

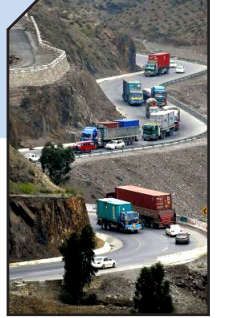


Page 2 | NATIONAL
Remembering President Daoud's Coup: Lessons for Afghanistan's Future

Trump vets Afghan war skeptic for ambassador job

President Donald Trump is considering nominating Will Ruger, a Koch-affiliated foreign policy expert who wants to pull all ...

Page 3 | ECONOMY
China Welcomes Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade Resumption



Kabul
32 / 18



Herat
37 / 24



Nangarhar
39 / 28



Balkh
40 / 27



Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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10 afs



10 more Georgian soldiers test positive for COVID-19 in Afghanistan

Ten more Georgian soldiers have tested positive for the coronavirus in Afghanistan and have been transported home to Georgia by the German Air Force earlier today. Twenty-eight other Georgian soldiers in the NATO Resolute Support mission tested positive for the virus on July 10. Eight of the 28 soldiers, who underwent treatment in Gori hospital of central Georgia, have already recovered. The Georgian Defence Ministry says that all the 38 soldiers belong to one cluster that Afghan personnel were the source of the infection. The soldiers suffer from a mild form of the virus, doctors in Gori hospital say. Georgia is the largest non-NATO contributor to the Resolute Support mission with 871 soldiers. ... **P2**



German Analysis Notes Progress in Afghanistan

A "meta-review" (a report based on other reports) of Afghanistan development by the German government shows progress in certain areas like access to basic health care, education, drinking water, roads, bridges and electricity in a 10-year period - from 2008 to 2018 - but highlights that many ambitious goals for the country were not achieved. Various types of evaluation reports published between 2008 and 2018 by relevant development institutions, as well as 148 studies, were selected and then analyzed and summarized in the meta-review conducted by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. The analysis shows that considerable progress was made in Afghanistan since 2001, namely in the areas of access to education and training, health care, energy and water, development of institutional capacities of central and provincial government authorities and good governance. Quality of life has improved significantly for many communities in ... **P3**

Afghan Govt Launches New COVID-19 Relief Package



The Afghan government on Saturday announced the launching of Dastarkhan-e-Milli program as part of its efforts to help households amid the COVID-19 pandemic who are facing economic hardship. Speaking on the occasion, President Ashraf Ghani said that 90 percent of the population in the country is living

below the poverty line and that the new package will cover 90 percent of households. Based on the program, in the first stage, the government will allocate \$86 million and then \$158 million in the second phase to provide food to people across the country. The first stage will cover over 1.7

million families in 13,000 villages in 34 provinces of the country. "If we collect both figures, over 90 percent of the population in Afghanistan will benefit from the package, the second phase will cost \$158 million," said Amrullah Saleh, the first vice president of Afghanistan. "Still there are serious dangers,

therefore we all need to take the guidelines seriously," said Mohammad Sarwar Danish, the second vice president of Afghanistan, referring to the dangers of COVID-19. "I receive reports from several places that the honorable district governors tried to get some of the money. If I saw them, I will hang them from their legs," said Ghani, warning those who would embezzle the funds. In May, the government had announced a free bread distribution program to the needy people in Kabul and in the provinces. The initiative was designed to provide aid through the city's bakeries to those in need during the lockdown. But later on, the needy families claimed that the program was compromised by corruption. According to the Ministry of Finance, the bread distribution process in the first phase cost Afs2.8 billion (over \$36 million) of which Afs1.15 billion (over \$14.8 million) was spent in Kabul. Based on the statistics, 38 percent of the population in Afghanistan was living under the poverty line in 2014 when Ghani became president following Hamid Karzai. The figure rose to 55 percent in 2017 and now Ghani says that 90 percent of the population is below the poverty line.

China ready to extend CPEC to Afghanistan

Beijing has once again renewed its willing to extend the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a multi-billion dollars project, to Afghanistan. "China supports the extension of CPEC to Afghanistan, which will bring more benefits to the Afghan people," a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said. Hua Chunying said China was also pleased to see the Gwadar port, among other CPEC projects, playing a positive role in the process and stands ready to work together ... **P2**



Wolasi Jirga Condemns Pakistani Shelling of Eastern Provinces

Lawmakers in Afghanistan's parliament on Saturday summoned acting Minister of Interior Affairs Massoud Andarabi to report on the recent mortar shelling by the Pakistani military forces on the eastern provinces of Kunar and Nuristan. The parliament in a report said that over the past one year, the Pakistani military forces have fired over 13,000 mortar rounds on Afghanistan's eastern regions, particularly on Kunar and Nuristan provinces, which left tens of civilians dead and wounded.

