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Nakamura Tetsu's legacy endures in war-torn Afghanistan

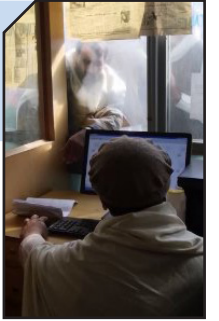
**Coalition Partners in Afghanistan Got Years of Free Lunches from US Because of Military Mix-up, IG Says**

For more than three years, coalition partners in Afghanistan got free meals at U.S. expense because of billing mistakes made by the...

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# Heart of Asia

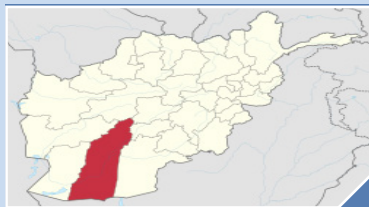
Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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**Landmine blast kills 6 civilians in Helmand**

At least six civilians, including women and children, were killed and two others wounded in Helmand province in a landmine blast on Sunday, an official confirmed.

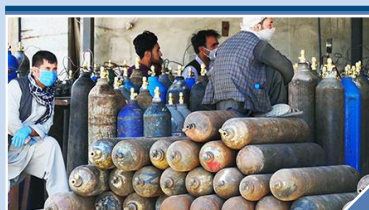
Umer Zwak, spokesman for the provincial governor, told Anadolu Agency that the incident took place in Washer district this afternoon.

He accused Taliban insurgents of planting the IED on the main road.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the blast.

Landmines, mostly planted in areas controlled or contested by Taliban, continue to wreck havoc in the conflict-ridden country.

About 30% of total civilian casualties – 1,293 – in the first three months of 2020 were caused by explosives laid on or just under the surface, ... **P2**



**Oxygen Shortage Persists at Govt Hospitals**

Patients and their relatives report a lack of oxygen in two government hospitals dedicated to treating COVID-19 patients and at some private health centers—a claim that has been rejected by officials.

Last week, an Afghan MP, Fatima Aziz, in a recorded video message complained about lack of oxygen in government hospitals as she was in bed, struggling with the coronavirus.

Relatives of some patients said that in a government hospital in Kabul oxygen balloons are distributed in turns to COVID-19 patients, something that hospital officials have not confirmed.

Relatives of three coronavirus patients were interviewed for this report, among others. All of them said their sick family member faced a lack of oxygen over the last few days.

“Less oxygen is available. All deaths here (at Ali Jinah Hospital) are because of a lack of oxygen. We are fighting to get an oxygen balloon. ... **P3**

## Trump: Russian Bounties on U.S. Troops ‘Fake News’



U.S. President Donald Trump on Sunday denied that he had been told or briefed on reported Russian bounties placed on US troops in Afghanistan, and called on The New York Times to identify its source. Trump called the story “fake news” and said neither Vice President

Mike Pence nor his Chief of Staff Meadows had been told or briefed, either.

“Everybody is denying it and there have not been many attacks on us,” Trump said in a tweet.

“Nobody’s been tougher on Russia than the Trump Administration.

With Corrupt Joe Biden and Obama, Russia had a field day, taking over important parts of Ukraine - Where’s Hunter? Probably just another phony Times hit job, just like their failed Russia Hoax. Who is their source?” he added.

On Saturday, The New York Times

reported that United States intelligence had found that a Russian unit offered bounties to Taliban-linked militants to US-led coalition troops in Afghanistan.

The report says that the alleged bounties gave incentives to the insurgents to target US forces. This comes amid efforts by US President Donald Trump to withdraw US forces from Afghanistan.

The Times, citing anonymous officials, said that Trump was briefed on the findings in March, but has not decided how to respond.

According to the report, militants were believed to have collected bounty money, but that it was unclear whether specific killings of US troops were under suspicion.

The report said that there were different theories on why Russia would support Taliban attacks, “including a desire to keep the United States bogged down in war.”

