



Page 2 | NATIONAL
India acting as a spoiler in Afghan peace process

Afghanistan's COVID-19 crisis has been fuelled by armed conflict

The COVID-19 pandemic is revealing the inequities in access to health care around the globe. In Afghanistan, the spread of the virus has ...

Page 3 | ECONOMY
MoF Demands Municipalities Report on Bread Program Finances



Kabul
 30 / 19



Herat
 37 / 24



Nangarhar
 39 / 28



Balkh
 40 / 27



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10 afs



We are committed to assisting Afghan forces as long as needed: NATO SCR

In an exclusive interview with Ariana News, Stefano Pontecorvo said that the decision in this regard would be made by the Afghan government. Pontecorvo added that the Taliban's high level of violence is unacceptable, noting that the government's concerns about not releasing the remaining Taliban prisoners are legitimate. Given the stalemate over the release of prisoners, he called on both laterals to show flexibility in achieving peace. He also legitimizes the Afghan government's concern about the remaining Taliban prisoners. "Although the prisoner release is slowly proceeding, we would like to see this stepped up a bit, but there are issues which are real issues on the side of the government ... **P2**



Govt Blames Taliban for Not Implementing Peace Deal

The US-Taliban deal signed on February 28 in Doha has remained unimplemented as three key parts of the agreement - a reduction in violence, a decrease in the number of foreign forces, and intra-Afghan negotiations should have happened 135 days after the accord. The intra-Afghan talks have not begun, violence has not been reduced, and only US troops are known to have been reduced - the status of other foreign forces in the country is still unclear. Monday was the 136th day after the peace deal that raised hopes among the Afghan people and political elites who believed it would lead the country towards negotiations. During this period, the number of US forces has decreased to the target 8,600 but there is no official figure on the number of other countries' forces in Afghanistan. The Presidential Palace has blamed the Taliban for not implementing their commitments, saying the movements by the group should be scrutinized after the peace deal. The agreement mentions that ... **P3**

Dozens injured in Taliban attack near Afghan spy agency office



More than 40 people, mostly civilians, have been wounded after gunmen clashed with security forces following a car-bomb blast at a government compound in Afghanistan's northern province of Samangan. The attack claimed by the Taliban group on Monday took place at a government facility in Samangan's

capital, Aybak, close to an office of the National Directorate of Security (NDS), the main intelligence agency, officials said. "It's a complex attack that started with a car bomb. Clashes with the attackers are still going on," said Mohammad Sediq Azizi, a spokesman for Samangan's provincial government.

The province's health director, Khalil Musadeq, said 43 civilians, including children, and members of the security forces had been wounded in the attack, with that number expected to rise and deaths expected. Witness Waseh Suhail said gunshots could still be heard inside the NDS compound.

"It was a huge explosion that broke all our windows," said Haseeb, who only gave one name, a government employee working nearby. "Many people have been wounded by flying pieces of glass." Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman, said the armed group - who are active in the province and have recently stepped up attacks there - were behind the bombing. Separately, at least 26 security forces were killed in coordinated attacks on Sunday in Kunduz province, also in the north, also claimed by the Taliban. The attacks in Chahar Dara and Imam Sahib districts left 14 security forces and three Taliban fighters dead, Esmatullah Muradi, spokesman for the governor of Kunduz, told Anadolu news agency on Monday. The recent attacks come at a sensitive time as violence in the country ramps up even as the United States tries to usher the government and the Taliban towards peace talks to end more than 18 years of war. The so-called intra-Afghan dialogue was agreed as part of the US-Taliban deal signed in the ... **P2**

Pakistan reopens India border for Afghan transit trade

Pakistan on Monday has decided to resume Afghan exports through Wagah border crossing from July 15, 2020, after implementing COVID-19 related protocols. According to the press release of Foreign Office of Pakistan, the decision was taken on the special request of the government of Afghanistan and with a view to facilitating Afghanistan's transit trade. With this step, Pakistan has fulfilled its commitments under Pakistan-Afghanistan Transit Trade ... **P3**



