire control of Afghanistan.

According to him, the Islamic Emirate had not violated the agreement, while, the U.S. has repeatedly violated the agreement and frozen Afghanistan's assets, still kept some key leaders of the Islamic Emirate in the United Nations blacklist, imposed sanctions on Afghanistan and has prevented the world countries to have engaged with the Islamic Emirate.

"Islamic Emirate wants peaceful and positive engagement with the United States of America and the world countries and the imposed sanctions should be removed and they should resolve the issues through diplomatic channels," Beradar further said.

Doha agreement within eight months of negotiations signed between the former United States special envoy for Afghanistan's peace talks Zulmay Khalilzad and the Islamic Emirate former political representative Mullah Abdul Ghani Beradar, on 29 February 2020 in Doha the Capital of Qatar.

The agreement was signed dur-

ing the administration of Donald Trump, which paved the way for the complete withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan, but still, the Islamic Emirate and the United States accuse each other in completely implementing it.

The ex-U.S. Secretary of States Mike Pompeo had said: "The Islamic Emirate should fulfill all articles of the agreement and take the necessary steps and the sustainable peace ground and intra-Afghans talks should be provided in Afghanistan."

Former United States' special representative for Afghanistan peace talks Zulmay Khalilzad, who had led the American negotiators with the officials of the Islamic Emirate, started the first phase of talks on 12 October 2018 in Doha the capital of Qatar.

Eventually, after eighteen months of negotiations the agreement in a formal ceremony and in the presence of representatives from 60 world countries and international organizations was signed between the United States and the Islamic Emirate in Doha the capital of Qatar.

Sayed Akbar Agha one of the political affairs analysts says the agreement was in the interest of Afghanistan and was the result of Afghans' sacrifices and its nega-

tive point was that the Islamic Emirate is far from the world and so far, none of the world countries has recognized the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) and it should be recognized.

Former U.S. special envoy for the Afghanistan peace talks Zulmay Khalilzad who played a mediator role between the U.S. State Department and the leaders of the Islamic Emirate has explained that with the escape of Ashraf Ghani from Afghanistan the Doha agreement's articles have not been fully implemented.

Member of the Political Office of the Islamic Emirate in Qatar Suhail Shaheen in the celebration of the 3rd anniversary of the Doha agreement has said: "The agreement was a turning point in the history of Afghanistan and the importance of the agreement will be remembered by the next generation."

He added that some agreement's articles including removing the names of the leaders of the Islamic Emirate from the United Nations blacklist and imposed sanctions and the recognition of the IEA, so far has not been practicalized and urged that the U.S. should pay attention in this regard.

Shukria Kohistani

## Food for thought

*"Hijab has direct link to morality of individuals in society."*

## People against nontransparent aid distribution process

Tons of foodstuff from some world countries, including the regional and neighboring nations poured into the country to be distributed among the poverty-stricken people, after the change in the political system more than one year ago.

World countries cut off political cooperation, after the Islamic Emirate's takeover of the country in mid-August 2021, but continued their help with humanitarian aids to the people of Afghanistan, especially after the U.S. freezing of up to 9 billion U.S. dollar in the country's central bank assets.

The freezing cash asset of the country caused the level of unemployment and poverty rise in the country. However, some world countries started aiding the poverty-stricken people, mainly, by sending wheat, flour and other edible items.

Since the start of the humanitarian aids in Afghanistan, most of destitute families complain about lack of transparency in the distribution process.

They said most of the deserving people have not received the aids or received less, while wide numbers of undeserving people have been benefiting the aid. This is due to nepotism and a process carried out by the corrupt area chieftains and the failure of the Islamic Emirate's related officials to deeply supervise the process.

Some say they have not yet received aids from any organizations, despite being registered at the doorsteps of their houses, while others even owning own cars and houses and were economically sound, receive the aids.

People thought the aid distribution process would differ with the one in the past government, after the IEA takeover, but they are now disappointed and said in both former and current systems, the poor are ignored.

During the former regimes, the aid distribution process has been full of corruption and the area chieftains were distributing aids to those who have either been their relatives or undeserving people receiving the aids in condition to share with the distributing teams' personnel.