Lawmakers condemned the provocative shelling on Kunar and Nuristan as brutal attacks and accused the Afghan government of neglecting the rights of the Afghan people. But, the security officials in today's session in the parliament refrained from responding to the questions



raised by the lawmakers in front of the media. "So far 93 of our countrymen have been martyred," said Nematullah Karyab, a member of parliament from Kunar. "Unfortunately, the Pakistani military forces have established installations in Kunar province," said Wazhma Safai, a member of

parliament. Some other lawmakers meanwhile accused the heads of the Afghan security, defense and intelligence agencies of inaction, corruption and negligence in their duties to protect the rights of the Afghan people and the nation's soldiers. "They (Pakistani forces) killed the old and the young people, ... **P3**

Muslim leaders...

grand mufti of the Sultanate of Oman; Abdel-Hadi al-Agha, undersecretary of Palestine's Religious Affairs Ministry; and Sheikh Maulana Shabbir Saloojee, the rector of Darul Uloom Zakariyya, an Islamic university in Lenasia, South Africa.

Hagia Sophia was first built as a church in the Byzantine era. It became a mosque after Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II conquered Istanbul in 1453. Last week, a top Turkish court annulled a 1934 Cabinet decree which had turned Hagia Sophia into a museum after nearly 500 years of use as a mosque.

China ready...

with Pakistan and Afghanistan in this regard. China also expressed its pleasure over the resumption of trade links between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the spokesman told a weekly media briefing. The official said China looked forward to improvement of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan and stood ready to play a constructive role to this end.

10 more Georgian...

The Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan was launched in 2015 and involves more than 16,000 personnel from nearly 40 NATO member and partner countries.

The mission serves to train, advise and assist Afghan defence and security forces and support them through funding.

By Arwin Rahi

Remembering President Daoud's Coup: Lessons for Afghanistan's Future

On July 17, 1973, former Prime Minister Mohammad Daoud Khan staged a coup against Afghanistan's last king, Mohammad Zahir Shah, Daoud's cousin and brother-in-law. Exactly what motivated Daoud to topple his cousin is a matter of contention. At the time neither Daoud nor his allies had the slightest idea that they were setting in motion a tidal wave, of which they would soon lose control. As a result Afghanistan would be plunged into the darkness of chaos and instability.

Daoud's Domestic Blunders
Daoud's first domestic blunder was abolishing the monarchy, which in one form or another had existed since 1747. The conservative Afghans had immense respect for both the institution of the monarchy and the monarch. Daoud's so-called republic, by contrast, was alien to most Afghans. By abolishing the monarchy, Daoud cleared the way for opportunists who couldn't have acted against the monarchy to act against his republic, which hadn't taken root in Afghanistan yet. Second, by involving (especially lower ranking) army officers in the coup and in politics, Daoud opened a Pandora's box, which would come back to haunt him five years later. That encouraged the left-leaning People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) to seek a similar path to coming to power. Plus, Daoud bestowed "double promotions" upon lower ranking army officers after having utilized their services to topple the king, tempting others to take part in future coups.

Third, Daoud appointed left-leaning ministers in his cabinet, which alarmed the Islamists (later to emerge as the Mujahideen). The Islamists' anti-government activities — including uprisings — earned them Daoud's ire. Islamist leaders such as Burhanuddin Rabbani and Gulbadin Hekmatyar fled to Pakistan, where Zulfikar Ali Bhutto welcomed them. These events echoed in Afghanistan for decades. Having emerged victorious in the jihad against the Soviets, Rabbani and Hekmatyar, along with other fundamentalists, returned to Afghanistan in the early 1990s and fought one another along ethnic and linguistic lines.

Fourth, since Daoud wanted to dispose of the monarchy once and for all, he introduced a new national anthem, a new flag, and new banknotes. Daoud thus set a notorious precedent for future governments. The national anthem, flag, and banknotes would be changed multiple times in the coming decades by the PDPA, the Mujahideen, the Taliban, and the post-9/11 Afghan government, wasting resources and making a



mockery of Afghanistan.

