



Kabul
28 / 13



Herat
31 / 14



Nangarhar
35 / 22



Balkh
29 / 17



Heart of Asia

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Iran, Pakistan discuss Afghanistan peace process

Ambassador of Pakistan to the Islamic Republic of Iran Rahim Hayat Qureshi met and held talks with Iranian Foreign Ministry's Special Envoy for Afghanistan Mohammad Ebrahim Taherian on Monday.

In this bilateral talk, the two sides discussed a wide range of regional developments including situation of Afghanistan and peace process in this country.

Pakistan envoy to Tehran in a tweet added that Iran's special envoy for Afghanistan affairs was looking forward to cooperating with his Pakistani counterpart to achieve common goals for peace, wellbeing and stability in Afghanistan.

It should be noted that Ambassador of Pakistan to the Islamic Republic of Iran Rahim Hayat Qureshi kicked off his mission in Iran after submitting his credential to Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in March 2020.



Afghan Media Protests Amendments to Mass Media Law

At least 20 Afghan media outlets and media-supporting organizations in an open letter to President Ashraf Ghani raised their concerns about the possibility of restrictions on media outlets and on the freedom of speech, as the government has suggested amendments to the mass media law that was enacted in 2006.

The 2006 mass media law has 54 articles. The new amendments have been approved by the cabinet and the draft is set to be sent to the parliament for ratification.

The letter mentions that the proposed amendments are in contravention of the articles 7, 34, 120 and 122 of Afghanistan's Constitution.

Article 34 of the constitution says, "freedom of expression shall be inviolable" and "every Afghan shall have the right to express thoughts through speech, writing, illustrations as well as other means in accordance with provisions of this constitution." It also says that "every Afghan ...

P3

EU Sends Emergency Supplies to Kabul By Air, Pledges €39M in Aid



As part of the EU's global coronavirus response, an "EU Humanitarian Air Bridge" flight departed on Monday from Maastricht, Netherlands bound for Kabul, Afghanistan, the EU said in a statement. The shipment includes

"100 tons of life-saving materials to supply EU-funded humanitarian partners," the statement said. The EU is also providing a new aid package of €39 million to boost coronavirus response as well as to help victims of war, forced

displacement and natural disasters in Afghanistan, the press release said.

"At this difficult time, the EU continues to stand by the most vulnerable in Afghanistan. The coronavirus pandemic poses

huge logistical challenges for the humanitarian community, while the needs remain high in critical areas. With this air bridge, the EU is delivering vital assistance such as food, nutrition, water, shelter to ensure aid reaches as many people as possible and to help support the people of Afghanistan," said Commissioner for Crisis Management, Janez Lenarčič.

EU humanitarian projects in Afghanistan "focus on providing emergency healthcare, shelter, food assistance, access to clean water and sanitation facilities, as well as various protection services supporting women and children," according to the statement, adding: "Since 2019, almost €100 million in humanitarian support has been allocated to ensure critical relief assistance to the most vulnerable." In addition, the "EU-funded Emergency Response Mechanism helps people recently displaced across Afghanistan. In 2019 and 2020, the Mechanism reached 400,000 people in all provinces through the delivery of aid such as clean water and access to sanitation services," the press release said.

U.S. senators ask Pentagon if \$1 billion in Afghan aid was cut

Two Democratic senators on Monday asked US Defense Secretary Mike Esper what happened to \$1 billion in aid for Afghanistan the Trump administration said it would cut nearly three months ago, according to a letter reviewed by Reuters.

Senator Jack Reed, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Robert Menendez, the top Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, demanded Esper explain whether the funds had been cut and if so from which accounts.

"Will the execution of such funding cuts impact the US military ...

P2



MSF Ends Activities and Withdraws from Dasht-e-Barchi, Kabul

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) on Monday in a press release officially announced that they were ending their activities in the Dasht-e-Barchi neighborhood in western Kabul where they had run a maternity ward providing care to pregnant mothers and their infants. In 2019 the program saw the delivery of over 16,000 babies, and it was one of MSF's largest international programs, according to the statement.