Wolesi Jirga rejects 2 presidential legislative decrees

The Wolesi Jirga on Monday rejected two legislative presidential decrees promoting the Petroleum Enterprise to a National Gas and Petroleum Authority and the National Examination Committee to as National Examination Authority. Nangyal Lawang, a member of the lower house Justice Commission, said that most members of the permanent Commissions had rejected the promotion of Petroleum Enterprise and Examination Committee as they deemed it against the law. He said the legislative decree issued last year was about promoting the Petroleum Enterprise of the Ministry of Commerce and Industries to a National Gas and Petroleum Authority while the Examination Committee of the Higher Education Ministry to National Examination Authority.



He said if these institutions were promoted to independent authorities, they would not be held accountable. Speaker Mir Rahman Rahmani said the creation of independent authorities, amendments or revocation of laws were the responsibility of the Wolesi Jirga. As the bill was presented in the house, a majority of the lawmakers rejected it. The legislative decrees would be dispatched to the upper

house for approval. Article 100 of the constitution says "If one House rejects decisions of the other, a joint commission comprised of an equal number of members from each House shall be formed to solve the difference." "The decision of the commission, after endorsement by the President, shall be enforced. If the joint commission does not solve the difference, the decision shall be considered rejected."

We are...

on releasing the remaining number of prisoners. We call for flexibility from all sides," NATO SCR Stefano Pontecorvo told Ariana News.

This high-ranking NATO civilian official considers it important to build internal consensus at the leadership level to achieve peace. He says the countries of the region and the world have agreed on a general consensus in this regard. He also says that the presence of the forces of NATO in Afghanistan will be at the request of the Afghan government.

"We don't want to stay here forever, but we are committed to assisting for as long as we need to be here, and that will be decided by the Afghan government."

Meanwhile, NATO Envoy called on the Taliban to remain committed and credible in achieving peace.

Dozens injured...

Qatari capital Doha.

The February agreement, which excluded the Kabul government, called for a gradual withdrawal of US forces and a prisoner swap between Kabul and the Taliban.

The Taliban has been fighting foreign forces since it was toppled from power in a US-led invasion in 2001. On Sunday, accusing the Afghan government of delaying the start of talks, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the Taliban was "left with no option but to continue the war."

By Syed Zain Jaffery

India acting as a spoiler in Afghan peace process

While India has gained significantly since US participation in Afghanistan and has considerably increased its influence in Afghanistan through economic and military assistance, it has failed to take a dominant position in recent Afghan peace talks to achieve its strategic interests. Since India is using Afghan soil to support proxies against Pakistan, it is, therefore, less supportive of the reconciliation process and does not want Taliban to play a leading role in future security arrangements concerning Afghan political apparatus. In this regard, the Taliban has recently announced that India has always played a negative role in Afghanistan and supported traitors in the country. The diplomatic choice of New Delhi to dispatch senior ambassadors to Russia as informal representatives for settling the negotiations with the Taliban revealed that the strategy has been changed to remain relevant with evolving security dynamics of Afghanistan.

Pakistan is sincerely dedicated to the peaceful resolution of the Afghan crisis but it is far more concerned with the interference of external "spoilers". Pakistan, which has been victimized for several years by extremism and terrorism, does not want to see resurgence of such violence. Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has categorically denied that Islamabad is taking the side of any particular group – Taliban or the Afghan government. He urged that Pakistan has no desire to interfere and has no other agenda but it will work with whatever arrangement the peace talks produce. In this context, the International community must understand that India is creating complications for the Afghan peace process and take notice of the Indian role as a spoiler within and outside Afghanistan.

