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Prisoner Release Delayed by Western Allies

Two days after the government started the release of the 400 high-value Taliban prisoners, an official from the High Council for National Reconciliation said some countries are opposing the freeing of six of the inmates that are accused of killing citizens of those countries.

The United States, France and Australia are the countries that are opposing the release of some of the prisoners, according to sources within the government, but reports confirm the position of Australia and France only. President Ashraf Ghani signed the decree to release the prisoners a week ago, a process that was first approved by the Loya Jirga, the grand council of at least 3,400 delegates.

A spokesman of the council, Fraidoon Khwazoon, said the release of the prisoners will continue and ... **P2**



UN calls on Afghanistan to protect human rights defenders

UN human rights experts Friday called on Afghanistan to take early decisive action to prevent killings of human rights defenders, while calling attention to a recent spate of such deaths.

"The killing of one human rights defender is a tragedy for society; the death of nine defenders since the beginning of this year shows the emergence of a truly alarming trend," Mary Lawlor, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, said in a statement. "Already by August, Afghanistan has far exceeded last year's figures." "Impunity allows the perpetuation of such crimes and implies a lack of recognition for human rights defenders' role in society," the experts said, noting that investigations in many cases had not yet yielded any results.

"There needs to be full ... **P2**

Govt Seeks Intl Consensus on Prisoner Release: Atmar



The Afghan government is working on plans to remove problems in the way of peace, Acting Foreign Affairs Minister Mohammad Haneef Atmar said Sunday, pledging that the challenges will be addressed in near future.

Atmar, who addressed a press conference in Kabul, said the Loya Jirga, the grand council, put five conditions on the Taliban besides

approving the release of 400 of their prisoners, but, according to him, the Taliban has not met these conditions so far.

Atmar called the high level of violence "regrettable" and said the international community has some considerations about the release of some prisoners, but the government is working to achieve a consensus in this respect.

"We are very saddened about the continuation of violence. This is one of the five issues that was stressed by the consultative Loya Jirga," Atmar said.

Atmar said one of the reasons behind the lack of implementation of the Loya Jirga decisions is inattention by the Taliban to an unconditional start of the intra-Afghan negotiations.

"The world has protested. Yes, the

world has protested. You have heard about it and you have made stories on it. Our work will be to create consensus on it with the world. A type of consensus that will not harm Afghanistan's national interests," he said.

Meanwhile, Nadir Naderi, a member of the negotiation team of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, said the team is ready for talks.

"Considering the goodwill that the negotiation team of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has, the Taliban should get ready as soon as possible so that we can begin the negotiations. We are ready to get on the plane within an hour," Naderi said. The Taliban, however, has stressed that they will not attend the talks until the release of the 400 prisoners is completed.

According to government data, out of the 400 prisoners in question, 156 of them have been sentenced to death, 105 of them are accused of murder, 34 of them are accused of kidnapping that led to murder, 51 of them are accused of drug smuggling, 44 of them are on the blacklist of the Afghan government and its allies, six of them are accused of assorted other crimes, four are accused of unspecified crimes.

The list of 5,000 prisoners ... **P3**

200 US troops return to home from Afghanistan

About 200 soldiers from the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry returned home Friday after a year-long mobilization to Afghanistan.

A traditional homecoming ceremony was not possible due to coronavirus restrictions, so a group of senior leaders from the Wisconsin National Guard greeted the soldiers when their plane landed in Eau Claire.

"You have done a phenomenal job," Lt. Col. Aaron Freund, ... **P2**



Afghan Forces Hold Military Exercise Along Durand Line

Afghanistan's army on Sunday conducted a military exercise in Spin Boldak district, Kandahar province, near the Durand Line, the de facto border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, a crossing that has witnessed clashes between the security and defense forces of both countries in recent years.

According to the Afghan Defense Ministry, on July 31 at least nine civilians were killed and 50 others were wounded in Pakistani forces artillery attacks on "residential areas" in Spin Boldak district. Military tanks, helicopters and heavy and light weapons were used in the military exercise by the Afghan National Army forces, which was attended by the Chief of Army Staff Gen. Yasin Zia.

Gen. Zia pledged that Afghan forces are ready to thwart any threat against the people of Afghanistan. "This time it was a military exercise



so we can detect our problems... We are strengthening our strong areas and will work on our weak points to change them into strength. Some reports are exaggerated, but the shelling that is done to us, we have directed our forces that we will not leave our people alone," he said. A similar military exercise was conducted in Goshta district, Nangarhar, near the Durand Line on

Friday. The district has faced many rocket attacks by Pakistani forces over the last few years.

