

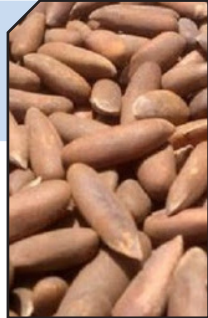


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Heart of Asia

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Kabul, Ashgabat Mull joint projects

Top diplomats from Afghanistan and Turkmenistan have underlined the importance of cooperation on executing joint projects in different fields.

Turkmenistan's Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov and his Afghan counterpart Haneef Atmar discussed the need for joint projects in areas of transport, energy, telecommunications and transit.

AKIpress.com reported the foreign ministers, during a telephone conversation, noted the significance of regular contacts between the heads of state.

"Atmar expressed gratitude to Turkmenistan for the humanitarian aid provided to Afghanistan in the period of the (Covid-19) pandemic," the news agency said. ... **P2**



Around 1.3 million people affected by flood in Afghanistan

Around 1.3 million people in Afghanistan are subject to torrential rains and floods in Afghanistan, local newspapers reported Monday.

Quoting Minister for Natural Disaster Management Ghulam Bahaudin Jilani, the newspaper warned that "deforestation, usurpation of lands along the riverbanks and lack of greenery coat around the seashores were among the factors causing severe damages emanated from torrential rains and floods" in parts of the country.

Afghan forests and jungles have been badly damaged due to protracted wars and conflicts.

"Forests should be further rehabilitated and the government should prevent deforestation to control the floods," the newspaper quoted the official as saying.

Hundreds of thousands of hectares of farmlands and gardens are ... **P2**

President Ghani Seeks Regional Support for Peace



President Ashraf Ghani on Monday afternoon spoke at the opening of an international meeting on "strengthening regional consensus for peace," stressing the need for the support of neighboring and regional countries to participate in the reconciliation process in Afghanistan.

Representatives of 19 countries

and international organizations attended the virtual meeting that was held at the Presidential Palace. "We all are faced with the threat of terrorism, regional crime networks and extremism," Ghani said. "The logic thought is that we stay together and Afghanistan as a roundabout of regional cooperation can play a good role in regional

stability and prosperity." He said that international consensus to end the war is there, adding that "the support of regional and neighboring countries for regional consensus will help Afghanistan to achieve its goals on peace."

On peace, Ghani said that "the peace process will face serious

challenges if the Taliban continue the war."

"Unfortunately, violence level is high compared to the last year. Recent reports by the UN showed that the Taliban is yet to implement their commitments-- and maintain their ties with terrorist networks," Ghani said.

Ghani said that the Afghan government has made big steps with the prisoner release, and the Taliban should quit violence and release the Afghan prisoners.

During the meeting, issues concerning Afghan peace and reconciliation process and support of the regional partners for an independent, unified, democratic and sovereign Afghanistan were discussed.

"India expressed support for a constitutional order in Afghanistan, which would protect the interest of all sections of Afghan society, including women, children and minorities. India highlighted the fact that in order to achieve durable peace in Afghanistan, putting an end to terrorist sanctuaries and safe havens is an essential pre-requisite," MEA said in the statement. ... **P3**

Badghis pistachio harvest to double this year

The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) on Sunday said pistachio harvest in western Badghis province would reach 34,000 tons -- double compared to last year's.

A statement from MAIL quoting Badghis agriculture director, Abdul Tawab Tayeb, as saying, "The amount of pistachio harvests would reach 34,000 tons this year in Badghis based on collected figures and assessments."

"Pistachio trees had low production last year due to drought but ... **P3**



Govt Still Refuses to Release Hundreds of Names on Taliban List

The Afghan government on Monday once again stated its firm stance of not releasing nearly 600 Taliban prisoners who are reportedly guilty of serious crimes beyond membership in the Taliban. The government called on the group to not request specific individuals for release.

The intra-Afghan negotiations were expected to begin within weeks after the US-Taliban deal was signed late in February, but the process faced multiple delays over disagreements on the release of Taliban prisoners by the Afghan government.