The Taliban operation was “led by a unit known as the GRU,” said the Times article, “which has been blamed in numerous international incidents including a 2018 chemical weapons attack in Britain ... **P3**

**Efforts on to curb underage recruitment: Mol**

The Ministry of Interior Affairs on Sunday said efforts were underway to prevent recruitment of underage persons in the police force across the country.

The US State Department recently published a report that claimed under 18 years old persons continued to be recruited and such persons were sexually abused.

In a statement, the Mol said a department has been created namely “Inside Security Department” to prevent the appointment of underage people in police ranks and to observe the process as well.

The statement said the Mol had made an application to control underage people’s recruitment in police and so far 80 percent of police personnel have been registered in the system.

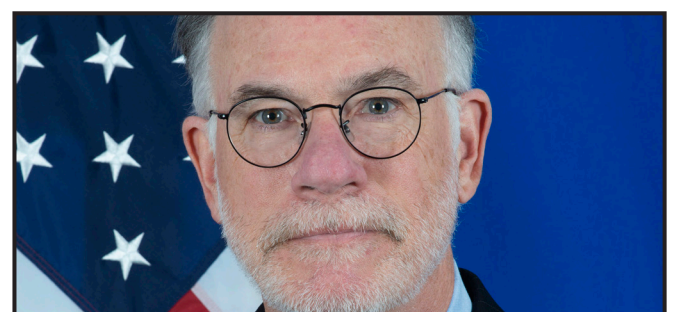


## U.S. to Afghan govt: Unmask corrupt elements

U.S. Chargé d’Affaires Ross Wilson on Sunday asked the Afghan government, private industry, media, NGOs and civil society to identify and combat corruption and create a future of opportunity and prosperity. In a tweet Wilson said: “Corruption continues to be the barrier to realizing Afghanistan’s true potential. We call on the Afghan government, private industry, media, NGOs, and civil society to identify and combat corruption, and create a future of opportunity and prosperity.”

This comes as the U.S. Fiscal Transparency Report 2020 placed Afghanistan among 76 countries that met minimum requirement for the fiscal transparency.

Wilson tweeted: “2020 Fiscal Transparency Report explains which countries meet the minimum requirements. Afghanistan can and must do more



AntiCorruption.”

The Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the FY 2020 SFOAA defines “minimum requirements of fiscal transparency” to mean the public disclosure of:

National budget documentation (to include income and expenditures by ministry) and Government contracts and licenses for natural resource extraction (to include bidding and concession allocation practices).

The 2020 fiscal transparency

review process evaluated whether the government publicly disclosed key budget documents, including expenditures broken down by ministry and revenues broken down by source and type.

The review process also evaluated whether the government has an independent supreme audit institution or similar institution that audits the government’s annual financial statements, and whether such audits are made publicly available.



### Yemen president...

self-rule in Aden and other southern provinces.

'War within a war'

This prompted Yemen's government in May to launch a military offensive in Abyan aimed at ousting the separatists from Aden.

The southern separatists and the Yemeni government are technically allies in the fight against the Houthis, but the rift between them represents a damaging "war within a war" in the Arabian Peninsula's poorest country. Earlier this week, a Saudi-led military coalition backing the government against the Houthis said it had deployed observers to monitor a ceasefire between pro-government troops and southern separatists announced two days earlier. Saudi forces arrived on Wednesday in Shaqra and Sheikh Salem, two flashpoints in southern Yemen's Abyan province, to monitor that truce, military sources said.

A collapse of the ceasefire in the south would again complicate efforts by the government to repel the Houthis, who are believed to be aligned with Saudi's regional foe Iran.

The separatists and the government are due to hold further talks in Saudi Arabia to discuss the truce, coalition spokesman Turki al-Maliki said this week.

Since the Saudi-led coalition launched a military offensive in 2015, tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have been killed and millions displaced in Yemen, in what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian disaster.