"We say that we are still strong, and we will respond to Pakistan anytime as we have done in the past. We have defeated it 10 times and we will defeat it 100 times more. These forces are the lions of Afghanistan," said Sharifullah, commander of 4th battalion of border forces. ... **P3**

Prisoner Release...

the Afghan government is in talks with the three countries to prevent any challenge for the peace process and to maintain its relations with these nations.

Reuters also reported that France that has asked the Afghan government not to release Taliban fighters convicted of killing French citizens.

Before the start of the process, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said last week he had lobbied for a former Afghan army soldier, who went rogue and killed three Australian colleagues, to stay in jail, according to a report by Al Jazeera.

"There is some criticism against (the release) of some prisoners, a limited number of prisoners, but we hope that intra-Afghan negotiations should not be delayed. The Afghan government is trying to overcome the issue in a way to maintain the current opportunity and our relations with the international community," Khwazoon said.

200 US troops...

commander of the 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment said. "You have all become American heroes and are part of something special. As your commander, I thank you for the privilege of watching you perform."

After getting off the plane, the troops boarded buses that took them to armories in Menomonie, Arcadia, River Falls and Eau Claire where their families waited for them to return.

REBECCA KHEEL

Poll: About three quarters support bringing troops home from Iraq, Afghanistan

About three-quarters of U.S. adults say they support bringing U.S. troops home from Iraq and Afghanistan in a new poll commissioned by the libertarian Charles Koch Institute obtained exclusively by The Hill.

In the poll, which surveyed 2,000 U.S. adults, 44 percent said they strongly support bringing U.S. troops home from Iraq and 30 percent said they somewhat support doing so.

For Afghanistan, 46 percent said they strongly support bringing troops home and 30 percent said they somewhat support it.

The poll was conducted by YouGov for the Charles Koch Institute, the research institute founded by conservative mega-donor Charles Koch that advocates a noninterventionist foreign policy, including supporting withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Given how polarized the country is on so many other issues, it is striking how unified Americans are on ending our endless wars in the Middle East, prioritizing domestic concerns over foreign ones, and avoiding greater military engagement in conflicts overseas," Will Ruger, vice president of research and policy at the Charles Koch Institute, said in a statement to The Hill. "After nearly 20 years of costly and often unnecessary military engagement abroad along with the current challenges facing our country at home, it is a positive sign that the American public increasingly wants to see the United States pursue a more realist foreign policy," Ruger added.

Asked whether the United States should be more or less involved militarily in global conflicts, 48 percent of respondents said engagement should decrease, while 32 percent said the level of engagement should stay the same and 7 percent said it should increase. Fifty percent of Democrats surveyed said military engagement should decrease, compared to 40 percent of Republicans.

The poll, which was weighted for gender, age, race, and education, has a margin of error of 2.5 percentage points.

The results for Iraq and Afghanistan, collected from July 24 to July 27, represent an uptick from a similar YouGov poll commissioned by the Charles Koch Institute in January. In that poll, 37 percent said they strongly supported and 31 percent said they somewhat supported bringing troops home from Iraq, while 38 percent said they strongly supported and 31 percent said they somewhat supported doing so in Afghanistan. The January poll also found 27 percent said military



engagement should stay about the same, while 52 percent supported less engagement.

The most recent poll comes as President Trump is pushing forward with a withdrawal in Afghanistan that is opposed by members of Congress from both parties. In line with a deal with the Taliban the Trump administration signed in February, the U.S. military has drawn down to about 8,600 troops. Trump is saying he wants to further draw down to 4,000 to 5,000 troops by Election Day, even as military officials have insisted any further withdrawal will be based on conditions on the ground that have not been met yet.

Lawmakers in a bipartisan vote included in the House's version of the annual defense policy bill a provision that seeks to slow an Afghanistan withdrawal by requiring the administration to make a series of certifications before any further drawdowns in Afghanistan.

The bill must be reconciled with the Senate's version, which does not include a similar provision but where senators in both parties have expressed concerns about a precipitous withdrawal from Afghanistan.

In Iraq, U.S. officials are negotiating future troops levels with the Iraqi government after Iraqi lawmakers called for a withdrawal. Iraqi opposition to the U.S. presence in their country grew at the beginning of the year after the U.S. drone strike that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani on Iraqi soil.

