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# Heart of Asia

Your Gateway to Afghanistan & the Region

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**U.S. Congratulates Nation, Calls for Reduction of Violence**

NATO Resolute Support Commander Gen. Scott Miller on Tuesday called on all sides to reduce violence and move toward peace.

"Very good time for all sides to consider reducing violence so the military forces of all sides can build the political paths toward peace," he said.

Miller also congratulated the Afghan people on their 101st Independence Day and reiterated his support from the security forces.

Meanwhile, US Department of State also issued a statement in which the US reiterated its commitment to the political settlement in Afghanistan.

"We honor the resilience and self-determination of the Afghan people, who have embarked on a new phase in their effort to end a 40-year war and live in peace, freedom, and prosperity. The United States remains committed to a political settlement that ... **P2**



**Afghan presidential compound hit in rocket attack on capital**

Six members of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's honour guard were wounded Tuesday when a rocket struck his palace compound, two officials told AFP.

The rocket was one of a salvo launched into central Kabul just as officials were gathering in the capital to commemorate Afghanistan's 101st independence day. Ghani had finished speaking outside the famous Arg Palace to mark the event when a rocket landed in the sprawling compound and wounded six members of his honour guard, two palace officials told AFP on condition of anonymity. The president had already wrapped up his ceremonial duties and was not affected.

The interior ministry did not immediately comment on the incident, but spokesman Tareq Arian earlier said 14 rockets were fired out of two vehicles in the capital, mostly hitting civilian homes. "Unfortunately, 10 civilians including four children and one woman have been wounded," Arian said. Two suspects were arrested, he added. ... **P2**

## With bright hope for peace, Afghans mark Independence Day



At an historic crossroad with optimized hope for peace, Afghanistan is marking its 101st Independence Day on Tuesday.

The country of some 35 million, situated on the crossroads of South and Central Asia, has been going through a turbulent period for the past four decades. However, the relative peace in past 19 years and the rejuvenated yet fragile peace process

have evoked hopes for a prosperous future there.

Generation born and raised in war As a classic example of an Afghan born and raised in this period, 39-year-old Anwar Khan Sadaat remains optimistic for the raging conflict to end within his lifetime. "I do not remember anything but war in my lifetime, but my grandmother keeps telling us stories of the glorious

past that never lets our hope for a peaceful future die," the roadside fruit vendor in the capital Kabul told Anadolu Agency.

Saadat's grand-uncle was among the first parliamentarians when the last emperor, King Zahir Shah, introduced a new constitution in 1964 switching the country to modern democratic state with civil rights. The subsequent events following the pro-

Soviet military coup in the late 1970s, however, had its toll on him just like millions of other Afghans who were killed, wounded and migrated.

"By selling these (fruits) I barely survive, me, my wife, children, the family of my martyred brother [Saadat's elder brother were killed while serving in the Afghan army six years ago] and my grandmother. I have three children, all girls, I want them to complete education, and go on to serve the nation under peace," Sadaat said as he delicately arranged an array of fresh grapes, apples, and other fruits on his cart, with the tricolor flag of Afghanistan hoisted on top, to attract buyers.

Peace within grasp The troubled Afghan peace parlay fringes on the sluggish prison swap, testing patient of the erratic warring parties.

Earlier this month, at an extraordinary moot "Loya Jirga", the grand consultative assembly of Afghan elders with over 3,000 public figures from across the country, lend their weight behind the government's call for a permanent cease-fire and the release of Taliban prisoners with international guarantees that the insurgents would not resort to violence again and commence intra-Afghan talks. ... **P3**

**Turkey reiterates support for peace in Afghanistan**

The Turkish president has reiterated Ankara's support for peace in Afghanistan as the war-ravaged country celebrated its 101st Independence Day on Tuesday.

In a letter to his Afghan counterpart Ashraf Ghani, Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed support for Afghanistan, which is "undergoing a critical transition."

A statement by the presidency in Kabul said the Turkish leader underlined deep-rooted bonds, cultural and fraternal relations... **P2**



## Afghan Govt Warns Neighbors Against Using Taliban as Proxies

In response to a recent report by US intelligence agencies saying that Iran offered bounties to Taliban fighters to target American and coalition troops in Afghanistan, the Afghan government on Tuesday warned Afghanistan's neighboring and regional countries against using the Taliban as a proxy in Afghanistan.