MSF said that the decision was made after the attack on the maternity ward on May 12 in which 24 were killed and 16 others were wounded. "Following the attack on the maternity wing of Dasht-e-Barchi hospital in mid-May, MSF announces their withdrawal and ended activities at the hospital," read the statement.

According to MSF, while no information has emerged about



the perpetrators or motive of the assault, the mothers, babies and health staff were the deliberate targets of the attack, and so the organization has determined that similar attacks could occur in the future.

"While we are looking at ways to provide support, the attack and our withdrawal leaves women in the area without comprehensive maternity care services," MSF said

in the statement.

MSF said that during the attack 16 mothers were "systematically shot dead" as well as an MSF midwife, two children aged 7 and 8, and six other people present.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack and the Taliban denied involvement.

Thierry Allafort-Duverger, MSF's director general, said that the organization never expected ...

P3

U.S. senators...

presence on the ground in Afghanistan?" they asked in the letter, requesting a reply by June 26.

"If the administration has determined that this cut in security assistance does not diminish our ability to pursue our national security objectives, what conditions have changed to create such a sizeable surplus?" they added. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the reduction on March 23 to try to force Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and his political rival Abdullah Abdullah to end a feud that had helped stall US-led peace-making efforts in Afghanistan. Ghani and Abdullah on May 17 signed a power-sharing deal, raising questions whether Washington would reduce the funding.

After nearly two decades of fighting the Taliban, the United States is looking to extricate itself and to achieve peace between the US-backed government and the militant group. But despite the pact between Ghani and Abdullah, peace talks between the government and the Taliban have yet to occur.

Reuters reported on April 5 the reduction would come from funds for Afghan security forces and, on May 20, that the Pentagon had not withheld the money despite Pompeo's March 23 vow to cut it "immediately."

On June 1, US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad said he thought the money had been cut and referred questions to the Pentagon.

The Pentagon did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the letter.

By Abdul Basit

ISKP in Afghanistan

Since the February agreement between the US and the Taliban, the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) has unleashed a string of high-profile attacks in Kabul and other Afghan cities to derail the intra-Afghan peace process.

The ISKP is projecting itself as the only defiant jihadist group committed to jihad in the hope of attracting hardline factions of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda opposed to the peace agreement.

At the same time, the ISKP, through these attacks, is pitching itself to 8,000 foreign jihadists in Afghanistan, 6,500 of whom are Pakistanis, who are looking for new organisational platforms to continue their militant careers. The terror group is also aware of the existing divisions between the Taliban's political and military commissions. Fighting and ousting the US from Afghanistan has kept the Taliban's organisational coherence intact. Once the US exits from Afghanistan, the military and political commissions' divisions will come under a lot of strain. Outside of Afghanistan, some dissident Taliban leaders opposed to the US-Taliban deal have already created a new group Hizb-e-Wilayat-e-Islami.

The ISKP has exploited the vacuum created by the Taliban's commitment to reduce violence in Afghanistan's urban areas, particularly Kabul, to create a conducive environment for intra-Afghan negotiations. Some of the ISKP's devastating attacks include the May 30 roadside bombing that killed a broadcast journalist and his driver, the June 2 attack on the Akbar Wazir Khan mosque assassinating the influential religious cleric Maulana Mohammed Ayaz Niazi.

Similarly, on May 12, the terror group targeted a funeral in the Nangarhar province killing 24 mourners. On the same day, a devastating assault on a maternity hospital in Kabul claimed 24 lives, mostly mothers and their newborns. Though the ISKP did not claim the attack, it bore all the hallmarks of its violence – attacking noncombatants of ethnic Hazara Shia minority in a city. Prior to this, the terror group hit a Sikh temple in Kabul with a suicide bomber killing 25 members of the Sikh community.