There are about 5,200 U.S. troops in Iraq helping local forces fight the remnants of ISIS.

The YouGov poll found similar levels of support for withdrawing from Iraq and Afghanistan across parties. The same percentage of Democrats and Republicans polled, 77 percent of each, said they strongly or somewhat support bringing troops home from Iraq. For Afghanistan, 78 percent of Democratic respondents said they strongly or somewhat support bringing troops home, compared to 77 percent of Republicans who said the same.

The poll, meanwhile, found more support for the U.S. troops stationed in Europe. Forty percent said the number of troops in Europe should stay the same, compared to 36 percent who said the number should decrease.

Specifically for Germany, 40 percent said the number of troops should stay the same, while 33 percent said it should decrease.

Forty-three percent of Democratic respondents and 46 percent of Republicans said troop numbers should stay the same in both Europe in general and Germany specifically.

Trump ordered a drawdown from Germany as punishment for Berlin not meeting NATO's goal of spending 2 percent of its gross domestic product on defense.

The Pentagon announced last week it would pull about 11,900 troops from Germany, sending about 5,600 elsewhere in Europe and bringing about 6,400 back to the United States.

By ANDREW QUILTY

Afghanistan's unseen Covid-19 crisis

The most striking thing about the top Covid-19 treatment facility in Afghanistan is the lack of basic measures preventing the spread of Covid-19.

At the Afghan Japan Communicable Disease Hospital in Kabul last week, security guards at the gate were maskless. So too a taxi driver delivering an elderly woman with a dry cough who was too weak to leave the car herself. Even the hospital's newly appointed director, Dr Ahmad Zahir Sultani, wore his mask slung beneath his chin, and of the dozen or so nurses and hospital staff who came seeking signatures while we spoke in his office, only one wore a mask.

Last week, Afghanistan's health minister, Ahmad Jawad Osmani, stated that nearly a third of Afghanistan's population – or roughly 10 million people – have been infected with the coronavirus. The figure was based on a survey, supported, he said, by the World Health Organisation and Johns Hopkins University, which indicated that in Kabul, more than half of its 5 million residents are believed to have been infected.

Afghanistan's health system was critically weak even before the

pandemic hit. Since then, only 90,000 coronavirus tests have been conducted, with 37,000 returning positive results. But testing capacity isn't the only problem; for serious cases, there are only 300 ventilators available, countrywide, some of which are going unused because staff have not been trained to use them. Another 32, it has been alleged, were stolen from the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and smuggled to Pakistan. At the Afghan Japan hospital last month, Sultani said shortages in oxygen saw patients' families fighting for tanks when delivery trucks arrived. Medical workers in the western city of Herat claimed they hadn't been paid by the government in three months, while the MoPH has been accused of embezzling millions of dollars pledged by international donors for the coronavirus response.

With widespread poverty and no welfare system to support them, the vast majority of Afghans cannot afford to follow the kind of behavioural change that has been effective in containing outbreaks elsewhere around the world. This is perhaps the greatest challenge facing public health officials in Afghanistan. Religious beliefs that overrule medical advice and a cultural

inclination to fatalism also contribute to an approach to dealing with the threat of the coronavirus that is pragmatic at best and submissive at worst.

The first positive cases of coronavirus were recorded in the western city of Herat in February. An explosion of infections in neighbouring Iran saw more than 200,000 Afghan migrant workers streaming back across the border in March. At least some brought the coronavirus with them. The workers piled into crowded buses and vans in Herat and dispersed across the country, rejoining the large, multigenerational households they had left to support in the first place. Infections were soon detected in all 34 provinces.

Officially, a total of 1300 Covid-related deaths have been recorded across Afghanistan. But most who've succumbed to the virus likely never sought treatment at all and don't figure in official statistics. Last week, only 40 of the Afghan Japan Hospital's 100 beds were occupied. Most people, says Sultani, "become sick in the night and die [at home]."

Many Afghans with symptoms prefer to wait out the illness rather than risk a visit to the hospital and a long wait for results. Others, ...

P3

UN calls on...

accountability for such egregious violations of human rights," they added. They cited the case of Asmatullah Salaam, who worked on promoting the right to education in the province of Ghazni, was abducted and killed as he made his way to celebrate Eid with his family on 1st August.