Sediq Sediqqi, a spokesman for Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said that the regional countries should not support the Taliban. However, the Iranian embassy in Kabul has rejected the report, saying Iran doesn't want its differences with the US to be brought inside Afghanistan.

"The Taliban is also accused of having support from other groups and networks, one of the important items of the peace process and the demand of the international community is that the Taliban are no longer used as a proxy group and no



country in the region should support the Taliban," said Sediqqi.

The Iranian embassy in Kabul has said that the US by levelling such allegations is trying to justify its failure in the peace process with the Taliban.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran, as it has repeatedly said before, does not intend to settle its disputes with the United States in Afghanistan. Also, the political and security contacts between Iran and the Taliban are

not secret. As Iran has informed the Afghan authorities, Iran will take all necessary steps to help restore lasting peace in its neighboring country and towards promoting intra-Afghan talks. Allegations by the US is a continuation of the fake claims which will not make any obstruction towards this path," the Iranian embassy said in a statement. "Regional countries are partly involved in this," said Mohammad Amin Weqad, a member of... **P3**

### U.S. Congratulates...

ends the conflict and ensures Afghanistan never again poses a threat to the United States and its allies," the US Department of State said.

"At this historic moment, as the Afghan people come together and attempt to broker a lasting peace, let us redouble our joint efforts in pursuit of a sovereign, unified, democratic, and self-reliant Afghanistan that is at peace with itself and which is a contributing member of the international community," the statement said.

### Afghan presidential...

The Arg Palace is located in a highly fortified area of the capital that also houses several embassies, and "incoming fire" alarms could be heard blaring from the US embassy.

Ghani's swearing-in ceremony on March 9 was also interrupted by rocket fire near the palace. No serious injuries were reported at the time.

In August 2018, multiple rockets were fired in Kabul, including at the presidential palace, where Ghani was making a speech. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility.

No group immediately claimed Tuesday's rocket attack, which came as the Afghan government and the Taliban are poised to begin peace talks. "We were expecting suicide attacks and bomb blasts on the roads, not rockets to hit our houses," said Habib Rahman, whose house was struck by one of the rockets.

Negotiations are set to start once Kabul completes the release of about 400 Taliban prisoners as approved last week by a traditional gathering of thousands of prominent Afghans.

By HIKMAT NOORI

## How different generations in Afghanistan view the country's independence

Every year, Afghans celebrate their independence on August 18, following the Islamic calendar. This year, as the country marks 101 years of freedom, its sovereignty continues to be marred with a history of foreign invasions, prompting decades of violence and bloodshed.

Afghanistan claimed independence from British colonial rule in 1919, under the aegis of the reformist King Amanullah Khan who established current-day Afghanistan.

For the last 40 years, the country has braved immense violence, starting with the Soviet invasion in 1979 that was resisted for a decade by the Afghan Mujahideen — a term that evoked bravado and righteousness in the West until it was smeared by the events following the 9/11 attacks.

The defeat and withdrawal of Soviet troops was followed by a power vacuum resulting in a civil war between the various Mujahideen factions in the early 1990s. This period was followed by the brutal regime of the Taliban who took control in 1996, only to be toppled five years later by a US invasion of the country in 2001. Since then, the insurgent group has continued to wage war against both foreign and Afghan forces.

This tumultuous history has ensured that not one Afghan born in the last forty years has experienced peace or freedom in the independent nation.

"We love our independence"

A very different Afghanistan lives on in the memories of those who lived before the start of the troubled times. "Life was simple and good before the Russian invasion, even though people were not that rich, it was an environment of safety and prosperity," recalls Sahira Sharif, a 59-year-old parliamentarian from Khost province of Afghanistan.

She recalls her life as a schoolgirl in Kabul, a city that was at the heart of cultural and economic growth in the region. "Crimes and harassment were very low; I used to walk from Khair Khana to Park-e-Zarengar (around 10 KM) to visit a library that was located there," she traces a scenic route from her youth.