"The US has agreed with the Taliban about the release of 5,000 prisoners... We do not expect the Taliban to tell us who should be released," presidential spokesman Sediq Sediqqi told reporters in



Kabul on Monday. Meanwhile, former US national security adviser John Bolton has said that Taliban is not committed to the agreement they signed with the US.

"I think the Taliban remain as dangerous as they have ever been. I don't think they're going to follow through on the peace deal

that they have negotiated. I don't think they have any intention of honoring that with respect to the government of Afghanistan and I think the harboring of terrorists whether they're ISIS, al-Qaeda or others remains a severe problem," Bolton said in an interview with DD India TV.

Taliban spokesman, however, ... **P2**

Kabul, Ashgabat...

A recent trilateral video summit among the presidents of Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan also came up for discussion. The two sides also conferred on the promotion of the peace process in Afghanistan, cross-border cooperation and collaboration in the framework of international structures.

The officials mainly focused on the issues touched on the trilateral video summit that took place earlier between the Presidents of Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan. Particularly, the diplomats exchanged views on the instructions given in accordance with the results of the talks of the Heads of States and reiterated the importance of joint projects in the areas of transport, energy, telecommunications, with special accent made on the transit corridor "Lapis-Lazuli" and the TAPI project.

Around 1.3...

washed away or badly damaged and hundreds of people rendered homeless due to flash floods in Afghanistan annually, especially in spring and winter.

The official assured that the government would provide assistance to the flood-affected people in the country.

The process of distributing 1,000 tons of wheat has already been kicked off for the 160,000 flood-affected people in the western Herat province, the minister said.

By Shahid Javed Burki

Is Russia returning to Afghanistan?

Afghanistan is back in the news. Not a day passes without the front pages of the main American newspapers carrying the news of some Afghan development. For obvious reasons, the coverage seldom refers to how Pakistan is likely to be influenced by what was happening in its neighborhood. To develop a good understanding of how developments in Afghanistan have affected and are likely to affect Pakistan, we have to go a long way back into history. The Afghan history is dominated by how various large powers have been involved in the country's affairs. First the British, then the Russians, then the Americans, and now the Russians again and the Chinese in the near future, have made it their business to take interests one way or the other with Afghan affairs.

At this time, what is receiving a great deal of attention in Washington is the Russian effort to hurt the Americans as they begin to withdraw from Afghanistan. This they are doing, it is alleged, by paying the Taliban fighters large sums of money to kill the United States soldiers. The Taliban have been engaged with the Americans ever since the latter invaded their country almost 20 ago. The Taliban have now signed an agreement with the US that would result in the Americans withdrawing their troops from Afghanistan, adopt a new system of governance for Afghanistan, and not permit any terrorist group from their country's territory to carry out operations outside their country's borders. It was the operation mounted by the Al Qaeda that destroyed the twin towers in World Trade Center in downtown Manhattan and did damage to the Pentagon building near Washington. These led the Americans to invade Afghanistan and remove the Taliban administration that had governed for five years. The terrorist attacks on the US was on September 11, 2001. The Americans struck Afghanistan on October 7, 2001.

Moscow's alleged involvement with the American forces engaged in Afghanistan raises a number of questions. How are the Russians carrying out this operation? Why are the Russians undertaking this operation at a time when the US has indicated



that it is pulling out? Wouldn't increase American casualties in Afghanistan cause the US to delay its departure? If President Donald Trump was briefed on the intelligence reports about the Russian operation, why did the American President choose to ignore this information? Now that the intelligence reports have become public through leaks to the press, what course of action is Trump likely to adopt? How will the Afghan situation be affected by this back and forth between Washington and Moscow? What will be some of the consequences for Pakistan? Not all these questions can be answered in one newspaper column. I will revisit the Afghan story off and on as it develops.