By Yamaka Michitaka

## Nakamura Tetsu's legacy endures in war-torn Afghanistan

Six months have passed since Japanese humanitarian Nakamura Tetsu was killed in Afghanistan. But his commitment to peace remains fresh in the minds of people throughout the country.

Earlier this year, a civic group in Kabul completed a mural of Nakamura's face, emblazoned with the message "You live on in our hearts."

Nakamura was killed by unidentified gunmen in the eastern city of Jalalabad on December 4, 2019. Multiple sources within the Afghan intelligence service say four men who had been detained in connection with the murder have been released due to lack of evidence. They say it is increasingly unlikely the case will be solved.

Nakamura spent over three decades in Afghanistan working on humanitarian projects to help rebuild the war-torn country. His Peshawar-kai non-governmental organization was known for its irrigation projects that brought water to impoverished rural communities.

Half a year on from his death, the situation in Afghanistan remains grim. Fighting between the government and militant groups such as the Taliban and the Islamic State have left thousands dead. The UN says civilian casualties in 2019 topped 10,000 for the sixth year in a row, with over 3,400 deaths and nearly 7,000 injured.

The country is also being hit hard by the coronavirus. The health ministry says the number of infections is nearly 30,000, and the death toll



sits at close to 600.

The pandemic has disrupted Peshawar-kai's ongoing canal projects. In April, the local government shut down roads leading to a construction site as part of efforts to prevent the spread of infection. After lengthy negotiations, authorities granted the group access to the site so they could continue their work.

But the group worries the government could shut them down at any moment if there are infections, so it requires all staff members to wear masks. Despite the difficulties, they remain committed to

the work, inspired by Nakamura's legacy.

"When we come up against difficulty, we try to imagine how Nakamura would have handled it," says Peshawar-kai chairman Murakami Masaru. "Our current activities are a continuation of what he did."

Since its completion, the Kabul mural has become a beloved symbol of hope for a better future.

"We will never forget such an honorable man," says one local resident. "I hope the children in this country aspire to be like him and contribute to Afghanistan in the same way."

### Landmine blast...

according to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

The attack comes a day after two officials of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission were killed in a blast in the capital Kabul.

Fatima Khalil, a donor liaison officer,

and Ahmad Jawed Folad, a driver, were targeted with an improvised explosive device.

The attack was the latest in a string of targeted killings of pro-government religious scholars and rights defenders since mid-May.

US special envoy for peace in Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad

condemned the "anti-human act."

"We support the overwhelming demand of Afghans to overcome these odds & continue the march to a permanent and dignified peace and an Afghanistan in which everyone's rights are respected," he said in a statement on Twitter.

Earlier this week, Abdullah Abdullah,

chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation, said escalation in violence has made it harder to open peace negotiations.

The start of intra-Afghan dialogue will pave the way for lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan as envisaged in a deal between Washington and Taliban signed in late February.

By Phillip Wellman

## Coalition Partners in Afghanistan Got Years of Free Lunches from US Because of Military Mix-up, IG Says

For more than three years, coalition partners in Afghanistan got free meals at U.S. expense because of billing mistakes made by the military, a new report says.

The problem was discovered at NATO's Afghanistan headquarters in Kabul, where the U.S. provides dining facility services for the coalition with the intention of getting reimbursed by 17 member countries each month.

However, the military only billed those countries for about half of the months between January 2016 and September 2019, resulting in a deficit of more than \$6 million, according to the report released Friday by the Defense Department Inspector General.

Further mistakes in the bills that were delivered undercharged recipients by nearly \$3 million, meaning the DOD was short by more than \$9 million during the

period examined, the report said. The report only looked at the situation at NATO's Resolute Support headquarters in Kabul, not other bases in Afghanistan. U.S. Forces-Afghanistan Multinational Logistics is primarily responsible for dealing with the reimbursement agreements with coalition partners at the Kabul base. The Inspector General blamed personnel for failing to establish terms and conditions -- including rates and calculation method -- with each partner country before dining services were provided. This came after the manager in charge of the agreements failed to develop a training program for personnel.