Fifth, Daoud's government was a republic in name only. He cracked down on political dissent and limited civil liberties. Under his leadership, Daoud founded a one-party system and only members of his party could be appointed to positions of power. By suppressing political activities (though ironically not banning political activities in the army) and founding a one-party system, Daoud laid the foundation of his own demise.

The Daoud regime arrested the Moscow-back PDPA leaders after they had criticized the government at a PDPA member's funeral in Kabul. In response, PDPA elements in the army toppled Daoud. Since then, Afghanistan has been embroiled in a series of conflicts, ranging from the Soviet invasion in the 1980s to the civil war in the 1990s and to the so-called War on Terror since 2001. Had Daoud allowed the monarchy to evolve peacefully, Afghanistan might have progressed and prospered.

Nonetheless, the conflicts and chaos have led to a political awakening among Afghanistan's various ethnic and linguistic groups, culminating in the 1990s' civil war along ethnic and linguistic lines. Thus, it's very unlikely that the pre-1978 order, where power was concentrated in the hands of a few in Kabul, can ever be restored again. If Afghans want durable peace, the

country must devolve power to the provinces to truly embrace Afghanistan's ethnic and linguistic diversity. Daoud's Costly Foreign Policy Blunders
Daoud's major foreign policy blunder was that he upset the delicate balance of interest between major stakeholders (major powers and neighbors) in Afghanistan. From the outset of World War I until Daoud's coup, the stakeholders had maintained a balance in Afghanistan, where no one's interests were threatened by its competitor. Daoud upset that arrangement.

First, no sooner did Daoud take office after the coup than he deteriorated relations with Pakistan by reinvigorating the so-called Pashtunistan and Durand Line issues, reminiscent of his time as prime minister (1953-1963). Daoud's coup coincided with the outbreak of the Baloch insurgency in Pakistan in 1973. To put pressure on Pakistan, Daoud provided shelter, training, and weapons to Baloch insurgents and Pakistani Pashtun nationalists alike.

Second, because he had a hard time selling his Pashtunistan policy to Pakistan's allies (Iran, the Arab world, and the United States), Daoud leaned more than he should have (and more than his country could afford) toward Moscow. The Soviets exploited this opportunity to make Daoud more reliant on them, and in the process they trapped him like a ... **P3**

By DANIEL LIPPMAN

Trump vets Afghan war skeptic for ambassador job

President Donald Trump is considering nominating Will Ruger, a Koch-affiliated foreign policy expert who wants to pull all American troops out of Afghanistan, to be the U.S. ambassador to that war-torn country, according to a person with direct knowledge of the matter.

Ruger has been interviewed several times in the last few weeks by officials in the Presidential Personnel Office, and also interviewed at the State Department with counselor Ulrich Brechbuhl a few weeks ago, according to the person. He has passed most of a background check and gone through an ethics review. Ruger has not been formally selected by Trump, and there are other candidates for the position, however, according to two people familiar with the matter. A White House spokesperson had no comment. Ruger declined to comment.

Ruger, a Naval Reserve officer who served a year in Afghanistan

a decade ago, is aligned with the president's thinking about the U.S. footprint in the Middle East and the wars in Afghanistan and Syria, and has been especially vocal about getting out of Afghanistan.

"President Trump has correctly concluded that a full and speedy withdrawal of our troops is imperative," he wrote in the American Interest in late May. "Our national interest isn't served by continuing to wage a futile battle but by exiting it." While a number of former senior military officials have urged Trump to keep a residual force in Afghanistan, Ruger, who supports the peace process led by Zalmay Khalilzad, wrote that the "establishment elites have failed to tell us how staying is going to accomplish much more than wasting additional American blood and treasure." He also said that in the op-ed that the only American interest in Afghanistan is to prevent a future terrorist attack against the U.S. from originating in the

country but that can be done using intelligence capabilities and out-of-country American military assets to spot threats. Ruger, who also is vice president for research and policy at the Charles Koch Institute and a former professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin, has argued the U.S. shouldn't stay in Afghanistan until there is a formal peace deal between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

Ruger has written op-eds for conservative publications like the Washington Examiner supporting Trump's withdrawal of troops from Syria, a decision that was widely criticized by both Republicans and Democrats.

The U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan currently doesn't have an ambassador, but instead is led by veteran State Department diplomat Ross Wilson as chargé d'affaires.