According to the US agencies that have gathered information about the Russian activities, the military spy agency that is believed to have offered the bribes to the Taliban is the GRU, in particular a sub-unit within the agency that in 2018 poisoned a former official that had been its employee but had become a double-agent, working for the British as well. A different GRU unit interfered in the 2016 US election, carrying out hacking attacks meant to exacerbate discord in the Democratic Party. According to Thad

Troy, a former CIA officer who was one of the first US officials to meet with Putin in the late 1990s when the latter ran Russia's FSB, the main successor to the KGB. "Though Putin has continually been active against the United States, 2016 election was sort of 'got ya' moment for him, that this works," Troy told one of the reporters working on this developing story.

Vladimir Putin, Russia's long-serving President, is nostalgic about his country's past. The past includes his country's interest in Afghanistan that goes back to the time when the British governed the South Asian Subcontinent. With the two-decades long fight over defining the future of Afghanistan moving towards some sort of resolution, Putin's Moscow would like to ensure that what emerges is helpful to it in minding its strategic interests in Central Asia and the Middle East. Putin can see Afghanistan going one of three ways. It could adopt the Western-style liberal democracy roughly in tune with what the country is following today. Or, it could opt for an Islamic system that is the wish of the Taliban who had briefly governed the country in the late 1990s. Or, it could place the country in the hands of an authoritarian ruler who would sit on top of a strong state and decide for ... **P3**

By Diah Hadid

No Rest for The Gravediggers of Afghanistan

Abbas has worked in this Kabul cemetery for more than a decade, since he moved to the Afghan capital for work. He's sometimes called to dig quickly to bury the victims of militant attacks. But the last six weeks are the busiest he's ever seen.

"People bring their dead during the day and during the night," says Abbas, who like many Afghans, has only one name. He believes the cause of death is COVID-19. "The sickness has spread between the people, and the number of deaths is growing," he says as he scrapes through the hard, rocky ground to dig a new grave in the Omed-e-Sabz cemetery that clings to a windswept mountainside that looms over the Afghan capital.

Abbas says before the pandemic, the gravediggers

would bury seven or eight people a day. Now it's more like 20. He sometimes buries family members side-by-side.

Kabul's gravediggers have long been witnessing to Afghanistan's bloodshed. Now, they're emerging as some of the most important eyewitnesses of how badly the pandemic is affecting the Afghan capital.

The Afghan government reports just over 31,200 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 733 deaths as of June 30. But those numbers aren't reliable at all, says Khushal Nabizada, the director of public health in the Kabul province. The U.N. reports the positivity rate from COVID-19 tests to be around 44 percent across Afghanistan, which suggests the disease is widespread. Nabizada says the country

doesn't have the capacity to do more testing — and that many Afghans are reluctant to self-report, because of the stigma surrounding the disease.

There are many reasons for the stigma. One political ethnologist, Orzala Nemat, explains families fear they'll be shunned if a member has a contagious disease. Others worry they or their families will be seen as bad people — with the disease as a divine punishment. Sick people worry that "maybe I have done some sins in my life, that's why I have COVID-19," Nemat says.

For example, in Kabul province, Nabizada says the real number of COVID-19 cases is probably "manifold higher" than the official tally of 12,000: With about 7 million residents in the city and its ... **P3**

Govt Still...

rejected the remarks and said the group is committed to implementing the peace deal.

Based on the agreement, the group has committed to not attack cities. On Monday, Taliban launched attacks on the outskirts of the northern city of Pul-e-Khumri, closing the main highway to traffic.

Sources close to the Taliban said the release of key Taliban prisoners — on which the Afghan government has

disagreements — will help the start of the intra-Afghan negotiations.

"The release of prisoners not only creates an environment of trust, but it also helps the start of the intra-Afghan negotiations," said Faiz Mohammad Zaland, a university lecturer.

On Sunday, the Afghan government revealed that one of the main reasons behind the delay in the intra-Afghan negotiations was its refusal to release 597 prisoners out of the

5,000 inmates that were to be freed as part of the US-Taliban agreement signed in late February.

These individuals are accused of serious "moral crimes," and are on a list that was given to the government by the Taliban, said Ahmad Rashid Totakhil, who heads up the prisoner release process.