Notwithstanding the arrests of two of its top leaders, Emir of Khorasan Sheikh Aslam Farooqi and leader for South Asia and the Far East Zia-ul-Haq, coupled with territorial and organisational setbacks, the terror group has shown unmistakable resilience, regenerative capacity and the capability to mount attention-grabbing attacks in Kabul. A recent UN report has put the residual numerical strength of the ISKP around 2,200 fighters clustered in small cells in and around Kunar, Nuristan and adjoining areas. So far, most of the research on the ISKP has focused on the strength or weakness of the group by examining its organisational capabilities, quality of the leadership and financial resources, while ignoring two critical factors: a) ideological appeal of Jihadi-Salafism in Afghanistan's urban, educated youth; and b) and its ability to form alliances with like-minded militant groups.

The traction of Jihadi-Salafism among Afghanistan's educated youth of urban middle and upper-middle class lies at the heart of the ISKP's remarkable resilience and regenerative capacity. A recent report of the United State Institute of Peace observes that the majority of the ISKP's recruits in Afghanistan's urban areas are non-Pashtuns, mostly ethnic Tajik. They are mainly drawn from Afghanistan's three universities: Kabul University, Al-Biruni University and Nangarhar university.

Unlike Afghanistan's rural hinterland, where the Taliban have consolidated their control, educated youth of the urban areas have been torn between the democratic practices introduced after the 2001 US intervention and the Islamist model introduced by different modern Islamic evangelical outfits like Hizb-ut-Tahrir. This has resulted in an identity crisis among the educated youth of urban areas.

In this identity vacuum, these youth were looking for a meaning, purpose and a sense of belonging in life. This search for identity pushed them towards the ISKP which offered them a strong in-group solidarity, ideological purity and a greater cause – the Caliphate to serve, live and die for.

Second, the ISKP's ability to strike alliances and cooperative arrangements with like-minded extremist groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Jundullah and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in addition to attracting some factions of the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban has also added to its resilience and longevity. The greater the number of alliances and forms of cooperation, the larger is the resilience and longevity of a terrorist group.

Moreover, the group operates in Afghanistan's urban landscape in the form of discreet cells making its detection and complete elimination a daunting task. These cells are scattered throughout Kabul, Kapisa, Panjshir and Parwan. The cell structures have enabled the ISKP to survive, plot and execute attacks. Post-attack arrests and investigation of different ISKP members in Kabul have revealed that members involved in logistical operations and execution of the same attack neither knew each other, nor were they aware of each other's presence.

It is important to mention that both IS central and the ISKP have been unforgivingly critical of the Taliban for striking a deal with the US. The IS spokesperson Abu Hamza al-Qurashi has termed the Taliban as "apostates" for signing a deal with the "Crusader" America and launching a campaign against ISKP in Nangarhar. This statement is a clear gibe at the Taliban and an attempt to paint them as a nationalist group masquerading as a jihadist entity.

Even if the Taliban and Kabul reach a political compromise, long-term peace in Afghanistan would remain elusive as long as structural causes of violence in the country are not addressed comprehensively. The single most important demographic factor critical to Afghanistan's peaceful and stable future is its youth. Constructively engaging the Afghan youth in the nation building by moving beyond the securitised kill and capture approach is urgently needed.

This approach will also be an effective neutraliser of the ISKP's ideological appeal among the Afghan educated, urban youth.

By Aditi Bhaduri

India must join hands with Central Asia for peace in Afghanistan

United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad is back in the region for a third time during this COVID-19 pandemic to advance the peace deal signed with the Taliban and accelerate intra-Afghan negotiations. Khalilzad's visit comes on the heels of the recent report by the UN Security Council's Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team. The report reveals that the Taliban continues to maintain links with the al-Qaeda, which is active in 12 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. The US-Taliban agreement, signed on February 29 in Doha, requires the Taliban to take a number of steps "to prevent any group or individual, including al-Qaeda, from using the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies."

The NATO's Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan is on record saying that in March "the Taliban refrained from

attacks against Coalition Forces; however they increased attacks against ANDSF [Afghan National Defence and Security Forces] to levels above seasonal norms." Indeed, throughout March, Afghanistan has seen violence with increasing brutality. The fact remains that even as the President Ashraf Ghani-led government is all set to sit down for the much-awaited talks with the Taliban, the signs are ominous. Also, the fact that Khalilzad is again back in the region testifies that in spite of the UN report the US-Taliban peace accord will hold.