Sharif was only 17 years of age when the Soviets invaded, and in a matter of years, she witnessed the stability and security of her homeland disintegrate. She graduated from high school against a backdrop of battles between the mujahideen and Soviet troops across the country. "I was meant to start studying in the medical university in Nangarhar province, but as the fighting intensified in Jalalabad city, my family forbade



me to continue," she said.

For those who resisted the Soviet invasion, the violence was a means to realizing their independence from an oppressive regime. "The Soviets wanted to rule us like they did other central Asian countries. They were against our faith, our culture, and our tradition. We fought them because we love our independence and Islam is important to us," says 53-year-old Mohammad Wazir Razi Kabuli, who fought in several battles against the Soviets.

"The first time I went to the battlefield I noticed a lack of medical personnel. That year I went to Pakistan and took a six months course in first aid, and then returned to serve as a paramedic to the mujahideen," he recalls from his time as a guerrilla in the country.

The conflict consumed nearly every Afghan family irrespective of their political allegiances. Like millions of Afghans, Sharif's family sought refuge in Pakistan or were displaced in other Afghan provinces. Although Sahira Sharif, ever a determined woman, stayed in Kabul with her brother to complete her higher education though the city was burning with deadly violence.

She also witnessed the aftermath of the battles. "Afghans may have defeated the Soviets but Afghanistan was in a worse situation after the victory. Everything was destroyed, so many people were killed," she says.

The gunmen who kill our people

The victory was punctuated by more violence and the

reign of brutal regimes. As the conflict evolved, so did the definition of an independent Afghanistan.

While Kabul sought independence from foreign oppression, Sharif's idea of independence takes inspiration from a country that was once at peace. "An independent Afghanistan is one where there is rule of law, and people have rights, development is equal and inclusive. And the government is able to make decisions without pressure," she says.

Perhaps, it is Afghanistan's youngest generation that perfectly illustrates the country's complicated relationship with the ideas of independence and freedom.

The Afghan youth — who make up 65 percent of the Afghan population — seek their own meaning in independence amidst a conflict that was thrust upon them. "I was born in the war, and have not known one second of peace in my life. Every day we experience new tragedies — suicide attacks, explosions, bombs, fighting and so on," says the 23-year-old Basira Paigham, a women's rights activist from the northern city of Aybak in the Samangan province.

She is concerned over the deal signed between the Taliban and the US earlier this year, one that has accelerated efforts to hold intra-Afghan talks. "The peace deal with the Taliban is not reconciliation, rather an agreement between a group of gunmen and the US administration. It does not take into account the human rights, transitional justice, rights of victims of war. It empowers the armed gunmen who ... **P3**

By Bill Knight

### Afghanistan choice emerging as dying - or living

Remembering progressive broadcaster Mike Malloy's description of Afghanistan — "where empires go to die" — it should come as no surprise that the Trump administration has been outmaneuvered in the long-promised end to the nation's longest war.

Negotiations are expected to resume in Doha, Qatar, this week after Afghan lawmakers on Aug. 9 released 400 Taliban prisoners, the last holdup delaying talks between the Afghan and U.S. governments and the Taliban.

Previous bargaining resulted in an agreement to free 5,000 Taliban prisoners, but Afghanistan hesitated in releasing the last few hundred, who'd been accused of serious offenses.

Afghans are led by President Ashraf Ghani — reelected over Abdullah Abdullah after disputed September voting, and finally seated in February. That was the month when U.S. diplomats brokered a peace

deal with Taliban forces and the Afghan government, and also when U.S. intelligence reportedly briefed the White House that a Russian spy agency had been offering bounties for killing U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Widespread fighting and targeted killings also stalled the peace process.

The war started in 2001, when the Taliban was considered an armed nuisance that harbored Al Qaeda leaders responsible for the 9/11 attacks, a weak annoyance that could be overwhelmed with military might. However, year after year, casualties increased, and "liberation" of territories was often temporary. Eventually, Taliban support grew with everyday Afghans' resentment and outrage of the U.S. and allies.