According to the Afghan government, so far 4,015 Taliban prisoners have been released and the process will continue this week.

Uber scoops up...

U.S. food delivery rival GrubHub, which commands a 23% market share, faltered over regulatory and other concerns. GrubHub was snatched up by Takeaway.com NV on June 11.

When Uber presented its offer in June, Postmates was gearing up for an initial public offering for July.

Postmates board, however, was concerned that being a smaller player in food delivery and the economic recession could cast a shadow over the new stock's long-term performance, according to a source familiar

with the matter. The board instead decided to opt for certainty by agreeing to a tie-up with the well-capitalized Uber.

Even with a pandemic-induced increase in demand, Uber Eats recorded a \$313 million adjusted EBITDA loss in the first quarter. Uber on Monday said Eats bookings have more than doubled in the second quarter, but the company declined to provide additional financial details, including on Postmates. Khosrowshahi said some 30% of Postmates' orders come from subscribers, a reliable customer segment Uber aims to expand with its own subscription service.

Paktika pine nut yield crosses 14,000 tons

Southeastern Paktika province produced more than 14,000 tons of pine nut this year, an official said on Monday.

Paktika Agriculture Director Abubakar Sediqi told Pajhwok Afghan News the pine nut yield was record high this season compared to the past six years. He said 6,000 tons of pine nut was produced last year but the yield increased to 14,000 this year across the province.

He added people now paid more attention to pine nut harvests after it import started to neighboring China. The agriculture director said around 30,000 metric tons of pine nut worth hundreds of millions of dollars were exported to China last year.

Aziz Aziz, a member of the provincial council, told Pajhwok pine nut yield increased this year and the government should find market for



the dried fruit.

He urged the government to create processing centers for the pine nut in the province.

Izzatullah, a trader of the pine nut, was happy with the nut yields this year in the province.

He said the import of pine nut was delayed to China last year due to Covid-19, but the government should facilitate the import of pine nut to foreign countries besides China.

Ulfat Kharoti, a resident of the Sarobi district, told Pajhwok so far foreign

and domestic traders had not visited them to buy pine nut due to coronavirus.

Meanwhile, agriculture department officials said efforts were underway to find domestic and foreign market for the pine nut this year.

Badghis pistachio...

more rainfall and snowfall last winter contributed to high production of the fruit this year," the source added. Last year, Badghis produced 15,000 tons of pistachio. According to MAIL, pistachio trees make around 30,000 hectares of forests in the province and more gardens of the fruit have been created with the efforts of MAIL and relevant organizations in the recent years.

Badghis agriculture department says around 4,000 pistachio gardens have been established in the province and they would produce the fruit in coming years.

The statement added that 120 hectares of pistachio jungle would be rehabilitated this year as 160 hectares was rehabilitated last year.

Badghis agriculture department has grown around 70,000 pistachio plants in the spring of ongoing 1399 solar year and distributed them to gardeners on a fair price, the source said.

MAIL said that pistachio was a major income source for Badghis farmers.

President Ghani...

India, one of the largest development partners of Afghanistan, with a commitment of more than USD 3 billion, reiterated the importance of an inclusive, Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, Afghan - controlled peace and reconciliation process.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for extending COVID 19 assistance to Afghanistan and for hosting SAARC leaders' meeting for coordinated efforts in the region.

"President Ashraf Ghani thanked Prime Minister Modi for extending COVID 19 assistance to Afghanistan and for hosting SAARC leaders' meeting for coordinated efforts in the region," the statement read

Is Russia...

the people without consulting with them. If the first course is followed, the Americans would retain their influence over the country. If the third route is the preferred option, Moscow would have a strong presence in Kabul. An Islamic republic would increase the influence of Iran in the country. Putin believes that he can move the Afghans in the direction in which they would like to go if they become suspicious of America's interests. Moscow is not the first capital to move Kabul in the direction it prefers.