While the world has primarily been focussed on violence, the role of ideology has not been sufficiently discussed. Jihadist groups such as the al-Qaeda, ISIS-KP, and the LeT are jostling for space in Afghanistan, there are others such as the Hizb ut-Tahrir, which seeks to revive a caliphate, that is slowly but steadily infiltrating Afghan civil society. One thing is near certain — any peace deal and

intra-Afghan understanding hammered out will result in establishing radical religiosity in the country.

In the midst of these developments, India, which has given developmental aid of more than \$3 billion, finds itself sidelined in Afghanistan. Both Khalilzad and Russian Special Envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov have called on India to engage with the Taliban, but New Delhi is weighing its options. India should opt for a regional approach, involving the Central Asian Republics (CARs) — Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Too often the role and scope of these countries in Afghanistan's stabilisation and future are neglected. Afghanistan shares its longest border of 2,800 km with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. This proximity, along with historical and cultural linkages, makes the CARs a direct stakeholder in Afghanistan's peace ...

P3

Iran, Afghanistan discuss expansion of customs coop.: official



Iran has always tried to stand by the people of Afghanistan and increase its political and economic relations with the country, IRICA Spokesman said.

The Spokesman for the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) Seyyed Rouhollah Latifi made the remarks on Sunday, saying, "The head IRICA Mehdi Mirashrafi held a meeting with Afghanistan's Ambassador to Tehran Abdolghafor Lival in order to increase customs cooperation and foreign trade between the two countries." According to Latifi, over 2 billion dollars

worth of goods were exported to Afghanistan in the last year.

He further noted that there are many opportunities for bilateral investment for both countries and expressed hope that with more interaction and active economic and trade diplomacy, the number of business transactions between Iran and Afghanistan increases in the future.

"Iranian Customs is ready to facilitate foreign trade with Afghanistan to significantly increase the level of economic interaction," he added.

Fish Farming to Increase in Balkh Province

20 new fish farms will soon be established in Balkh province, an official says.

Abdul Fahim Jabbari, head of the National Agriculture Project at the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation in the north of the country, said that each of these farms, which is planned to be built on one acre each, will have the capacity to raise 3 to 4 thousand fish per season.

Jabari adds that the cost of each farm is 750,000 afghanis, and will dramatically increase fish production in Balkh.

He says that fish farming in Balkh will have good results, which is why they have started the construction of 20 fish farms.

"We have 20 farms under our support, each of which is 120 by 18 meters and has the capacity to raise 3 to 4 thousand fish," said Jabari.

Jabari said these farms would be operational in two months.

Most of the farms are located in Dehdadi and Nahr-e-Seraj districts of Balkh province.

Mohammad Nabi, owner of a fish farm in Dehdadi district, said that 11 years ago, at the cost of 5,000 Afghanis, he built a fish farm and now has 10,000 fish.

He says he earns 6 hundred thousand afghanis a year from the sale of these fish.

"Someone encouraged me to build a farm, and promised to give me fish from the agriculture department and build the pool, but that man disappeared. Then I myself sent a person to Jalalabad city of Nangarhar province and brought fishes back. The first time I brought them, each fish was like a matchstick but now each of them has



reached half a kilo," said Nabi.

Mohammad Wakil Niazi, provincial director of the agriculture department, said there are already 46 fish farms in Balkh, with between 11 and 13 tons of fish entering the market each year from those farms. He said the fish supplied to the markets from those farms have a fixed price and that each kilogram of fish is sold for 400 afghanis.

"We have about 11 to 13 tons of fish being supplied to the markets in a year from these farms," said Niazi.

Regarding the demand for fish, Niazi said: "With the standard pools built by the Ministry of Agriculture's National Agricultural and Livestock project, we hope to meet a large part of the market's needs."

Statistics from the Balkh Department of Agriculture and Irrigation show that out of 46 fish farms, ten farms were built by the Ministry of Agriculture's National Agricultural and Livestock Project, with four to five people working in each of these farms.