Given that it's mid-July in the last year of a ... **P3**

Afghanistan: Virus cases hit low as testing declines



Afghanistan reported 60 more coronavirus cases on Saturday, its lowest daily count over the past three months. However, the figure came on a day when, according to the Health Ministry, just 194 tests were conducted across the country. The percentage of positive cases detected over the past 24 hours indicates the COVID-19 pandemic is still a grave threat in Afghanistan, where total cases are now up to 35,289, including 1,164

deaths. Recoveries in the country have increased to 23,280, leaving the number of active cases at 10,845, according to the ministry's data. The capital Kabul remains the hardest hit area, accounting for 55 of the new infections and 17 fatalities. The total number of cases in Kabul is now up to 14,305 and the death toll stands at 448.

China Welcomes Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade Resumption

China has applauded the resumption of trade relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan after land crossings between the two neighboring countries were opened following a temporary closure under the COVID-19 crisis. Pakistan has opened five key routes with Afghanistan, including Torkham and Chaman crossings, for bilateral trade and transit over the past three weeks. The other three routes now open to Afghanistan are Ghulam Khan, Angor Ada and Dand-e-Patan. The trade routes were closed by

Pakistan back in March to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus. "China supports the extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan, which will bring more BRI (China's Belt and Road Initiative) benefits to the Afghan people," Chinese Foreign Ministry's spokesperson Hua Chunying said in a media briefing on Thursday. "China is pleased to see Gwadar port plays a positive role in this process and stands ready to work together with Pakistan and Afghanistan in this regard," she said.



Exchange Rates

76.85	\$	76.95
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94.1	£	94.2
458	Rp.	459
20.1	د.ا.	20.2
1040	₹	1050

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0202301360
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0202500312
- Corona call center - 166

Syria ready for...

The prices of all materials have more than doubled in recent weeks and people are discontent with the new situation. The economic situation has started a free fall when the border of the country with Lebanon closed as a result of the measures taken by the Syrian government against the spread of the COVID-19.

Later on, the U.S. imposed a new set of sanctions under the so-called Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, which is a United States legislation that sanctions the Syrian government, including Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for alleged war crimes against the Syrian population.

People on the streets have been divided between those who don't believe a new parliament will resolve any crisis and others who hoped the new lawmakers can pass laws to soften the sharpness of the economic crisis in the country. "I hope the new parliament can pass laws to make our lives better I still believe they can do something because they are supposed to represent us and voice our worries and crisis," Rula Youssef, a lawyer, told Xinhua.

For his side, Roushdi Ali, a university economics student, a capable parliament and a new government can find solutions and alternatives to ease the difficulties of the sanctions and economic crisis.

"We have a lot of capabilities in our country and we can achieve self-reliance and overcome the crisis but we need capable people who have a clear agenda about making the country better," he said.

The Syrian state-run media outlets have made several campaigns urging people to take to the polling centers and cast their ballots under several slogans such as "Your Voice is Your Rights."

Trump vets Afghan...

presidential term, it's unclear if Ruge, if nominated, would have time to get confirmed by the Senate prior to the election although the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is moving forward with several nominees next week.

Nor is it clear, in any case, how much power a new ambassador might have to shape events in Kabul. Under the terms of the preliminary peace deal announced in February, the U.S. agreed to withdraw its troops if the Taliban refrained from attacking American forces and rejected al Qaeda and ISIS. But violence against the Afghan government has escalated in the months since, and Khalilzad has struggled to salvage the arrangement.

German Analysis...

Afghanistan, 75 percent of the population now has access to basic health services, maternal mortality has declined to 396 cases per 100,000 live births, around 30 percent of the population has an electrical grid connection and 55 percent of Afghans have access to clean drinking water, the study shows. The number of children in school has increased to 9.2 million in 2019 from one million in 2001, the study says.

It shows that that the poverty rate has been rising again since 2015 and now stands at 55 percent. The Afghan government's institutional structures and services are slowly improving, but they are far from able to keep up with the increasing demand and requirements, the analysis says.

The government has succeeded in increasing its own contribution to the funding of the budget to 45 percent, the analysis finds, but adds that the government lacks planning and implementation capacity, and good governance. It also mentions corruption and nepotism, and a war and drug economy, as the key factors that undermine the acceptance of the government among Afghans. The Afghan government is unable

to adequately maintain the country's infrastructure on its own, the study says.

From an economic point of view, the analysis says, Afghanistan displays major development potential, as the country has an abundance of raw materials (world's largest copper reserves as well as oil, natural gas, coal, lithium, gold, gemstones) and could theoretically produce extremely large amounts of energy from renewable sources. Afghanistan could also become a logistics hub in the future if regional integration efforts were to make further progress, the study finds, adding that agricultural development is the most important driver of economic growth, which is why the Afghan government is focusing on the agricultural sector.