His death came not long after Fatimah Natasha Khalil and Ahmad Jawad Folad were killed on their way to work at the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission on 27th June. Human rights defender Ibrahim Ebrat was shot dead in Zabul in May.

"In January, the Government of Afghanistan voiced support for the idea of creating a national protection mechanism for human rights defenders, but no progress has been reported and clearly defenders are still no better protected than they were before," the experts noted.

"We urge the government to urgently put in place, as promised, an effective national

protection mechanism." It is the responsibility of every government to protect human rights defenders against armed groups, they added.

"Afghanistan must do better at detecting and acting on early warning signs, such as threats and intimidation, protecting others who find themselves at risk, and thoroughly investigating violence, including killings, when they happen," they said. "We cannot allow these disturbing events to continue."

The experts said they were talking with Afghanistan authorities, and pledged to closely monitor the situation. Besides Ms. Lawlor, the experts are: Irene Khan, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, Special Rapporteur on Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association; Agnes Callamard, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions.

Herat Fig Growers Need Markets, Storage

Herat agriculture department officials said Sunday that this year fig production in Zinda Jan district has increased compared to previous years. According to officials, more than 8,000 tons of figs will be harvested in the province this year.

But gardeners in the district say they are not optimistic about an increase in revenue because of the lack of a market for their products.

The gardeners say they must sell their figs at low prices in the markets.

"This year some trees were frozen and some not, but my trees were not frozen. We are also facing some problems with the lack of storage and lack of market opportunities--the government has to help us," said Abdul Satar, a fig grower in Zanda Jan district.

A number of fig growers in the Zinda

Jan district of Herat say some of their crops have spoiled due to the lack of storage and no immediate buyers.

"Gardeners are desperate because we the gardeners don't have enough facilities for our products and those who have the facilities, they gain the most revenue," said Abdul Rahman, another gardener in the district.

"If we had a standard packaging system our products would sell in good price and both the gardeners and people would benefit from the products," said Noor Ahmad, farmer. Herat's agriculture department admits that despite the increase in fig yields, the lack of a market this year is one of the challenges facing Herat fig growers.

"The air corridor that was supposed to be opened from Herat has not been



opened yet and we ask the relevant institutions to take action in this area because Herat's fruits--especially grapes and figs--can have good

markets," said Abdul Saboor Rahmani, the provincial director of agriculture. Zinda Jan district has the most fig orchards in Herat province.

Govt Seeks Intl...

was given to the Afghan government by the Taliban to be released ahead of the intra-Afghan negotiations, which are now expected to be held in Doha.

Last week, the consultative Loya Jirga, the grand assembly of Afghan elders, approved the release of the 400 Taliban prisoners, a step that was seen as a key push for the start of the intra-Afghan negotiations.

At the same event, Atmar and Naderi, who is also head of the Independent Administrative Affairs and Civil Service Commission, signed an agreement on reforms in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Atmar said that with the new plan, appointments in the ministry will be apart from political interventions and that candidates will be appointed through free competition.

Afghan Forces Hold...

"I am ready always to defend my country," said Shaheen, an Afghan soldier. "We are here at Spin Boldak near the Durand Line. We are always ready to defend our flag and our soil," said Adil, an Afghan soldier.

A big number of Kandahar residents were seen in the area watching the military exercise. "We can fight directly with Pakistan as we have trust in our forces," said Naqibullah, a Kandahar resident. "We have an army, we have an air force and we have ground forces... They are improving day-by-day," said Mohammad Daud, a Kandahar resident.

Chinese diplomat...

take action to stop a handful of American politicians from damaging bilateral ties for their personal interests, the diplomat said. "We are committed to developing a China-U.S. relationship featuring non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation," he said. "At the same time, we will safeguard our sovereignty, security and development interests."

Bera and other House representatives attending the dialogue said U.S.-China relations matter greatly to the two countries and the world and that the two sides should take effective measures to manage their differences while expanding cooperation on epidemic control and trade.

The dialogue was co-hosted by the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs and the U.S.-Asia Institute.

Afghanistan's...

according to Sultani, avoid treatment altogether, fearing that if they die their bodies will be taken away and deprived of a proper Islamic burial. In rural areas, where access to information and healthcare is limited and rates of education are low, public health advice is largely ignored.