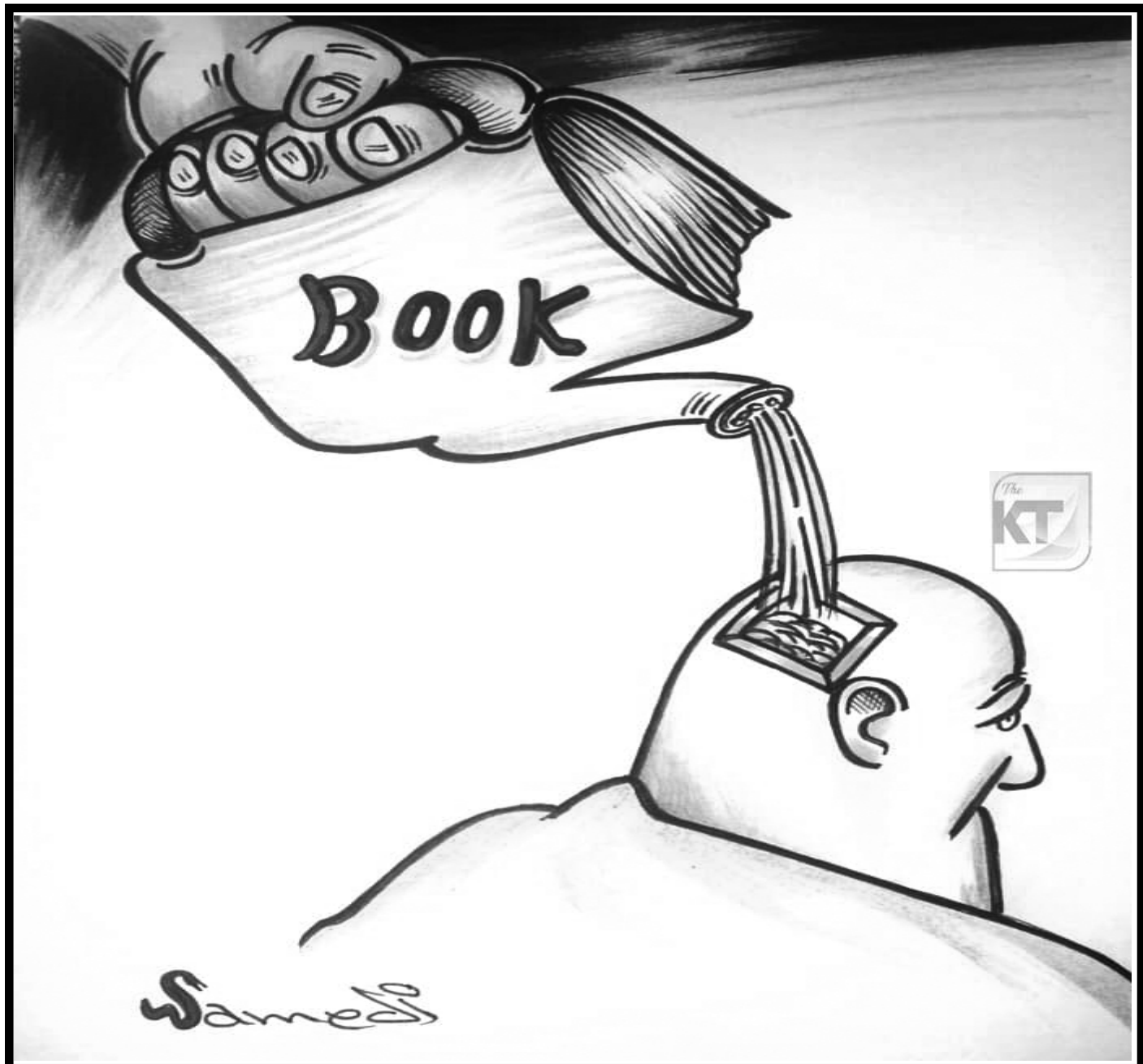
This and similar factors coupled to help collapse the system.