The study says there has been some success achieved with infrastructure in Afghanistan but adds that "very little private Afghan or international investment is made in this area due to the volatile security situation."

The analysis also sheds light on areas in which Afghanistan has not made progress or has remained a concern for the country.

Deteriorating security, deficiencies with regard to respect for human rights, less progress on women's rights, high drop-out rate in schools, the low school enrolment rate for girls, the continued high level of illiteracy, and highly insufficient economic growth and corruption in the Afghan government are major problems that Afghanistan is facing right now, according to the study.

Other deficiencies mentioned by the evaluation are lack of coordination of approaches and measures among donor countries, parallels institutional structures in the government, less attention to the selection of actors and partner institutions for cooperation, unevenly distribution of development activities to provinces, and lack of institutional capacity for implementing development activities.

These all, the study says, have increased widespread corruption in government offices.

The meta-review suggests that concepts and strategies should be modified in the future to achieve more significant progress, and thus finally be able to offer the Afghan people hope for the future after more than 40 years of war.

Wolasi Jirga...

they didn't even have mercy on the women, this is shameful for the Afghan government," said Zahra Tokhi, a member of parliament from Zabul.

"What has been the stance of the Afghan government about the action of the Pakistani military?" asked one senator, Robina Jalali. Security officials refrained from

commenting on the issue when journalists tried to get their reactions.

Two days ago, at least eight civilians were killed and eleven others were wounded following mortar attacks by Pakistani forces on the Sarkano district in Kunar, as well as on Asadabad, Kumart's capital, according to the local officials in the area.

Afghan military personnel were also killed in the attacks, said the officials, adding that several Afghan forces checkpoints were also destroyed in the attack.

Local officials in Kunar have said that the firefight between Afghan and Pakistani forces broke out after Pakistani forces tried to establish new check posts inside the Afghan territory.

Remembering...

When Daoud realized the futility of the Pashtunistan issue, it was too late. In order to balance his foreign relations, Daoud needed to improve relations with Pakistan and start distancing himself from Moscow. Doing the latter wouldn't be easy though. Anwar Sadat had shunned Moscow earlier for closer ties with the United States. Therefore, Moscow was eager to stop Daoud before he, too, could slip out of the Soviet grasp.

The easiest way for Moscow to prevent Daoud from deserting it was to have him removed through a coup by the PDPA (who

could not have toppled Daoud without Moscow's consent). The concept of maintaining a balance of interest fully perished under the rule of the PDPA (1978-92), which relied on Moscow for survival. Since Moscow was involved more than its fair share in Afghanistan, other stakeholders joined the fray to protect their interests.

With the passage of time, "untying the Afghan knot" has become more and more complicated. No stakeholder involved in Afghanistan wants to disengage before its competitor. For instance, Pakistan and India each view each other's involvement in Afghanistan

with suspicion; the same is true about Iran and the United States. Unless all stakeholders agree on a framework to not use Afghanistan's territory against one another, it's very unlikely that peace and stability will return to Afghanistan.

The balance that Daoud upset and the PDPA dumped needs to be restored and upheld, otherwise conflict will likely continue under different names, with negative repercussions for the entire region and beyond. In the worlds of Allama Mohammad Iqbal, Afghanistan is "the heart of Asia... whose prosperity is Asia's prosperity, and whose corruption is Asia's corruption."

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Muslim leaders laud Turkey's Hagia Sophia move

Leaders of Muslim communities around the globe are welcoming Turkey's decision to make Istanbul's iconic Hagia Sophia a mosque again and congratulating President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on the move.

In letters and phone calls to Ali Erbas, the head of Turkey's Religious Affairs Directorate, the leaders thanked Erdogan and hailed the reopening of Hagia Sophia as a mosque, said a directorate statement.

In a phone call, Allahshukur Pashazadeh, the chairman of the Religious Council of the Caucasus, congratulated Erbas over Turkey's move, while a letter from Rateb Jneid, head of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, conveyed his support for the decision.

The Republic of Turkey under Erdogan's leadership is "a rising star and indispensable source of hope for Muslims and the oppressed," Shaqir Fetahu, deputy chair of the Islamic

Religious Union of the Republic of Macedonia, said in his letter.