"Unless USFOR-A establishes terms and conditions with coalition partners before providing services, develops training specific to Afghanistan and performs oversight, the DOD will continue to not initiate bills

for the full reimbursable amount for dining facility services," the Inspector General said.

Fifteen Western European countries, Australia and New Zealand reimburse the DOD for dining services at NATO's Resolute Support headquarters. The DOD covers the costs for more than 20 other coalition countries who would be unable to assist the mission without financial help.

The Inspector General encouraged USFOR-A to collect the missing payments, develop agreements with each coalition partner and update personnel training.

USFOR-A was complying with the recommendations, the Inspector General said. It had already billed its partners for 2019 and earlier this year began distributing bills for 2018, with bills for 2016 and 2017 also expected to be delivered, the report said.

## Dispute on Abdullah's Side Reportedly Delaying Cabinet Choices

Politicians close to Abdullah Abdullah, head of the High Council for National Reconciliation, reported a rift among political leaders on Abdullah's side over cabinet appointments and the share of authority for provincial departments and deputy ministers' posts in some ministries.

Abdullah's team has been given a 50 percent share in the cabinet based on the political agreement, and he can introduce his picks for the posts.

The Presidential Palace said last week that their portion of the cabinet has been appointed and the list is ready to be sent to the parliament for a vote of confidence. The parliament meanwhile will observe summer recess in two weeks, something that critics say will once again delay the cabinet appointments for another two months.

Sayed Ishaq Gailani, head of the National Solidarity Movement of Afghanistan and a supporter of Abdullah, said the rift among political leaders who are supporting Abdullah is one of the reasons behind the delay in the appointments of acting and nominee ministers in the cabinet.

"There are many volunteers for ministries and deputy ministers' posts, but the seats are less; therefore, the doctor (Abdullah

Abdullah) has some problems," Gailani said.

The Presidential Palace said they are expecting Abdullah Abdullah to complete the list of his picks for ministries and send it to the Palace.

But some sources from Abdullah's office said the list will be sent to the Presidential Palace in the near future.

The delay in cabinet appointments has been met with criticism from the public, critics and lawmakers who say it will not favor rule of law in the country.

"The five commissions of the parliament are working on documents of ministers and no nominee will be approved in contravention of the law," said Mirza Mohammad Katawazi, the deputy speaker of the Wolesi Jirga, the lower house of the Afghan parliament.

Another key part of the Ghani-Abdullah political agreement was promoting Abdull Rashid Dostum to the rank of marshal, something that was expected to be done through a presidential decree, but it has not happened so far.

Dostum was recently seen in photos sowing wheat in a farmer's field in Khwaja Do Koh district in the northern province of Jawzjan along with his bodyguards and locals.



# Watchdog Reports Corruption in Customs Offices

The Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, also called MEC, in a new report on areas vulnerable to corruption found eight key conditions that affect reforms.

The report has assessed the two general directorates of the Ministry of Finance: the customs department and the revenue department.

The report finds alleged interference by government officials, MPs and "warlords" in the activities of the two departments and says they have provided conditions for corruption in the two offices.

The report says there is a difference in numbers provided by officials and exporter countries on exports and imports between Afghanistan and other nations. For instance, the report says, the UAE's data on imports and exports with Afghanistan was 14 times more than the figures provide by the revenue and customs departments. This is due to improper implementation of mutual agreements and memoranda of understanding.

The report also finds "gaps" in human resources management in the Ministry of Finance that includes serious violations in regulations on the appointments of civil service employees.

The report says there is a lack of



electricity supply in customs offices that affects the taxpayers' collection system and hinders operations.

It also says that scanners in border crossings and scales in customs offices are not active due to a lack of electricity.

The report also says that customs officials lack the required capacity to adhere to guidelines of the World Customs Organization to control transit goods and prevent unnecessary delays with imports and exports.