The Islamic Emirate authorities should take the issue serious and give the rights to those deserved, on one hand and on the other, any corrupt individuals including those belonging to the government organs, even if they were ministers, deputy ministers or other high-ranking officials, should be identified and taken to the law.

The process could be just, fair and successful, when honest individuals and people of virtue were appointed to the most important aid-distributing agencies, including the capital and the provinces.

Most importantly, when any of the related officials or personnel are found corrupt, should not only be dismissed of the office, but soon also be arrested and taken to the law.

Such anti-corruption acts by the government monitoring offices, either small or big, would be a lesson to others and help prevent the repetition of the heinous phenomenon, in addition of helping to the elevation of the Islamic Emirate's credibility among the people.





Model of political system in Islam:  
Some ulamas’ views on  
voting and elections

Part VI

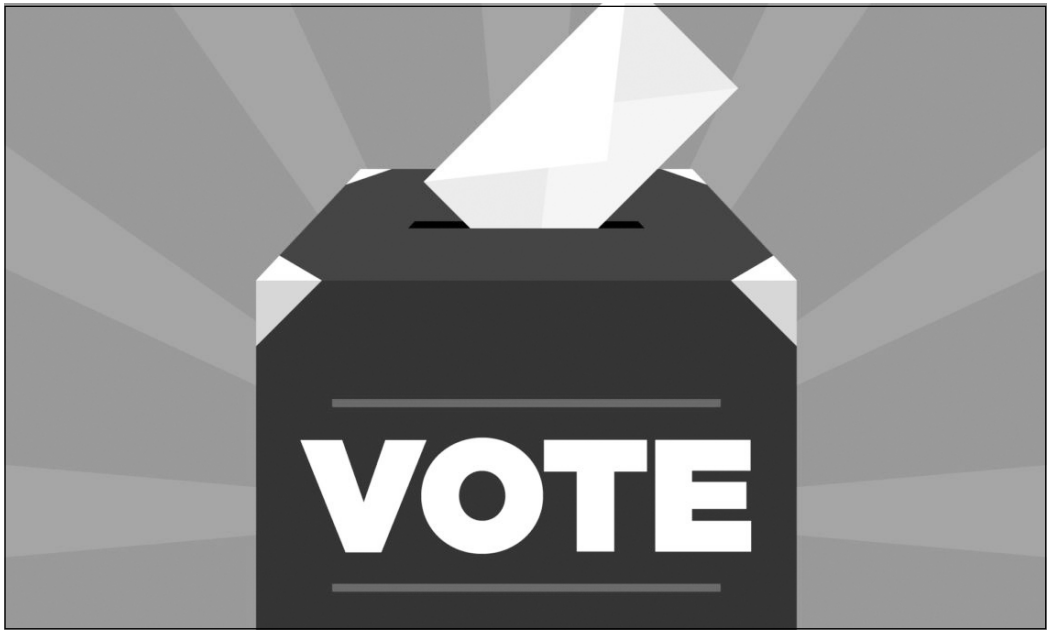
A number of ulama consider that it is okay if the head of the state is elected through the elections. They also consider efforts and participation in elections as religious duty if followed for the victory and supporting good candidates. According to this group of ulamas, electing a proper pious and able person as head of the state through the elections is a good option.

Now if the candidate really has the ability to run a government and is ready to do it with full passion and faith, his candidacy is okay, but it would have been better if he had not stood for it, but a group of Muslims had asked for his candidacy.

Nevertheless, a number of ulamas say if the right is about to be lost, a proper and knowledgeable person can himself ask for doing the duty what Yousuf did: He ‘Yousuf’ said: “Give me charge of the storehouses of the land, I am a knowledgeable guardian”.

But, if a person does not have the qualifications for the seat and is still nominated for it, then before the destruction of the hereafter, he commits the crime against the nation as before that, his responsibility was only to himself and his family, but now he’s responsible and accountable for the whole nation and he’ll be accountable in hereafter.