As great powers advance towards the conclusion of an agreement in Afghanistan, the destiny of its \$3 billion investment and influence in the war-torn nation is very worrisome for India. PM Narendra Modi has assigned 4 billion rupees for social construction in Afghanistan during the first quarterly expenditure of his second parliamentary term. Experts think that political fear in India regarding Afghanistan is due to the reality that it has been excluded from the negotiations even after offering humanitarian and



financial aid to Afghanistan with up to \$650 million to \$750 million, rendering it the biggest regional aid provider. Moreover, Islamabad has almost prepared the grounds for the Washington, Moscow and Beijing to achieve an agreement with the Taliban. Rakesh Sood, former Indian ambassador to Kabul, has already confessed that neither India nor its concurring partners had a position at the peace talk process for the Afghan regime.

Between 1996 and 2001, India supplied the Anti-Taliban Northern Alliance with military, political and financial aid. The main aim was to disregard a peaceful western border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. A factual analysis shows that New Delhi has never been reluctant to use proxies to safeguard its security objectives in Afghanistan. It is clear that, with the aid of Afghan National Directorate of Security and anti-Pakistan terrorist factions in Afghanistan, RAW has waged hybrid warfare in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Karachi. The network of the Indian and Afghan security services may still be exploited to disrupt the latest peace process in Afghanistan because New Delhi and Kabul are not in favour of the legitimacy granted to the Taliban by the United States and its allies.

Ministry of Human Rights launches 'Young Experts' Programme

India's continued clandestine activities in Afghanistan are a perpetual threat to the national security of Pakistan. In the course of Ajit Doval Doctrine, Indian Consulates in Afghanistan are collaborating with terrorist organizations to establish decoy insurgent movements in Pakistan. A recent UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Report on terrorism had vindicated Pakistan's position that the banned Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) operating from Afghanistan and supported by India threatened regional countries, including Pakistan. New Delhi is lobbying in Washington for its role in Afghanistan and also bilaterally engaging with the Afghan government to create favourable circumstances through its intelligence. Pakistan on many occasions has signaled that India's military support to the government in Afghanistan and the continued presence of Indian military and intelligence there will be considered as an unacceptable provocation. After 9/11, Pakistan anticipated the Afghan administration's tilting tendency toward India. Pakistan's strategic objectives concerning the future of Afghanistan have been associated ... **P3**

By Misha Ketchell

Afghanistan's COVID-19 crisis has been fuelled by armed conflict

The COVID-19 pandemic is revealing the inequities in access to health care around the globe. In Afghanistan, the spread of the virus has been ignited by decades of armed conflict and reconstruction efforts that have prioritized cutting public expenditures over strengthening the Afghan health-care system. Powerful states and institutions have long tried to shape Afghanistan in their own image — by war or by policy. They are responsible for creating the conditions under which Afghans are extremely vulnerable to the ravages of COVID-19.

The first case of coronavirus in Afghanistan was confirmed on Feb. 24, 2020, in Herat province. As of July 8, 33,594 cases and 936 deaths have been confirmed. Nonetheless, only 77,501 people have been tested to date, which is why the confirmed cases are estimated to be only a tenth of the actual case numbers.

For example, the government of Herat province estimated that in the week leading up to

June 12, 280 people died in the province of suspected COVID-19 without ever seeing a medical professional.

Armed conflicts involving superpowers

The uncertainty about the scope of the pandemic in Afghanistan is a symptom of the social and political upheaval in the country. Since the 1979 invasion by the Soviet Union, Afghanistan has been the stage for armed conflicts involving global superpowers. In 2001, a United States-led military coalition invaded the country for the ostensible purpose of defeating al Qaeda.

These successive conflicts have displaced many Afghans: In a country of 38 million people, 1.1 million people are currently internally displaced and another 1.7 million people are refugees who have recently returned from Iran or Pakistan.

These populations suffer from precarious housing and work situations. The ongoing conflicts have uprooted citizens,

destroyed infrastructure like roads and hospitals and heightened the demands on the health-care system. In 2019, at least 3,403 civilians were killed and 6,989 were injured in armed conflict.

Health-care professionals and facilities have frequently been targeted by armed groups, and Afghans cite conflict-related insecurity as a key barrier to health care.