What can be described as the "Greater Middle East" and the region of Central Asia have become areas of contention for the world's major powers. These include the US, China, Russia and the European Union. A couple of lesser powers have also joined the race. They include Turkey

and India. The large powers are not likely to get involved with one another militarily but that can't be said about the secondary powers. For instance, China and India have had a fist and stone fight in mid-June in the upper reaches of the Himalayas.

The large contenders will contest through proxies and use trade and other economic interventions to gain influence. For the moment there are a number of areas of contention. These include the oil-producing countries in the Greater Middle East and the Himalayas. Russia and Turkey are engaged in Libya and China and India are fighting it out in the Himalayas.

If the US intelligence services were aware of what Moscow was doing by way of bribing the Taliban to kill the American servicemen, why didn't they persuade President Trump to act? They had known that these

bribes were being given money: they had looked into the bank accounts of both the GRU and some of the Taliban leadership. According to one theory, this was the time when the US was about to conclude a peace treaty with the Taliban. If information that some of those who were active in the negotiations were also being bribed, they may have walked out of the talks. Also, Russian involvement against US interests in Afghanistan is "nothing new", said Mike Pompeo, the American Secretary of State, in a conversation with the press. "They have been selling small arms that have put Americans at risk for 10 years." He said he brings up Afghanistan "with great frequency" in talks with his Russian counterparts. The Afghan story, in other words, will continue to develop. It needs to be carefully watched by Islamabad.

No Rest for The...

surrounding rural belt, "our assumption is that there might be more than one million cases in Kabul," he says.

Nabizada says they reached that conclusion from looking at patient flows at hospitals, random testing and announcements of deaths on social media.

He believes the number of people dying is also higher than the official number of 733. "I assume maybe two or three times more than this - people are dying - and they are not reporting to us, and they are not asking for support."

He says at least 20 to 30 people a day are calling a hotline the government set up to provide coffins and sanitation equipment to bereaved families. But he says he can't register these deaths as COVID-19-related because the deceased were not tested for the disease.

That's because of stigma, again. Nabizada says other families simply want to have a traditional Muslim burial: wrapping their loved one in a shroud and lowering them into the ground, surrounded by male relatives, instead of being quickly buried in a coffin by a few people, which is standard practice for COVID-19 victims to prevent possible transmission at the funeral.

Back in the Kabul cemetery, the diggers say the pandemic is changing how they work. Before, they'd wait for bereaved families to come and ask them to dig a grave - they are paid about \$5 a day by cemetery managers but also rely on tips from mourners. Now, workers like Nangalay scrape their shovel through the hard, rocky ground to dig graves in advance.

"We dig 20 to 30 graves a day," says the gravedigger, who also has only one name. "People

bring them straight from the hospital to the graveyard," he said, referring to COVID-19 victims. Hospitals do not store such bodies because of concerns about contagion. As he speaks, a group of mourners trudge up the hill toward an empty grave, carrying a body in a green shroud emblazoned with gold writing. A skinny sunburnt child with black, dirt-streaked hair, rushes after the group, offering to pour water on the grave - seen as a blessing for the dead. The children, mostly desperately poor, earn tips. Another worker, Rajab - he only has one name - said his boss hired six more gravediggers to keep up with their busier pace. Most of the burials take place during the day, he says, but now they're also burying people at night. "Maybe they have corona," he says. And he starts to dig another grave.

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Germany spends nearly €1B for costs linked to U.S. troops

The German government has paid nearly €1 billion over the past 10 years to cover costs linked to the deployment of US soldiers in Germany, local media reported on Monday.

The government spent €982.4 million on US troops in Germany, of which €648 million went into construction work at US military bases, the DPA news agency said, citing a Finance Ministry statement.

The communique was issued in response to an inquiry by Brigitte Freihold, an opposition parliamentarian of The Left, a radical leftist party. There are almost 35,000 US soldiers based in Germany.

Last month, US President Donald Trump announced that he will withdraw 9,500 of them, citing Germany's spending too little on military defense.

Although the German government has increased

the defense budget drastically, it still misses the NATO target of 2% of the gross domestic product. "Germany has been in default for years and owes NATO billions of dollars, and they have to pay that," Trump said when the troop withdrawal was announced.