Because of the low testing capacity, members of the public and journalists alike have taken to using anecdotal indicators for measuring infection and death rates. Social media users blame unusually high numbers of deaths announced by Facebook friends and their extended families on Covid-19. The Washington Post reported in June that senior security officials from four provinces estimated a 60-90% infection rate among their forces. A Kabul gravedigger was reported saying that before the pandemic he was burying seven or eight people per day but that now that figure had risen to more like 20.

Compared to many countries, the Afghan government was quick with containment measures. In late March, although only a few dozen cases had been recorded, schools, universities, government offices and all non-essential businesses in Kabul and provincial capitals were ordered shut, domestic airlines grounded and road travel restricted.

But few Afghans could afford to stop working, even as infection rates increased. A spokesperson for the World Food Program (WFP) in Afghanistan told me in May that "44% of all Afghans - more than 16 million people - rely on unsustainable livelihoods that will be disrupted by the shocks due to the outbreak of Covid-19."

The same month, Parvathy Ramaswami, WFP's Deputy Country Director in Afghanistan, said the situation was "quickly turning from a health emergency to a food and livelihood crisis":

In cities, the lockdowns and reduced economic activities leave the most vulnerable families like urban poor, communities in protracted displacement and all those relying on casual labour for survival not knowing where their

next meal will come from.

In July, at the launch of a national aid distribution program, President Ashraf Ghani said that 90% of Afghans were now living on US\$2 (A\$2.80) or less per day. The country itself, according to the World Bank's latest Global Economic Prospects report, will experience an economic contraction of 5.5% of GDP this year.

But the continuing economic downturn belies the fact that by June, aside from the ongoing closure of schools and universities and bans on large public gatherings, early containment measures were all but forgotten. The risk of succumbing to poverty, as experts had predicted, was greater than that posed by the coronavirus.

In Kabul, the street hawkers who began selling surgical masks and gloves when fear of the pandemic took hold in March went back to selling knock-off sunglasses and mobile phone accessories. Temperature checks at supermarkets, government offices and on domestic flights are perfunctory. Most times I've been tested, the devices (presumably faulty or counterfeit) gave readings that suggest I'm clinically dead. During a rare Taliban photo-op aimed at promoting the insurgent group's public health bona fides, the temperature gun wielded by one fighter turned out to be two blocks of wood bound together with white electrical tape.

The majority of Afghans have confronted the coronavirus with the fatalism they have adopted through the ebb and flow of more than 40 years of war. Sultani says, "Afghans have experienced so much hardship in the past" that they aren't so worried about a disease, no matter how much experts sound warnings. That, he says, and the belief that their fate is ultimately "the will of God".

In June, I visited the provincial hospital in the capital of Wardak Province, an hour's drive from Kabul. Amin, an Intensive Care Unit nurse, told me the hospital was admitting less than half the number of patients compared to before the pandemic. "People are afraid to come," he said.

After being tested, those with symptoms are encouraged to admit themselves to a quarantine ward established by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan a short drive away. Of the 50- to 60-year-olds checking in there, he said, "none of them are surviving. By the time we get their results, they're dead." The results, he told me, take up to a week to come back from Kabul, so aside from critical patients, most simply return to their villages, spreading the virus further into Wardak's valleys.

At a frontline security checkpoint a couple of kilometres down the highway, where at least one member of the Afghan National Police was shot and killed by a Taliban sniper since my visit, the commander, Haji Lal Mohammad, told me that 20 or his 30 men had shown coronavirus symptoms but that few had bothered being tested. One who had tested positive, and was still complaining of symptoms, arrived as I spoke with the men around the edge of a woven plastic carpet over cups of customary green tea. He made his way around the group, shaking hands with each of his comrades. "Don't worry," he said, "[Corona is] not so bad in Afghanistan."

Before taking me on a tour of the Afghan Japan hospital last week, Sultani, the director, told me that, even when visiting the Intensive Care Unit, "I only wear a mask, no gloves". The ICU is a long room with a row of 12 beds containing patients with the most severe cases, many of whom were gasping for breath through oxygen masks. Citing optimistic cancer patients who recover, and pessimistic ones who do not, Sultani said, "I believe that when a person's confidence is high, they have less chance of becoming sick." When morale is low, he reasoned, "the immune system suffers, and you are at greater risk of contracting disease".

When I questioned the efficacy of confidence as a prophylactic, he said, "I've been here for 20 or 25 days, and I still haven't become sick. I'm doing this to maintain morale among the doctors and staff, to be strong, not to be afraid."