Reconstruction efforts flawed Shortly after the 2001 invasion, the U.S. and international financial institutions started to implement a reconstruction program that directed international contributions through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which is controlled by the World Bank. As journalist Naomi Klein reported in 2005, the fund "has already managed to privatize health care by refusing to give funds to the Ministry of Health to build hospitals. Instead it funnels money directly to NGOs."

Those aid agencies build ... **P3**

Will get married once Afghanistan win the World Cup: Rashid Khan

Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid Khan has said that he will get married once Afghanistan win the World Cup. They lost all nine league stage matches in 2019 WC. One of the finest leg-spinners in the present era, Rashid Khan owns a number of bowling records, especially in the shortest format. Despite being just 21, the Afghanistan player has already scalped 296 wickets in T20s and has also had the honour of leading his national team. The youngest captain to lead a side to a Test victory, Rashid created history when Afghanistan defeated Bangladesh last year. Though the board decided to reappoint Asghar Afghan as captain across all formats in December. A T20 globetrotter, Rashid plays in almost every T20 league whenever he is away from national duty. One of the highest earners in Indian Premier League, Rashid has also plied his trade in Big Bash League, Mzansi Super League, Bangladesh Premier League, Pakistan Super League and a number of other tournaments.

Being one of the youngest cricketers, Rashid is also the most eligible bachelor

in Afghanistan. Recently, Rashid opened up about his marriage plans and revealed when he will tie the knot. Speaking to Azadi Radio, Rashid said: "I will get engaged & married once Afghanistan win the cricket world."

Rashid, who made his ODI debut in 2015, was a part of Afghanistan's 2019 World Cup team. Given their form, the Gulbadin Naib-led squad was expected to pull off something big but they lost all nine league stage matches to finish the tournament at the last spot.

The controversial decisions made throughout the tournament led to Gulbadin's sacking. Afghanistan failed to open their account in 50-over World Cup but they are expected to put up a great show in the T20 World Cup.

Rashid has been away from competitive cricket since March. He hasn't played any match since the Ireland series, which took place in India. He was scheduled to return to India after a week to represent Sunrisers Hyderabad in IPL 2020 but the league is currently suspended. Rashid is confirmed to play the league whenever it takes place.

MoF Demands Municipalities Report on Bread Program Finances

Amid widespread reports of corruption, the Afghan Ministry of Finance on Saturday called on the Kabul Municipality and other municipalities in the 32 provinces of the country to report back on the hundreds of millions of afghanis these entities were provided as part of the government's relief package to provide free bread to the poor amid the pandemic.

According to the Ministry of Finance, over 2.2 billion afs was allocated for the bread distribution funds for needy families across the country during the lockdown. The Ministry has called on all municipalities in 34 provinces to report back on their spending with clarity and transparency.

"The government institutions who have received the funds must be accountable and they need to report back on their expenditures with transparency," said Shamroz Khan



Masjidi, a spokesman for the Ministry of Finance.

From the 2.2 billion afs, 1.2 billion afs were taken by the Kabul Municipality. Kabul Municipality was frequently criticized for corruption with bread distribution by the residents.

"In each case four, 30 or 35 percent were given to bakers in exchange for cooking the bread," said

Shahryar Fahim, the head of Kabul Procurement.

"Some part of the expenditures have not been completed-- with the completion of them, all expenditures will be cleared," said Nematullah Barakzai, the head of the media department of Kabul Municipality.

Kabul Municipality has admitted that the account of some of these

expenses is not clear yet.

Meanwhile, a number of residents in Kabul have reported large scale corruption and irregularities from the funds.

"They have sent the main part of the amount into their pockets. In some areas, they were distributing only two breads for each needy family," said Bilal Ahmad, a resident in Kabul.