The report covers assessments from July to November 2019 from group interviews, direct monitoring and the review of documents in Kabul, Nangarhar and Balkh provinces. MEC officials, who presented the report

at an event on Sunday, said they have not been able to assess all the issues at Torkham customs due to "threats and obstruction by customs officials there."

"There are cases at the Attorney General's Office from customs that have been left there for years," said Maiwand Rouhani, head of the MEC secretariat.

According to the officials, strongmen are extorting money from customs officials by death threats and kidnapping them. Also, they are extorted by other government officials, according to the findings.

MEC findings show that goods are taken out of the country by smuggling and by use of forged documents.

"The imports have been under-registered...from 10 goods, one has been registered and nine others have been smuggled (into the country)," said Ajmal Shakir, a researcher at MEC. The Ministry of Finance spokesman, Shamroz Khan Masjidi, said efforts have been made to ensure reforms in the ministry.

"The Afghan government leadership and the leadership of the Ministry of Finance and our technical team are committed to bringing reforms, whether it takes less or more time," he said. "We have started the process of bringing reforms in taxes as well as at the ministry (of finance), we have announced all vacancies in a free competition."

### Trump: Russian...

that nearly killed Russian-born double agent Sergei Skripal."

The New York Times quoted a Kremlin spokesman saying that Russia was unaware of the accusations. Russia has more recently been accused by the United States of quietly providing weapons to the Taliban.

According to the report, US intelligence concluded that Russia intervened in the 2016 presidential election in a bid to assist Trump, including through manipulation of social media.

### EU pledges €4.9...

"As we were doing our very best to digest the unprecedented hardships that this new [corona]virus had cost, we also continued to witness another ongoing disease that had plagued our world for decades, centuries even: oppression and inequality," he said.

"The tragic case of George Floyd was a flashpoint that changed so much. Those devastating 8 minutes and 46 seconds validated the horrendous systemic racism and civil injustice we know to be present in our current reality". He was followed by Miley Cyrus, who performed a rendition of Beatles' classic "Help!" in an empty stadium. The concert also featured Usher, Jennifer Hudson, Justin Bieber and Quavo, J Balvin, Chloe x Halle, Yemi Alade, and Christine and the Queens.

### Poland votes in...

in Poland, an EU country of 38 million people.

Anti-gay rhetoric Duda has promised to defend the governing party's raft of popular social benefits, including a child allowance and extra pension payments - a key factor behind the populists winning a second term in October's parliamentary election.

Bread and butter issues are weighing heavily on voters' minds as the economic fallout of the pandemic is set to send Poland into its first recession since communism's demise.

"I'm happy. I can't complain; I get an extra pension payment and children are getting 500 zloty," Irena, a 63-year-old pensioner, told AFP in the central Polish town of Minsk Mazowiecki.

"I'd like this to continue," she added, declining to provide her surname.

Duda has also echoed PiS attacks on LGBT+ rights and Western values, something analysts see as a bid to attract voters backing a far-right candidate.

Campaigning with the slogan "Enough is Enough", Trzaskowski promises to use the experience and contacts he gathered as a

former European affairs minister to "fight hard" for a fair slice of the EU's 2021-27 budget, and to repair tattered ties with Brussels. He has, however, promised to keep the PiS's popular welfare payments.

While many see his PO party as a weak and ineffectual opposition, Trzaskowski supporters regard him as a bulwark against the PiS's drive to reform the courts, something they insist risks destroying any notion of an independent judiciary.

"I'm a lawyer and this (PiS justice reforms) affect me directly," Marek, 60, told AFP in Minsk Mazowiecki, also declining to provide his surname.

"It's as if a blacksmith would go to a watchmaker's shop and try to put things in order. People might support it, but in the long run, these reforms will have to be reversed."

Voycech Shebilski, the editor-in-chief of influential political magazine Visegrad Insight, said there are new issues on the horizon for the election.

"COVID-19 and the economic turmoil resulting from that are major issues in today's campaign," he said, speaking from the town of Lodz. "The

two candidates are struggling to demonstrate that their election will guarantee the best outcome to secure the future, to secure passing through this difficult time."