MSF Ends Activities...

such an attack against women about to give birth.

"We were aware that our presence in Dasht-e-Barchi carried risks, but we just couldn't believe that someone would take advantage of the absolute vulnerability of women about to give birth to murder them and their babies," says Thierry Allafort-Duverger, MSF director general. "But it did happen."

MSF said that the decision has been shared with their staff, the national health authorities and other partners. Despite the decision to stop activities in the hospital in the west of Kabul but yet MSF said we are looking into ways to support local initiatives aimed at improving access to healthcare.

"By pushing us to close our activity in the hospital, the assailants have also left women and babies without access to essential medical care, in a country where maternal and neo-natal mortality remain high," read the MSF statement.

MSF said their program had been operating in Dasht-e-Barchi in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health since November 2014, providing free-of-charge maternity and neonatal care in one of the most densely populated areas of Kabul.

According to the MSF, over the past 16 years 70 MSF staff and patients in MSF healthcare programs have been killed in Afghanistan.

MSF continues to run medical programs in the Afghan provinces of Helmand, Herat, Kandahar, Khost and Kunduz, with activities covering a broad range of health issues. MSF first started working in the country in 1980.

Turkey, Russia...

legitimate government".

He dismissed speculation of a link with the situation in Syria, where Turkey and Russia are also on opposing sides of the war.

Libya, a major oil producer, has been mired in turmoil since 2011 when longtime ruler Muammar Gaddafi was toppled in a NATO-backed uprising.

Last week, the United Nations said the warring sides had begun new ceasefire talks in Libya.

Afghan Media...

shall have the right, according to provisions of law, to print and publish on subjects without prior submission to state authorities." The letter says that the proposed amendments will restrict the independence of monitoring organizations.

The amendments suggest before and after publication censorship, and the letter in protest states that government institutions have provided "unnecessary" and "vast" authority to the government's monitoring organizations, some advantages and rights of media and journalists have been excluded and the independence of the National TV has been questioned – among other restrictions and amendments.

The letter says the proposed amendments will limit media activities and freedom of expression in the country.

India must join...

and stability.

The primary threat is of jihadist violence spilling over into the CARs. The region has seen many residents flock to join the ISIS. In case the ISIS-KP embeds itself in Afghanistan, there is a fear that jihadists from the CARs would take the jihad back home. Groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan continue to pose a threat to the region, and any signs of religious radicalism is immediately put down with a heavy hand in the CARs.

The second threat is that continuing instability within Afghanistan threatens to destabilise the region, with violence spilling over into the neighbouring countries, such as Tajikistan which has already suffered a civil war. Yet another headache is the drug trade which, emerging from Afghanistan, encompasses Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and further on Russia and Europe. With so much at stake, the CARs, which was initially hesitant to play an active role, has increasingly become focussed on Afghanistan. The CARs has also realised the potential of Afghanistan to be a beneficial neighbour. It has also initiated infrastructure projects and developmental aid

The issues come amid the possibility of imminent peace negotiations between the teams of the Afghan government and the Taliban.

"If this draft is sent to the parliament and if it is passed, it will impose very serious restrictions on media activities," said Najib Sharifi, head of the Journalists Safety Committee.

The letter also says that many of the amended articles of the mass media law are in contravention of article 19 of the international declaration on human rights that guarantees the freedom of speech without restrictions.

Article 6 of the mass media law says Journalists shall have the right to avoid disclosing their source of information, except when a competent court orders the disclosure. But the amended draft says that the source of information can be disclosed to government institutions such

as police, NDS and the Attorney General's Office.

"Also, the cancellation of the licenses of media outlets has been eased (in the draft)," Sharifi said.

Journalists' rights organizations also questioned the reason behind the government's decision to propose the amendments to the law.