Moreover, in a letter on behalf of the Council of Lithuanian Muslims Religious Communities, Lithuanian Mufti Aleksandras Beganskas said: "We believe that this blessed mosque, which is a symbol of monotheism, will embrace all of humanity regardless of religion, language, race, and sect under Turkey's Religious Affairs Directorate."

Erdogan's move to open Hagia Sophia for worship is a sign of the liberation of Jerusalem's al-Aqsa Mosque from captivity, said a letter from the Association of Palestinian Scholars Abroad. In its letter, the Association of Moroccan Scholars congratulated all the courts in Turkey, the people, and the Islamic world, especially Erdogan, for deciding to reopen Hagia Sophia for worship. Also thanking Erdogan and hailing the decision were Sheikh Ahmad bin Hamad Al-Khalili, ... P2



A look at the world

UN Secretary General Initiates New Global Deal for fairer world order

United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres has put forward an initiative to battle inequality - a New Global Deal that will aim to create a fairer model of global governance, Guterres said on Saturday in his lecture commemorating Nelson Mandela.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has brought home the tragic disconnect between self-interest and the common interest; and the huge gaps in governance structures and ethical frameworks," he said.

"To close these gaps, and to make the New Social Contract possible, we



need a New Global Deal to ensure that power, wealth and opportunities are shared more broadly and fairly at the international level," Guterres stressed.

The UN chief explained that quality education for all, and the effective use of digital technology, will be crucial to achieving these aims.

This would mean doubling education spending in low and middle-income countries by 2030 to \$3 trillion a year: within a generation, all children in low- and middle-income countries could have access to quality education at all levels. 'We stand together, or we fall apart'

The UN chief ended his major strategic vision statement, by invoking the importance of international cooperation and solidarity.

"We belong to each other", he said. "We stand together, or we fall apart".

The world, he concluded, is at breaking point, and it is time for leaders to decide which path to follow. The choice presented by Mr. Guterres, is between "chaos, division and inequality", or righting the wrongs of the past and moving forward together, for the good of all.

'Iran-China coop. road map can be extended to BRI, CPEC'



Iran's envoy to Pakistan believes that Iran-China 25-year cooperation roadmap can be extended to other regional cooperative mechanisms such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

In a tweet on Saturday, Iran's Ambassador to Islamabad Mohammad Ali Hosseini wrote: "Iran-China Comprehensive Cooperation Program is a clear roadmap and a principled way for future relations between the two important countries."

"In other ways, it can be extended to regional cooperation with other existing mechanisms such as BRI and CPEC Initiatives."

Iran and China are presently holding talks on finalizing their 25-year cooperation roadmap.

In a meeting on June 21, Iran's cabinet of ministers approved the final draft of the 25-year comprehensive cooperation plan between Iran and China.

On July 5, came the announcement of the Iranian FM Zarif about Iran-China negotiations over a 25-year so-called 'accord', which as he put into words is "clear and the two countries have nothing to hide about it."

However, the enemies regard the cooperation roadmap 'unacceptable' and 'unbelievable' for it makes Iran capable of resisting the US sanctions.

Syria ready for parliamentary elections amid economic challenges

The Syrian government has finished preparations for the parliamentary elections due on Sunday as voters are hoping for a change that could resolve the economic hardships in the country.

Over 7,400 polling centers have been prepared across the country for the elections where 1,658 candidates are running for the 250-seat parliament, according to the state news agency SANA.

It's worth noting that the Syrian government is now in control of around 70 percent of the Syrian territory with ultra-radical rebels in control of the Idlib Province in northwestern Syria and the U.S.-backed Kurdish militia of



the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) controls areas in northeastern Syria.

Luqman Ahma, the spokesman of the self-declared Kurdish administration in northern and northeastern Syria, said in a press conference Saturday that there will be no polling centers in areas controlled by the Kurdish groups, adding that the Kurdish administration has nothing to do with the parliamentary elections.

Meanwhile, the streets in Damascus are filled with posters of the candidates, many of whom are already members of the parliament and ran for the elections four years ago.

The new thing this year is the number of young candidates that haven't been noticed in the previous elections. Still, the footprint of the ruling al-Baath party is expected to be obvious in this election like in the previous ones as more than half of the candidates are members of the al-Baath party.

According to the law, after the parliamentary elections, President Bashar al-Assad will name a new prime minister and ask him to form a new government.

However, the elections this year come amid a harsh economic situation with tightened sanctions and an unprecedented slide in the value of the Syrian pound against major currencies. ... P3



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