"The other issue here is whether there is a promise of hope and change, which is the main message of Trzaskowski, who is likely to make it to the second round of election," he added.

'Budapest model' Since winning power in 2015, both Duda and the PiS have in many ways upended Polish politics by stoking tensions with the EU and wielding influence through state-owned companies and public broadcasters.

Some analysts view the election as a crucial juncture: a second five-year term for Duda would allow the PiS to make even more controversial changes while defeat could unravel the party's power.

A win for Duda would pave the way to "bolstering 'Eastern' tendencies, like the rise of oligarchs ... and a drift to the Budapest model (of Hungary's Viktor Orban) - that's the danger," Warsaw University political scientist Anna Materska-Sosnowska told AFP.

### Oxygen Shortage...

Her blood pressure goes down whenever I go to get an oxygen balloon for my mother," said Aziza, a patient's relative who is under treatment in Ali Jinah Hospital - one of the two government facilities for COVID-19 patients.

"The situation was good for two days last week as we did not have any deaths. But in the last two days, we had over three deaths," said Nazir, son of a patient.

"Patients have less access to

oxygen... My mother was about to die due to lack of oxygen one day (in the hospital)," said Ibrahim, son of a patient.

The Ministry of Public Health reported the highest number of recoveries on Sunday: 2,004. According to ministry data, the coronavirus cases have been reducing over the last four days. According to the ministry, three companies have been contracted to supply at least 950 balloons of oxygen to Ali Jinah and Afghanistan hospitals every day. Some

employees and doctors of Ali Jinah Hospital said they receive 150 to 200 balloons a day. "The problem is in sending oxygen to our hospitals. The Ministry of Public Health calls on contractor companies to supply the required oxygen on time," said Akmal Samsor, spokesman for the Ministry of Public Health. Data by the Ministry of Public Health shows that so far, 737 people have died from COVID-19 in the country, while unconfirmed data suggest higher number of deaths.

### Exchange Rates

77	\$	77.1
84.9	€	85
93.4	£	93.5
461	Rp.	462
20.6	د.ر	20.7
960	₹	970

### Contact Numbers

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Ata Turk Hospital

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# Poland votes in presidential election delayed by pandemic

Polish voters are casting their ballots in round one of a tight presidential race that had to be postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic. Incumbent Andrzej Duda, 48, is campaigning for re-election in a vote that could determine the future of the right-wing government that supports him.

Polling stations opened at 7am (05:00 GMT) on Sunday and will close at 9pm (19:00 GMT) with an exit poll expected as soon as voting ends.

Ten candidates are vying to replace him, but opinion polls suggest that Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski, a liberal from the main Civic Platform (PO) opposition party, will enter a neck-and-neck runoff on July 12.

The most recent polls showed that no single candidate was likely to reach the 50 percent required to avoid a runoff given the crowded field of candidates, all of whom are male. In that case, the two top vote-getters will face each other on

July 12.

The vote had been scheduled for May 10 but was postponed in a chaotic political and legal battle as the ruling party pressed to hold it despite the pandemic.

Victory for Trzaskowski, also 48, would deal a heavy blow to the Law and Justice (PiS) government, which has relied on its ally Duda to endorse polarising legislation, especially judicial reforms.

While the PiS insists the changes are needed to weed out judicial corruption, critics and the European Union insist they erode judicial independence and democracy just three decades after Poland shed communism.

US President Donald Trump, who regards the populist PiS administration as a key European ally, gave Duda his blessing this week.

Trump invited him to the White House on Wednesday as the first foreign leader to visit since



the coronavirus pandemic began, just four days ahead of election day.

Originally scheduled for May, the ballot was postponed due to the pandemic and a new hybrid system of postal and conventional voting was put

in place on Sunday in a bid to stem infections. While official figures show at least 33,000 confirmed cases and more than 1,400 deaths, the health minister has admitted that there are likely up to 1.6 million undetected cases ... **P3**

### A look at the world

#### Coronavirus: Iran makes masks compulsory from July 5

Iran said on Sunday it will make mask-wearing mandatory in public from next week as it confirmed 144 more fatalities from the novel coronavirus, bringing the nationwide death toll to 10,508.