Now, the Pentagon is planning for a withdrawal before the November election — one of a few "October Surprises," one suspects — but withdrawal

means more than loading troops onto aircraft and flying them home. It would take weeks, if not months, to ship weapons and equipment, give some material to Afghan forces and just leave other items not worth keeping or transferring. An autumn withdrawal would follow moving thousands of personnel since the Trump administration approved the deal. However, after Trump was inaugurated — campaigning on ending the country's "endless wars" — the administration lifted restrictions on air strikes, and the U.S. military's air war increased there, resulting in more civilian casualties, according to the independent Bureau of Investigative Journalism. In the first half of 2019, U.S. and Afghan militaries together were responsible for more civilian deaths than the Taliban. Last year, American forces dropped more bombs in Afghanistan than in any year in the last decade, resulting in more than 1,000 civilian ... **P3**

### Turkey reiterates...

between the two countries marking centenary of their diplomatic relations.

"Turkey continues to support Afghanistan to achieve peace at this juncture while the country is undergoing a critical transition in terms of sustainable peace, security and prosperity," it said quoting the letter. Russian President Vladimir Putin also congratulated the Afghan president, stressing that joint efforts and partnership in combating terrorism and narcotics will benefit both the countries, and lead to consolidating regional stability and security.

Meanwhile, multiple rockets hit various areas close to the highly-guarded diplomatic enclave in the capital Kabul

during the celebrations.

Tariq Arian, an interior ministry spokesman, said at least 14 people got injured as a result.

Disagreements over the exchange of prisoners has delayed peace negotiations envisaged under a US-Taliban deal signed in February to end the 19-year-old war.

Last week, Ghani agreed to release the last 400 Taliban prisoners after an Afghan grand assembly approved the move. The administration has so far set free 80 insurgent prisoners.

The Loya Jirga said the decision was made to immediately start intra-Afghan dialogue, which is expected to begin soon, most likely in Qatar, where the Taliban maintain a political office.

### U.S. action...

Taiwan is an inalienable part of China. China resolutely opposes the establishment of official institutions or any official exchange between Taiwan and Somaliland," Lijian said.

Taiwan's president had announced the development on Twitter.

"An important milestone for the Taiwan-Somaliland partnership! Today we

opened the Taiwan Representative Office in Somaliland. We are bound together by our shared values of freedom, democracy, justice & the rule of law, ideals that will guide our future cooperation," Tsai Ing-wen said.

With the new ties, Taiwan raised the number of its recognizing counterparts to 16. Beijing considers it a

Chinese province but Taipei has maintained that it is independent since 1949.

China refuses diplomatic relations with any country that recognizes Taiwan.

Somaliland, a self-declared state in East Africa with a nearly 3.5 million population, is yet to be recognized by the international community. However, it has its own flag, parliament, and currency.

# Reduced Electricity to Industrial Parks Raises Concerns

The Afghanistan Industries Association said Monday that the distribution of electricity to Pul-e-Charkhi Industrial Park of Kabul has dropped by 50 percent in the last two months. The members of this association warn that if this situation continues, around 20,000 workers in the industrial park will be unemployed. The director further stated that due to the reduction of electricity, the production of factories has decreased, hence workers currently are without work. "43,000 people work here, if you [DABS] give us regular electricity, we promise that 100,000 people will work here for another year, but if this situation continues, DABS and the supreme economic council will be

responsible for the consequences," said Abdul Jabar Safi, the director of the Afghanistan Industries Association. The members of this association say that with the change of leadership at DABS, the commitments of the company also changed, and promises made by the previous leadership to the industrialists were not fulfilled. Furthermore, DABS officials say an increase in electricity consumption on one hand, and a decrease of available electricity on the other, has led to the distribution shortage. "Electricity production in Naghlu Dam [East Kabul] has been reduced due to water shortages, and we have problems with Tajikistan also," stated Salem Salemi, DABS Chief Operating Officer Director.



According to the Afghanistan Industries Association, only 480 of the 1,067 factories established in Pul-e-Charkhi Industrial Park are active, and the rest are shut down due to various problems, including electricity shortages.