A number of religious ulamas believe that voting for a candidate has three qualities in accordance to Sharia:



1. Testimony: The voter testifies in favor of the candidate that he is qualified for the seat and carries out his duties with full honesty. Now if he is not qualified and suitable for the seat, the voter will pay the price as he was wrong in his testimony and told a lie, which is a big sin after ‘shirk’.

2. The second position of the vote is intercession and recommendation as Allah, the Almighty says about intercession: “Whoever intercedes for a good cause will have a reward therefrom; and whoever intercedes for an evil cause will have a burden therefrom. And ever is Allah, over all things, a Keeper.

3. The third position of the vote is advocacy in public

rights: the voting candidate chooses his representative in such rights that those rights belong to the whole nation; So, if he did not vote for the right person, in this case, the voter is accountable for his vote.

The result is that the position of the vote in the election is the same as of testimony; therefore, telling lie in testimony is illegal as telling a lie is the greatest sin, and taking any compensation for testimony is also illegal. To summarize, a voter is accountable for his vote.

The voter will commit a big sin if he votes for the wrong person.

The voter also commits a big sin if he sells his vote or gets money for his vote.

Religious ulamas believe that with these principles, types of governance, practical work mechanisms and accountability are related to the situations of each era as different types of governance have been run in the past 14 centuries. So, it will be very good for the current leadership of Afghanistan to come up with more flexibility to bring some reforms in the political, judiciary and executive system to gain the trust of the people. In the light of the suggestion of ulamas, they should form a government which will be a good example for the Islamic countries and go for positive engagement with the world countries.

Concluded

Dubai to hand over consulate of  
Afghanistan to Islamic Emirate



Recently, developments have been made in the correct and positive policies of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), while, Dubai is going to officially hand over the Afghanistan consulate to the Islamic Emirate in the coming days which is a positive step and shows the appropriate actions and commitments of the Islamic Emirate.

Lately, the Iran-based Afghanistan embassy and its consulates have officially been handed over to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA)

although, the Islamic Republic of Iran has not officially recognized the Islamic Emirate, but this step of the Islamic Republic of Iran is a step towards recognition of the Islamic Emirate.

Also, the Afghanistan consulate in Istanbul has officially been handed over to the officials of the Islamic Emirate.

The step by Dubai will pave the way for Afghan traders, as Afghan traders are working there, and their challenges will be resolved.

Acting Minister of Foreign

Affairs Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi in a meeting with the head of the European Union delegation Raffaella Iodice, and special representative of the EU Tomas Niklasson for Afghanistan, asked the European officials to reopen their embassies in Kabul.

“The security is ensured than ever before in the country and world countries without any fear can reopen their embassies and consulates in the Kabul,” Muttaqi said.

This is to be noted that the Islamic Emirate do its best to

pave the way for reopening of the world countries’ embassies and consulates in Afghanistan, and it is necessary for the world countries to stop propaganda against the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and they should take steps towards positive engagement with the IEA. It is worth mentioning that the international community has slowly realized the Islamic Emirate and it is recognized by the international community as the true and real representative of the people of Afghanistan

Mohammad Daud

IEA celebrates Doha  
agreement anniversary

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan celebrated the 3rd year anniversary of the Doha peace agreement on Wednesday tenth of Hot month (Solar year), which the agreement was signed between the former United States special envoy for Afghanistan’s peace talks Zalmay Khalilzad and the Islamic Emirate representative Mullah Abdul Ghani Beradar, on 29 February 2020 in Doha the Capital of Qatar.

The Leadership of the Islamic Emirate called the agreement the most important achievement and the beginning of a great victory against the U.S. and its allies.

Minister of the Tribes and Borders Noorullah Muneer said: “Islamic Emirate won the world war in Afghanistan.”

The Islamic Emirate announced in the celebration of the Doha Agreement anniversary that the agreement paved the way for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan.

“Three years ago, withdrawal agreement of foreign forces from Afghanistan was signed between the officials of the Islamic Emirate and the United States in the presence of representatives from 60 world countries and international organizations,” the Islamic Emirate said:

According to the state-

ment, all these achievements were the results of the Afghans’ sacrifices which freed Afghanistan from 20-year foreign occupation and paved the way for the establishment of an Islamic system in the country.