India acting as...

with its anxieties for the existence of New Delhi's diplomatic forces in Kabul, which Islamabad thinks present immediate safety and security risks. New Delhi's enhancing efforts to remain relevant in the Afghan peace process will continue to play an important role in Pakistan's decision making. Nonetheless, Pakistan's strategic outlook in modeling its future related to Afghan peace talks has also been driven by a rational willingness to achieve desired impact in a fast-moving and complicated geopolitical setting.

In the War on Terror, Pakistan has been a frontline country which suffered tremendous human and economic losses. Pakistan would like a peaceful Afghanistan that will prevent the Kabul from becoming a premise for a proxy war against Islamabad. Whereas, India is neither Afghanistan's immediate neighbour nor does it share ethnic and cultural values, so its role in the Afghan peace process will remain restricted. India may want to see the peace process stalled and seek to provoke a reaction so that it can cost all the stakeholders, particularly Pakistan. Pakistan has never been opposed to India having a bilateral relationship with Afghanistan but has an objection that India is using Afghan soil against Pakistan. Islamabad hopes that after the withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan with respect to the peace agreement recently signed, India will desist to use Afghan soil against Pakistan's interests.

Govt Blames...

US forces should withdraw from five military bases in Afghanistan, but the forces have not left the bases so far.

The prisoner exchange between the Afghan government and the Taliban is another complicated process that has delayed the intra-Afghan negotiations. The process should have happened 10 days after the peace deal, according to the agreement.

"Their (Taliban's) key responsibility was a significant reduction in violence and an 'unofficial' ceasefire. Another responsibility of theirs was to cut their ties with all terrorist groups, but you saw in recent reports by the UN and US that this has not happened so far," presidential spokesman Sediq Sediqqi said. "A big role in the peace process is on the Taliban's shoulders."

According to the agreement, the Taliban has been asked to cut their ties with terrorist groups

such as al-Qaeda, but a Pentagon report released earlier this month said al-Qaeda's regional affiliate in Afghanistan maintains "close ties" to the Taliban and has an "enduring interest" in attacking US troops.

"Last night, a group of over 70 Taliban with the help of foreign terrorists attacked a checkpoint of security forces in Arghanjkhwah district in which seven members of the local and national police were martyred and two others were wounded," said Nek Mohammad Nazari, spokesman for the Badakhshan governor.

The Afghan government has so far released over 4,200 Taliban prisoners out of 5,000. There is a rift over the release of 529 of the prisoners.

"They (Taliban) have neither reduced violence nor they have released prisoners (of the government forces) and neither they have been able to create a

consensus for peace within their leadership," said Jawed Faisal, spokesman for the National Security Council.

The Taliban on Monday conducted a complex attack on an NDS compound in the northern province of Samangan, leaving 10 dead and 60 others wounded. A spokesman of the group, Zabihullah Mujahid, in reaction to calls for a reduction in violence said on Sunday that they have yet to find an alternative for war. He urged the completion of the release of 5,000 prisoners and the start of the intra-Afghan negotiations.

Meanwhile, US Chargé d'Affaires Ross Wilson who met with the Afghan negotiating team today said in a tweet that "to start the next chapter and move to the successful negotiations that Afghans demand, both sides need to complete the exchange of prisoners, and the Taliban must reduce the violence."

Pakistan reopens...

Agreement (APTTA). Pakistan has restored bilateral trade and Afghan transit trade at all border crossing terminals to pre-COVID-19 status, the Foreign Office stated.

The press released further read, "Pakistan remains fully committed to further strengthening its bilateral relations with Afghanistan in all areas including trade, and to facilitate Afghanistan's transit trade under APTTA."

Afghanistan's...

clinics and operate them through grants and contracts. This policy benefited international non-governmental organizations, but failed to build the capacity of the Afghan Ministry of Public Health. Reconstruction loans by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are tied to conditions that typically mandate limits on public spending and have been found to have adverse effects on the human right to health.