"It has given the media monitoring role to specific government institution. This can result in autocracy," said Mujib Khalwatgar, head of Nai, an open media supporting organization. However, the Ministry of Information and Culture said the government remains committed to safeguarding the freedom of speech. "Any amendment in the mass media law is shared with heads of media, media unions and heads of newspapers," said Sabir Mohmand, a spokesman for the ministry.

in Afghanistan.

It is common knowledge that stabilising the Afghan economy and integrating it into the regional economy would go a long way in stabilising the country. In particular, Afghanistan's potential as a lucrative transit country to the markets of South and Southeast Asia has seen the countries engage in a number of economic initiatives and connectivity project, such as the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, the Lapiz Lazuri Route Agreement, the Heart of Asia Process and so on. In the same spirit projects such as the CASA-1000 and the TAPI pipeline, in which India is involved, were initiated. Today, more than 50 percent of Afghanistan's trade is with its immediate neighbours.

In March 2018, Uzbekistan hosted a conference on Afghanistan in which more than 20 countries including India participated, paving the way for intra-Afghan talks. All the CARs view Taliban as an important stakeholder in Afghanistan.

India has good ties with the CARs and together participate in the common platform – the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. While Russia and China are embroiled in

differences with the US, the CARs enjoys cordial ties with the US.

This is why in the 2019 India-Central Asia Dialogue held in Samarqand in Uzbekistan, there was an Afghan component too. India and the CARs pledged to assist Afghanistan through the "implementation of joint infrastructure, transit and transport, energy projects, including regional cooperation and investment projects."

India will find more common ground with the CARs regarding Afghanistan than with any other country. Kabul views Tashkent as central to its peace process, which would help reduce Islamabad's influence. Co-ordinating with the CARs could help counter Pakistan's role and influence in Afghanistan, even as it can incentivise Pakistan to pursue peace and cease to view Afghanistan through an Indian lens.

Finally, the CARs would act as the model Muslim State for Afghanistan to emulate. All of them are Muslim-majority countries with high levels of education, rule of law, women's empowerment and respect for diversity, practicing moderate Islam – the perfect foil to ideologies of murderous religiosity. For war, after all, begins in the minds of men.

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Heart of Asia

Chief Editor: M. Hamid Hamdard

Reporters: Safiullah Nasary, Shafiq Amirzay,

Jawad Temori & Hameedullah Hamidi

Graphic & Design: Arman

Phone: +93-202502100 - +93-777989696

Website: www.heartofasia.af

Email: heartofasiadaily@gmail.com

Address: Behind Rahman Baba High School

- Opposite to 3rd District,

Kabul - Afghanistan

Print: Waygal Printing .Co - +93 - 202512626

Turkey, Russia continue to work together for Libya ceasefire

Turkey will continue talks with Russia over reaching a lasting ceasefire in Libya despite the postponement of talks on Sunday, Turkey's foreign minister said.

Speaking alongside Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif at a news conference in Istanbul on Monday, Mevlut Cavusoglu said the postponement was unrelated to any lingering issues on the "core principles" between the two sides on Libya and Syria.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin have agreed to continue working together to establish a lasting ceasefire in Libya, Cavusoglu said.

With Turkish military support, Libya's internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) has advanced for weeks against Khalifa Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA), which is backed by Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.

Heavy clashes have erupted as the GNA laid siege to LNA-held Sirte, close to major energy export terminals on the Mediterranean seaboard.

The push last week came despite a unilateral ceasefire proposal by Egypt, a backer of the LNA's Haftar, who has waged a 14-month campaign to try and capture the capital.

After launching a counteroffensive in March against attacks on Tripoli, the GNA's army recently retook strategic locations, including the Al-Watiya airbase and Tarhuna.

On Sunday, Russia and Turkey postponed ministerial-level talks that were expected to focus on Libya and Syria, where the two countries support opposing sides in long-standing conflicts. Cavusoglu and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov decided to put off the talks during a phone call, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said.

Failed ceasefire
However, Cavusoglu said that it was important



to prevent another failed ceasefire. A previous truce attempt collapsed earlier this year and shortly afterwards the GNA began to register battlefield victories - with the help of

Turkish military advisers and drones. Cavusoglu also said it would be "unrealistic" for Turkey and Russia to make decisions without consulting the Libyans, "especially the ... P3

A look at the world

China urges U.S. to stop provocations

China urges the U.S. side to stop all provocative acts against China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, a defense ministry spokesman said on Monday.