The Islamic Emirate hopes that the security and the Islamic system that has been established should remain firm and stable in the country.

The agreement was signed on 28 February 2020 and the two sides agreed that during the evacuation of U.S. military forces, the intra-Afghan talks will be started and the Islamic Emirate should not allow Afghanistan’s soil to be used for any terrorist activities against other countries, particularly the U.S. and its allies, as well as the Afghan territory not be used as safe havens for terrorist groups.

When Joe Biden was selected as the President of the United States, his administration quickly started the evacuation of U.S. forces from Afghanistan and this action caused the Islamic Emirate to quickly take entire control of Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Mullah Abdul Ghani Beradar said: “The United States of America has illegally frozen the assets of Afghanistan, while it

has not positive engagement with the Islamic Emirate, it has avoided other countries to have engagement with the Islamic Emirate.”

Beradar added that positive engagement with the world countries was a need and the Islamic Emirate wants peaceful and positive engagement with the world.

On the other hand, Acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum Mawlawi Shahabuddin Delawar said that the United States had repeatedly violated the Doha agreement and the American unman planes are still breaking the country’s airspace and sometimes launches strikes in some certain parts of the country.

The U.S. is also behind the failure of the United Nations’ recognition of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

However, Afghans consider the Doha agreement as the start of a sustainable and permanent peace and the end of two decades of war and misery in the country.

Mohammad Alim Dadkhah one of the Kabul residents says that security has been ensured in the country and it is the responsibility of everyone to cooperate with the government in maintaining security in the country.

Saïda Ahmadi

Work underway to prevent further  
damages caused by Amu River

Residents of five provinces in the country’s north and north-east are facing with problems due to the none-stopped erosion of their agricultural lands by Amu River as there are no walls built to prevent from damages made by the river.

Meanwhile, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has dispatched a high-level delegation led by acting minister of agriculture, irrigation and livestock Mawlawi Attaullah Omari to assess the damages caused by Amu River waters to the agricultural fields.

Some residents in Northern provinces bordering the Amu River have complained against the none-stopped erosion of their agricultural lands by Amu River due to the non-existence of protective walls on the riverside.

The residents made fresh complaints in this regard at a time when a high-level government delegation has recently traveled to northern provinces to oversee the damage to the agriculture lands made by the Amu River waters threatening the country’s northern provinces particularly, Takhar, Kunduz, Balkh and Jawzjan, where the people depend on incomes coming from agricul-

tural products.

The 534,769 square km of the Amu River drainage basin with 1,200 km length includes most of Tajikistan, the southwest corner of Kyrgyzstan, the northeast corner of Afghanistan, a narrow portion of eastern Turkmenistan and the western half of Uzbekistan. During the spring season, the river’s waters increase and start damaging agricultural fields in Afghanistan side.

Following problems of the residents of the districts of Takhar, Kunduz in the north-east of Afghanistan and Balkh and Jawzjan provinces in the country’s north, where the people live along the banks of the Amu River, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has tasked a delegation to assess the damages made by the river.

The delegation that has visited different districts of the respective provinces says that the people of these areas are facing a disaster. Mawlawi Attaullah Omari, the acting Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock of the Islamic Emirate, who was leading the delegation, says that there is a fear that thousands more families will be displaced from the districts bordering the Amu River.

“Dozens of villages, houses, schools, madrassas and holy places such as mosques have been destroyed by the Amu River and the people have been also displaced. The river’s waters have washed people’s houses and the residents live on the sands under the green sky. They have no water to drink, no place to live, no road and health center. These displaced people are facing with lots of problems,” said acting minister of agriculture, irrigation and livestock.

According to the delegation, the Islamic Emirate’s council of ministers have recently allocated 2 billion afghani urgent budget to construct protective walls along the Amu River in four provinces, but the amount is not sufficient as more 4 billion afghani is needed to address the problems in the area. Work is underway to prevent the damages made by Amu River in the country’s northern provinces. Meanwhile, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan leadership has asked relevant domestic and international aid organizations to cooperate with the IEA and local people to solve this problem.