A further 2,489 people tested positive for COVID-19, raising the overall count to 222,669, Health Ministry spokesperson Sima Sadat Lari said.

She added that a total of 183,301 people have recovered, and been discharged from



hospitals so far, adding that 2,946 patients remain in critical condition.

Over 1.6 million tests have been conducted in the Middle Eastern country to date, according to the spokesperson.

Stressing the importance of observing health protocols to fight the virus, President Hassan Rouhani made wearing face masks in public mandatory from next week.

"Starting July 5, for two weeks, wearing masks in all public gatherings will be compulsory," he told the country's anti-virus task force.

The decision will be implemented in August as well, if necessary, the president added. Rouhani said 2020 is the hardest year for Iran in terms of economic distress due to sanctions and the virus, but the country hopes to overcome this difficulty by working together.

Iran reported its first COVID-19 cases in February. It imposed restrictions in March, which were lifted gradually from April.

The sanctions-hit economy is starting to suffer under the pressures of the health crisis. **P3**

#### EU pledges €4.9 billion for coronavirus tests, vaccines and treatments at fundraising concert



EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the EU would pledge €4.9 billion with the European Investment Bank towards coronavirus tests, treatments and vaccines.

The pledge came as global leaders joined forces with an international line up of artists - including Shakira, Coldplay and Miley Cyrus - for a historic event on Saturday raising money in the fight against COVID-19.

The initiative marked the conclusion of the Global Goal: Unite For Our Future campaign launched by the EU and activist group Global Citizen to fund research for a coronavirus vaccine and help rebuild communities impacted by the pandemic "in a fair and just way".

The concert kicked off at 8pm CET and was live-streamed across the world and co-hosted by von der Leyen and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson.

The concert was preceded by a global pledging summit hosted by Ursula von der Leyen, who thanked on Saturday all those who contributed raising money for the campaign, stating that some €6.15 billion had been raised.

The EU-led initiative Coronavirus Global Response has already raised almost €10 billion.

International advocates, experts, artists and activists among the likes of Angelique Kidjo, Melinda Gates, Dr. Vin Gupta, Ken Jeong and Kate Upton joined the discussion.

At the beginning of the event, Dwayne Johnson spoke out about racism amid protests fuelled by the death of Black American George Floyd. ... **P2**

#### Yemen president urges separatists to 'stop the bloodshed'

Yemen's president has called on southern separatists to "stop the bloodshed" and abide by a power-sharing agreement in his first public comments since the secessionists declared autonomy in April.

The conflict between the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the internationally recognised government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi constitutes a second front in Yemen, already split by a war between government loyalists and Houthi rebels.

The STC, which declared self-rule on April 26, has made a series of military gains, the latest this month when it seized the strategic Indian Ocean island of Socotra.



"I call on the so-called Southern Transitional Council ... to return to the path of the Riyadh Agreement and stop the bloodshed," Hadi said during a meeting on Saturday with high-level government officials, referring to a power-sharing deal for the south struck last November that quickly became defunct.


The Riyadh accord's implementation "has long faltered due to continuous escalatory activities, including the announcement of self-rule and the rebellion witnessed in Socotra", Hadi said, who has been living in the Saudi capital following the takeover of Sanaa and large parts of Yemen by the Houthis in 2014.

"Resorting to arms and force for personal gains ... will not be accepted," he added.

The agreement, which was signed in May 2019, includes the unification of all military formations under the authority of the ministries of interior and defence, as well as the formation of an efficient government made up equally between the north and south of Yemen.

Located off the southern coast of Aden, the interim seat of the Yemeni government, Socotra is near strategic shipping lanes and is famed for its biodiversity.

Tensions have escalated over the last several months since the separatists declared ... **P2**







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