Ren Guoqiang made the remarks when asked to comment on the flight of a U.S. military aircraft over Taiwan last week.

The flight over Chinese territory by a U.S. military aircraft without China's permission seriously infringed upon China's territorial sovereignty and



undermined peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, said Ren. "It is extremely wrong and dangerous."

He urged the U.S. side to abide by the one-China principle and the three China-U.S. joint communiqués, noting that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army has the will, confidence and capability to safeguard China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, safeguard the common interests of the compatriots from both sides of the Taiwan Strait, safeguard peace and stability across the strait, and thwart any attempt to create "one China, one Taiwan," he added.

American Muslims urge reform to end police brutality



Dozens of American Muslim organizations joined Monday to the demands for changing policing practices in the US, after death of George Floyd under police custody last month. "The victimization of unarmed Black Muslims has a long and troubling history," said Muslim Advocates, a national civil rights organization, in a joint statement.

"Today, we are committing to take action in support of Black-led organizations on the front lines of this work. This is our fight," the organizations said. "We join together to call for reform to our nation's policing practices." The demanded reforms include establishing a federal standard that use of force be reserved as a last resort, prohibiting maneuvers that restrict the flow of blood or oxygen to the brain and the use of no-knock warrants, and lowering the legal standard to make it easier for prosecutors to successfully hold law enforcement accountable, among others.

"As American Muslims, we will draw on our diversity, our strength, and our resilience to demand these reforms because Black lives matter," they added.

The statement was signed by 95 organizations, national and local, from nearly 30 states.

Floyd, 46, an unarmed black man, died after being pinned down by Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, as he was being arrested in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25 after reportedly attempting to use a counterfeit \$20 bill at a local store.

His last words, "I can't breathe," became a slogan for worldwide protests.

His death has prompted largely peaceful mass demonstrations that have continued more than two weeks across the US, though some have devolved into violence and looting.

Chauvin made his initial court appearance last week on charges of second-degree murder and manslaughter.

U.S. top court denies Trump 'sanctuary' cities challenge

Supreme Court declined to hear Monday the Trump administration's challenge to three "sanctuary" laws in the US's most-populous state, dealing a major blow to President Donald Trump. The top court's decision leaves in place lower court rulings that upheld the majority of the laws. They limit cooperation between California's state and local law enforcement and federal immigration authorities, and also bar private employers from voluntarily cooperating with federal immigration officers. The Trump administration had sought to have the Supreme Court take up and review the rulings, but it declined to do so. Only two of nine justices on the court -- conservative-leaning Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas -- dissented from the court's two-sentence order.

Trump has sought to emphasize his hardline immigration policies ahead of the Nov. 3 presidential election where he is set to face Democratic challenger and former Vice President Joe Biden. The two have staked out starkly different approaches to both legal and illegal immigration ahead of the polls. Next up for the Supreme Court on immigration is a looming decision on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy established by former



President Barack Obama. It allowed children brought to the US illegally to receive renewable two-year periods of deportation protections. The ruling could result in the deportation of an estimated 700,000 program beneficiaries, known collectively as "Dreamers." A ruling is expected within the next couple of weeks.

The Supreme Court also extended Monday anti-discrimination workplace protections to individuals based on sexual orientation. The landmark 6-3 ruling extends protections to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender employees.

"An employer who fires an individual for being homosexual or transgender fires that person for traits or actions it would not have questioned in members of a different sex. Sex plays a necessary and undisguisable role in the decision, exactly what Title VII forbids," Associate Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote for the majority.

Title VII of the 1964 Civil Right Act bars employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin. The Trump administration argued its sex protections did not extend to sexual orientation or gender identity.



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Dehbori, 2nd Street
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Kabul

+93 (0) 789 98 9696

shigal.edu@gmail.com

Shigal English Academy

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