Samiullah Momand

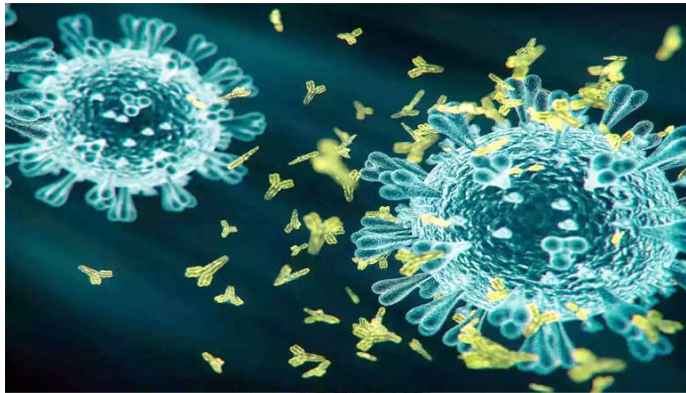






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# WHO urges countries to reveal intelligence on COVID-19 origins



The World Health Organization has urged all countries to reveal what they know about the origins of COVID-19 following claims by the United States that the virus was likely leaked from a Chinese laboratory and which has led to furious denials from Beijing.

US Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Christopher Wray told Fox News this week that the FBI had assessed the source of the COVID-19 pandemic was “most likely a potential lab incident in Wuhan”, the Chinese city that hosts a virus research laboratory and was the location of the first COVID infections in late 2019.

“If any country has information about the origins of the pandemic, it’s essential for that infor-

mation to be shared with WHO and the international scientific community,” WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Friday.

“Not so as to apportion blame but to advance our understanding of how this pandemic started, so we can prevent, prepare for and respond to future epidemics and pandemics,” the WHO chief said.

The WHO has not abandoned efforts to identify the source of the pandemic, he said.

“WHO continues to call for [China] to be transparent in sharing data and to conduct the necessary investigations and share the results. To that effect, I have written to, and spoken with, high-level Chinese leaders on multiple occasions, as recently as just a few

weeks ago.”

The WHO chief also said that “all hypotheses on the origins of the virus remain on the table”.

Chinese officials have angrily denied the FBI’s claim of their country being the origin of the pandemic, calling it a smear campaign against Beijing.

Wray also told Fox News television that China had thwarted efforts to identify the origin of the virus.

“I will just make the observation that the Chinese government ... has been doing its best to try to thwart and obfuscate the work here, the work that we’re doing, the work that our US government and close foreign partners are doing,” Wray said.

Politicisation of the search to identify the origin of the virus was making the scientific work harder and the world less safe as a result, Tedros added.

Tedros said there was a moral imperative to find out how the pandemic started, for the sake of the millions who lost their lives to COVID-19 and those living with long COVID.

Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO’s COVID-19 technical lead, said the organisation had reached out to the US mission in Geneva for more information regarding the

FBI chief’s claims.

So far, however, they did not have access to the data on which the US reports were based, said Van Kerkhove, who is an infectious disease epidemiologist.

“It remains vital that that information is shared”, to help move the scientific studies forward, she added.

China’s foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said last week that Beijing had been transparent in the search for the origin of the virus. She countered that the US should look to its own biological laboratories scattered across the world when searching for the virus’s source.

“It is the US who should respond to the world’s questions and concerns over Fort Detrick and its military and biological labs across the world,” Mao said.

“By politicising the issue, the US will not succeed in discrediting China. Instead, it will only hurt the US’s own credibility.”

As of February 21, there have been more than 757 million virus infections and 6.85 million related deaths, according to the WHO’s global COVID-19 trackers. The WHO also acknowledges that the true death toll is far higher.

**Aljazeera**

## Man sets himself on fire on US university campus after ‘mental episode’

A man set himself on fire at the University of California at Berkeley in the US on Wednesday during an alleged severe mental health episode, the New York Post reported. The incident was captured on video and has since gone viral, with more than 350,000 views on social media platforms. The incident was reported to authorities at 4:17 p.m. local time after the man, who has not been named, was seen walking at Sproul Plaza on campus completely engulfed in flames.