After more than 15 years of governance through international financial institutions, the International Monetary Fund insists on prioritizing a "balanced budget" over increases in social spending even though it recognizes that Afghan government spending on health care is vastly insufficient. As a result of this underfunding, there's a shortage of health-care professionals: There are only 9.4 skilled health professionals and 1.9 physicians per 10,000 people in Afghanistan. Rural areas have as few as 0.6 physicians per

10,000 residents.

Fragmented health-care system The international funding priorities have fragmented and stratified the Afghan health-care system: NGOs operate many free specialized clinics, but are vulnerable to funding cuts and depend on international forces for security.

The free public health clinics are often mere shells. Patients report the clinics lack qualified personnel and often run out of essential medicines, and underpaid doctors working in public clinics urge patients to attend their "more lucrative after-hours private practice" instead. As a result, patients face significant financial barriers to health care.

According to a 2015 study, one in five patients reported losing a close friend or family member due to lack of health care over the previous year. These numbers are bound to rise further as the coronavirus charts its path through the country.

Nationally, out-of-pocket expenses paid by patients

account for up to 73.3 per cent of all health-care expenditures, central government funding for 5.6 per cent and international donor funding for 20.8 per cent. Although more than half of Afghans live in poverty, they have been required to shoulder the majority of the burden of paying for their health-care system.

Uniquely vulnerable The pandemic highlights global and local inequalities, but it hides responsibility for the conditions that enable the spread of the coronavirus.

The NATO countries, including Canada, that have spent resources on violently transforming Afghanistan according to their own agenda need to understand that the combination of prolonged armed conflict and the concerted underfunding of health care have made the residents of Afghanistan uniquely vulnerable to the virus. Without massive support for social services and health care, Afghans will continue to have to choose between COVID-19 and hunger.

Exchange Rates

77	\$	77.1
85.6	€	85.7
94.1	£	94.2
462	Rp.	463
20.2	دروغ	20.2
1010	₹	1020

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Kabul Ambulance - 112

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Ata Turk Hospital
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Corona call center - 166



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Russia: Hagia Sophia status 'Turkey's internal affair'

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin said Monday that changing the status of the iconic Hagia Sophia to a mosque was Turkey's internal affair. Russia is of the view that no one should interfere in the decision, he said in an interview with Sputnik radio. "We assume that we are talking about Turkey's internal affairs, in which, of course, neither we nor others should interfere. At the same time we pay attention to its significance as an object of world culture and civilization," he said. On Friday, a top Turkish court annulled a 1934 cabinet decree, which had turned Istanbul's Hagia Sophia into a museum. This verdict by the country's Council of State

paved the way for its use again as a mosque after 85 years. It ruled that the architectural gem had been owned by a foundation established by Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II, the conqueror of Istanbul, and presented to the community as a mosque -- a status that cannot be legally changed. The Hagia Sophia was used as a church for centuries under the rule of the Byzantine Empire. It was turned into a mosque following the conquest of Istanbul in 1453. In 1935, the Hagia Sophia was converted into a museum. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the historical complex will be ready for worship for Friday prayers on July 24.



A look at the world

WHO sounds alarm as coronavirus cases rise by one million in five days

Reuters tally, climbing by a million in just five days. The pandemic has now killed more than half a million people in six-and-a-half months, and World Health Organization (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said there would be no return to the "old normal" for the foreseeable future, especially if preventive measures were neglected. "Let me be blunt, too many countries are headed in the wrong direction, the virus remains public enemy number one," he told a virtual briefing from WHO headquarters in Geneva.



"If basics are not followed, the only way this pandemic is going to go, it is going to get worse and worse and worse. But it does not have to be this way." Reuters' global tally, which is based on government reports, shows the disease accelerating fastest in Latin America. The Americas account for more than half the world's infections and half the deaths. Parts of the world, especially the United States with more than 3.3 million confirmed cases, are still seeing huge increases in a first wave of COVID-19 infections, while others "flatten the curve" and ease lockdowns. Some places, such as the Australian city of Melbourne and Leicester in England, are implementing a second round of shutdowns. Chinese-ruled Hong Kong, albeit with a low 1,522 cases, is to tighten social distancing measures again amid growing worries about a third wave. The United States reported a daily global record of 69,070 new infections on July 10. In Brazil, 1.86 million people have tested positive, including President Jair Bolsonaro, and more than 72,000 people have died.