He also pointed out that the stationing of US troops in Germany caused "huge costs" for the US, while Germany benefited from them economically.

"These are well-paid soldiers. They live in Germany. They spend a lot of their money in Germany," Trump added.

A longtime member of the NATO military pact, Germany hosts more than half of all US soldiers stationed in Europe.

Germany plays a crucial role for US global military operations as it also hosts US Africa Command, major military hospitals and training facilities.



A look at the world

Macron creates three super ministries to lead coronavirus recovery

France is creating three beefed-up ministries for finance, social affairs and the environment in response to the coronavirus shockwaves convulsing the economy, part of a reshuffle by Emmanuel Macron as he recasts his presidency.

Macron's chief of staff Alexis Kohler said Bruno Le Maire would stay at the helm of a Finance Ministry tasked with steering France out the worst economic depression in decades, now in full control of the budget.

Elisabeth Borne will take charge of an enhanced Labour and Social Affairs ministry just as the downturn



unravels Macron's hard-fought gains on unemployment and the president seeks to reset relations with unions and voters after waves of protests. She previously led the Ministry for Ecological and Inclusive Transition.

Former Green party politician Barbara Pompili will run a dedicated Environment Ministry as Macron and his new prime minister seek more emphasis on green policies to drive an economic rebound and build a sustainable future for companies like Air France and Renault. The reshuffle comes eight days after Macron's party took a drubbing in local elections that saw the Greens surge in major cities like Lyon, Bordeaux and Strasbourg.

Uber scoops up Postmates for \$2.65 billion in 'everyday' delivery push



Uber Technologies Inc on Monday said it would acquire Postmates Inc for \$2.65 billion to expand its food delivery market share and significantly increase the business of supplying everyday goods at a time when the coronavirus has pummeled its core ride-hailing service.

The all-stock deal, still subject to regulatory approval, would give Uber a roughly 30% share of the U.S. food delivery market, trailing only rival DoorDash, which commands some 45%, according to analytics firm Second Measure.

Uber said both companies' boards have approved the deal, for which Uber currently expects to issue some 84 million shares of common stock. Uber offered a premium of about 10% on Postmates' last valuation of \$2.4 billion. Its shares were up 5% at \$32.24. Uber Chief Executive Dara Khosrowshahi on Monday told analysts the tie-up would allow Uber Eats to distinguish itself by delivering not only restaurant food, but everything from groceries to personal care and fashion items. Uber has launched an option to send packages via its U.S. ride-hail drivers during the pandemic and teamed up with grocery stores in several countries. The acquisition allows it to expand into Postmates' existing network in 4,200 U.S. cities.

"The vision for us is to become an everyday service," the Uber CEO said.

Khosrowshahi said he expects the deal to create profitability for the Uber's Eats unit, as well as some \$200 million in cost saving synergies in about two years and additional efficiency gains through Uber's smarter routing technology.

The tie-up comes after a month of frenzied merger talks in the industry as millions of Americans were marooned at home by the coronavirus crisis. Companies have traditionally tried to gain market share with costly promotions and driver incentives.

Uber's original plan to acquire ... **P2**

Xi Jinping stresses further cooperation with Arab states

Chinese President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter to the 9th ministerial meeting of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF) held on Monday via video-link, calling on the two sides to make more efforts in deepening cooperation.

Xi Jinping hails close ties and mutual support between China and Arab countries

The forum was co-chaired by Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi.

Recalling the announcement of establishing strategic partnership



between China and Arab states at the 8th forum, Xi said that the "future-oriented strategic partnership of comprehensive cooperation and common development" has been deepened through cooperation and strategic coordination during the past two years.

Xi said that the two sides have supported each other and conducted close cooperation amid the pandemic, expressing vividly the content of the community with a shared future for China and Arab states.

Against the current backdrop, the two sides need to strengthen cooperation more than ever, Xi said.

Taking the opportunity of the forum, the president called on the two sides to deepen cooperation against the virus, as well as in other fields, so as to better benefit the people of the two sides.



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