Bystander videos that have surfaced online show onlookers trying to help the man by pouring water on him and swatting at the flames with their jackets.

Despite their efforts, the victim did not respond to their pleas to get on the ground, continuing to wander around in full view of horrified passersby.

Officers with the UC Berkeley Police Department and Berkeley firefighters arrived and managed to get the situation under control, after which the victim was taken to Highland Hospital in Oakland.

According to the Berkeley Scanner, the victim, believed to be in his 20s, suffered second- and third-degree burns over most of his body. Alarabiya

# Severe storms in southern US kill at least nine people

Storms producing tornadoes and heavy rains have rolled through parts of the southern United States, killing at least nine people and leaving more than one million customers without power, according to authorities.

The National Weather Service said the powerful storm had mostly left the south of the country by late Friday and was moving to the northeastern US, where it was forecast to cause heavy snow and sleet from southeastern Michigan east to New York state. Parts of central New York and southern New England may see more than 30cm (a foot) of snow by Saturday afternoon.

Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear said at least two tornadoes sparked by the storm system ripped through the western part of his state on Friday.

The governor said on social media that at least three people were killed in the severe weather, though he did not provide any more details.

A fourth person was killed by the storm in Kentucky, a woman who died when a tree fell on the car she was in, the Fayette County coroner’s office said.

Aside from the tornadoes, Beshear said thunderstorms in Kentucky were generating winds of 129km (80 miles) per hour, which are “strong enough to blow tractor-trailers off the road”.

Beshear had declared a state of emergency before the storm and on Friday evening the mayor of Louisville, Craig Greenberg, followed suit because of the severe storms, high winds, widespread damage and danger to lives and property.

“I encourage everyone in our community to exercise extreme caution this evening, and in the coming days – do not drive through standing water, do not approach downed power lines, or do anything that would put the lives of anyone at risk,” Greenberg said in a Facebook post.

Alabama Governor Kay Ivey said on social media that three people were killed in the storm in her state, though she provided no details.

US politics, Canada’s multiculturalism, South America’s geopolitical rise—we bring you the stories that matter.

In Arkansas, a man died when he was swept into a swollen river by floodwaters after driving on a flooded street, according to the Scott County Sheriff’s Department.

In Mississippi, Governor Tate Reeves said on social media on Friday that overnight storms producing high winds had resulted in one person’s death, though he gave no more details. Aljazeera

# Carbon capture: What is it and how does it fight climate change?



The UK government is set to announce where a ground-breaking power station will be built.

The carbon capture plant is designed to stop most of the carbon dioxide (CO2) it produces being released into the atmosphere.

How does carbon capture work?

Burning fossil fuels like oil, gas and coal to generate electricity emits CO2, which is the main driver of climate change.

The carbon capture process stops most of the CO2 produced from being released, and either reuses it or stores it underground.

The UK government wants a new power station where carbon dioxide is captured and stored under the North Sea - either in old oil and gas reservoirs, or permeable rocks known as saline aquifers.

Carbon capture gfx

Why is carbon capture needed?

Carbon capture power plants are part of the government's commitment to remove carbon from UK electricity production by 2035. It hopes to build at least one by the mid 2020s, although

that deadline now looks improbable.

There has been a big expansion in renewable energy in the last decade - in particular the use of offshore wind - but the unresolved question is how to keep the lights on when the wind isn't blowing.

Carbon capture power stations are seen as part of the solution, along with the increased use of nuclear energy, and other rapidly-evolving technologies such as hydrogen.

A really simple guide to climate change

Is the UK on track to meet its climate targets?

Where will the new power station be built?

There are three proposals under consideration: one at Keadby in north Lincolnshire and two near Redcar on Teesside.

All would require the construction of a pipeline to transport the captured CO2 under the North Sea for storage.

How much CO2 will the power station remove?

In 2021, the UK emitted 425 million tonnes of CO2. That's fallen by almost 50% since 1990.