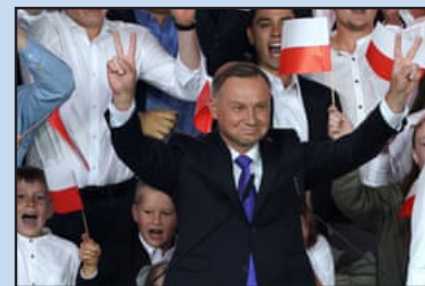
Kosovo's Thaci quizzed by war crimes prosecutors




Kosovo President Hasim Thaci on Monday appeared at The Hague to be interviewed by a special international prosecutor after his recent indictment on war crimes charges. "Nobody can rewrite history," he said in his prepared statement to the press as he stood outside the entrance to the court, chants ringing out behind him, almost obscuring his words at times. "I believe in peace, truth, reconsideration and justice. I believe in dialogue and good relations with all neighbours," the statement went on. He added that he was "ready to face the new challenge and win for my son, my family, my people and my country." Supporters stood behind a barrier draped with the flags of the Kosovo Liberation Army, Albania and Kosovo, waiting for Thaci to arrive and held signs that read: "This is racism" and "we have no heroes to sacrifice". The leader has denied any wrongdoing, but last Wednesday said that he would go to the special chamber to be questioned by prosecutors. The accusations relate to Kosovo's independence war against Serbia and are being assessed by a judge at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC) who will then decide if the case will go to trial. The KSC, a court based in The Hague with international staff working under Kosovo's law, is mandated to look into allegations that members of the Kosovo Liberation Army, which was fighting for independence, committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. The indictment came as EU-sponsored talks between Kosovo and Serbia restarted in Brussels at the weekend. The KSC, a court based in The Hague with international staff working under Kosovo's law, is mandated to look into allegations that members of the Kosovo Liberation Army, which was fighting for independence, committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. The indictment came as EU-sponsored talks between Kosovo and Serbia restarted in Brussels at the weekend.

Poland's incumbent Andrzej Duda narrowly wins presidential vote

Andrzej Duda, Poland's conservative, populist incumbent, has won the presidential election by a thin margin, results from over 99 percent of polling stations show. Who is Andrzej Duda? Born in 1972, Duda was elected to the Polish parliament in 2011 and the European Parliament in 2014. One year later, he went on to win the presidential election after promising voters social benefits galore. The remaining uncounted votes are unlikely to sway the final outcome, the National Electoral Commission said on Monday, a result that reflects the deep divisions within the European Union (EU) nation. Duda, who is backed by the ruling right-wing Law and Justice party (PiS), won 51.21 percent of the vote, while opposition candidate, liberal



Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski, got 48.79 percent. A second five-year term for the 48-year-old lawyer would improve the governing right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) party's chances of moving ahead with its agenda. His victory would have profound implications for Poland's relationship with the EU. Trzaskowski, a former European Parliament lawmaker who joined the race relatively late, opposes Duda's denigration of urban liberals, the LGBTQ community and other minorities, aims to counter the erosion of democratic rights under the ruling party. He represented the centrist opposition Civic Platform party that was in power from 2007 to 2015. Duda favors tightening Poland's anti-abortion law - already among Europe's most restrictive - and recently likened "LGBT ideology" to communism, drawing criticism at home and abroad. On Duda's watch the retirement age for men was lowered from 67 to 65. The PiS also began giving parents a monthly allowance of 500 zloty (130 U.S. dollars) for each child. In terms of foreign policy, Duda has worked on strengthening ties with NATO. Just four days before the first round of the election last month, Duda visited U.S. President Donald Trump, the first foreign leader invited to the White House since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Trump praised Duda as his Polish "friend".



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