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Palestinians protest UAE-Israel normalization deal

Thousands of Palestinians gathered Saturday to protest a deal between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel to normalize ties. Two separate massive protests were held in Cibaliya in the northern Gaza Strip and the southern Rafah crossing after Hamas urged residents to demonstrate.

Hamas spokesperson Ismail Ridwan told Anadolu Agency the agreement will not give legitimacy to Israel.

"Israel will never be the friend of Arabs and Muslims," according to Ridwan who said the UAE "sold out" Palestinians for their own interests.

"The UAE will be the loser of this agreement, because Israel's desires will go as far as to pillage the resources of all Arab countries,

especially the UAE, beyond the borders of Palestine," he added.

US President Donald Trump announced Thursday the agreement to normalize relations, in a move forestalling Israel's controversial plans to annex large swathes of the occupied West Bank. The deal is expected to inked within three weeks.

The UAE is the first Gulf state and third Arab nation to have full diplomatic relations with Israel after Egypt and Jordan.

Palestinian groups denounced the deal, saying it does nothing to serve the Palestinian cause and it ignores the rights of Palestinians.

The peace deal is a "treacherous stab in the back of the Palestinian people," Hamas said in a statement.



A look at the world

UN launches \$565 million appeal for Beirut victims

The United Nations launched a \$565 million appeal Friday to help Lebanese people affected by the explosion at Beirut's port with immediate humanitarian assistance and initial recovery efforts.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said the money will enable the U.N.'s humanitarian partners "to help people in need by targeting food security, health, shelter and protection, as well as water and sanitation hygiene support."

U.N. humanitarian officials said some of the \$300 million pledged at a donor conference Sunday co-chaired by French President Emmanuel Macron and the United Nations may be committed to the \$565 million appeal, but the amount won't be known for some time because the pledges include a



mixture of humanitarian and reconstruction activities.

The U.N. humanitarian office said the series of devastating explosions Aug. 4 destroyed most of Beirut's port, flattened surrounding neighborhoods, damaged six hospitals and more than 20 health clinics, and destroyed 120 schools. The blast killed over 170 people, injured more than 6,000 and left thousands homeless, it said.

The humanitarian office said the appeal will target:

- Immediate delivery of hot meals, food rations and grain supplies.
- Rehabilitation of damaged health facilities and provision of trauma kits and essential medicines.
- Cash for shelter for families whose homes were damaged or destroyed and for repairs of common building areas and facilities affected by the blast.
- Repair of schools and provision of educational supplies and psychological support for children.

Trump: U.S. will not probably participate in online summit on Iran before elections



On August 14, Russian President Vladimir Putin came out with an initiative to organize a summit of the United Nations Security Council permanent members, Germany and Iran to discuss problems of the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

The United States will not probably take part in an online summit on Iran proposed earlier by Russian President Vladimir Putin, President Donald Trump said at a press conference on Saturday. "Probably not," the US leader said. Washington will probably want to wait until presidential elections in the country end, Trump added.

On August 14, Russian President Vladimir Putin came out with an initiative to organize a summit of the United Nations Security Council permanent members, Germany and Iran to discuss problems of the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The purpose of the event is to identify steps that will allow avoiding confrontation and aggravation of the situation in the UN Security Council," the Russian leader said in the statement posted on the Kremlin's website.

Chinese diplomat calls for efforts to stabilize China-U.S. relations

Relations between China and the United States are at a crucial juncture, and efforts must be made to maintain and stabilize bilateral ties, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zheng Zeguang said on Thursday.

Zheng made the remarks during a dialogue via video link with a group of U.S. Congress members, including Ami Bera, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and Nonproliferation, and Ted Yoho, who also sits on the subcommittee.

Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi warned last month that China-U.S. relations were facing the most serious challenges since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1979.



The United States should immediately stop slandering China and create conditions for the two countries to cooperate in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, he said, adding that China sincerely wishes the U.S. could defeat the coronavirus at an early date.

However, Beijing firmly opposes Washington's attempts to stigmatize China or shift blame to China over the virus, he noted.

The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the United States has surpassed 5.3 million, and more than 169,000 people have died, according to data released by Johns Hopkins University. Both numbers are the highest among countries in the world. Zheng criticized the U.S. for its unilateral provocations as well as remarks and behaviors that interfered with China's internal affairs, harmed Chinese interests and seriously damaged bilateral ties in recent months.

People from both sides should ... **P3**



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