The amount being captured at these proposed power stations is very small by comparison.

None of the three proposed carbon capture plants claims to capture more than two million tonnes a year.

The government has set a target to capture between 20 and 30 million tonnes of CO2 a year by 2030. That could involve other industrial processes as well as power generation.

How much will carbon capture cost?

The technology has been around for decades. It's mainly been used in industries where captured CO2 can be reused, for example to force out oil and gas from underground reserves.

There are no such plans to use the CO2 from the new proposed power stations.

The cost of a new gas power station at Keadby, providing electricity for nearly a million homes, is £350m.

Catherine Raw of energy company SSE told the BBC that building a similar sized gas power station with carbon capture would roughly double the cost.

The hope is that the price might fall over time. The cost of renewable energy for example has plummeted in the last decade.

There are those who see carbon capture as too expensive and believe the money would be better spent on renewables and power storage (like batteries).

"These power stations look like another excuse for the government to show preference to their friends in the oil and gas industry, making energy more expensive to everyone else's disadvantage," says Dr Doug Parr of campaign group Greenpeace UK.

BBC

# Vanuatu: Pacific nation reels from twin cyclones and earthquake

The Pacific nation of Vanuatu has declared a state of emergency as it reels from an earthquake and two cyclones in as many days.

The 6.5 magnitude quake struck on Friday, a day after category four Cyclone Judy swept through the islands.

The storm caused widespread damage and flooding across the country. No casualties have been reported yet.

A category three storm, Cyclone Kevin, arrived on Friday, bringing destructive winds of up to 130km/h (81mph).

Hundreds of people had fled to evacuation centres in the capital Port Vila ahead of the second cyclone.

"We are a resilient people. We will get through this," Vanuatu's Prime Minister Ishmael Kalsakau told broadcaster RNZ Pacific on Friday.

Aid workers have described the situation as unprecedented.

"It's crazy, Vanuatu is used to natural disasters, but I think this is the first time it has had two cyclones back to back," said UNICEF's Eric Durpaire, according to AFP news agency.

He said he had heard reports that Wednesday's storm had ripped off the roof of an infants ward in Vanuatu Central Hospital.

Cyclone Judy flooded roads



## Pentagon chief’s trip to Middle East to focus on Iran threats: Official

The Pentagon chief is heading to the Middle East this weekend, where his primary focus will be Iran, a senior US defense official said Friday.

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, who was previously head of the US Central Command (CENTCOM), is scheduled to visit Jordan, Egypt and Israel. Sources familiar with his trip have said that Austin will also stop in Iraq, where US combat troops officially withdrew at the end of 2021.

US troops are still present in Iraq at the invitation of Baghdad on advise and assist missions.

Over 30,000 US troops are deployed across multiple bases in the Middle East.

But with Iran enriching uranium at levels close to weapons-grade, its continued support for terrorist groups and proxies across the region, and its supply of drones to Russia, Tehran has become an increasingly acute threat to Washington and its allies.

The Biden administration has long favored a diplomatic solution to Iran’s nuclear weapons program, which Iran claims is for civilian purposes.

Speaking to reporters at the Pentagon, the senior US defense official reiterated the president’s continued desire to address Iran’s nuclear ambitions via diplomacy.

“Secretary Austin’s job is to ensure that should the President need other options, there are credible options from the Department of Defense available,” said the official who was speaking on condition of anonymity.

Citing senior Biden administration officials as saying that reviving the 2015 nuclear deal is not currently on the table, the official noted that the Pentagon has been working on the “full constellation” of Iranian threats.

The official pointed to Iran’s cultivation of non-state actors and proxies that threaten the US and its partners, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Tehran’s aggression at sea, cyber threats, drone threats and its ballistic missile program are several other issues the US is working to counter. “Every partner, every capital you visit in the Middle East, will talk about their concerns related to all of these threats,” the official said. “So Secretary Austin will seek to... consult with our partners on how we can most effectively push back and undermine them going forward.”

Senior Biden administration officials were recently in Riyadh, where they met with GCC counterparts for talks on Iran, counterterrorism and addressing other common threats.

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