### With bright hope...

Among organizers of Loya Jirga, Tair Zaland told Anadolu Agency the ground is paved in an "unprecedented way" for eventual peace in the country. "More than ever, we are closer to an ultimate peace with the public consensus nationwide, the three cease-fires we had in past three years and almost completion of the prisoners' swap," the nearly dressed Afghan diplomat with a clip of tricolor Afghan flag on his coat said while stressing this opportunity must be seized.

### Fight against dependency syndrome

Throughout its recent and classic history, Afghanistan's strategic location on the crossroads between Central and South Asia has played pivotal role in determining its fate.

Zaland agrees. "We [Afghans] as well as our neighbors can benefit greatly if our location is used for collective gains, connectivity for trade and cultural ties instead of proxy wars," he added.

"The management of water and natural resources has been worst affected by the war. If we need to achieve and realize the wish of self-reliance, food security, there is a need to prioritize this sector," he said. Akhtar has been occasionally visiting Kabul to share his knowledge and thoughts in this regard with students and relevant officials.

"The new lot of educated Afghan youth wish for their country at this 101st Independence Day that the war ends so that we can enjoy the natural beauty of all our provinces and enter healthy competition in various fields with all countries of the world," he said.

This year, Akhtar said he will enjoy the Independence Day celebrations with his friends and relatives in Kabul. Comparing the lavish public celebrations before the rages of war with current modest fiesta, Saadat said his grandmother always speaks fondly of King Shah inspecting the robust units of soldiers, the traditional "Attan Dance" and other festivities during this day.

"That all is no more around, but God is merciful, we will see peace and such public celebrations soon," he said.

### How different...

continue killing our people," she explains.

Now, as the Afghan government prepares to negotiate with the Taliban, Paigham finds her independence at stake.

"Today as an Afghan girl, I have the independence to seek education, to work alongside men, travel and even express my opinions. The Taliban have made clear that they disapprove of women who work and are involved in social or political spheres. I will lose my freedoms if the Taliban comes [to power]," she said.

"I hope the government of

Afghanistan stops compromising with the Taliban because it only empowers them to trample on our freedoms." Paigham's views are shared by those from the generation before her.

"Afghanistan can be made free of invasions, but real peace and independence will come when our leaders can prioritise national interest during the peace talks, over personal, ethnic, religious, political and geographical interest," said Kabuli.

Sharif also adds in agreement, "If the negotiations are based on commitment, honesty and true will, the outcome will be good for Afghans, but as we know that

Taliban and Afghan government are not impartial."

However, the irony of yearning for freedoms—from conflict, oppression, invasions and extremism, among other things—in an independent country, is not lost on Afghans who celebrate their independence.

"Even if peace is made with the Taliban, it will take a long time to make Afghanistan an independent and developed country," Sharif said.

"This war is not just an Afghan war, it's the war of regional and international rivalries. So it will end only if all parties show a willingness to end it."

### Afghanistan...

which he reportedly received in a daily briefing Feb. 27. Meanwhile, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs – which has jurisdiction over bills and investigations related to the nation's foreign affairs – will get new leadership after the primary defeat of committee chair Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) by progressive Jamaal Bowman.

Engel, who backed the Iraq War, also was one of a handful of Democrats who opposed the Iran deal and who helped defeat an attempt to stop selling cluster bombs to Saudi Arabia. Progressives are lobbying House leadership to name a chair who will push for change in Afghanistan and throughout foreign-affairs issues.

The committee – whose members include Illinois Republican Adam Kinzinger and progressive Democrats Joaquin Castro of Texas, Ted Lieu of California and Ilhan Omar of Minnesota – needs someone who "advances the bold, progressive foreign policy that this country deserves," said progressive groups in a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. They seek a chair independent from special interests who opposes militarization and surveillance at home and sanctions that hurt civilians abroad, and who supports a diplomacy-first approach to national security and a global economy that prioritizes people and the planet, not corporate profit. Perhaps for the United States, leaving Afghanistan won't signal the death of an "empire," but the birth of sensible policies.

### Afghan Govt...

offered bounties to Taliban fighters to target American and coalition troops in Afghanistan, identifying payments linked to at least six attacks carried out by the militant group just last year alone, including a suicide bombing at a US air base in December. In late June, United States intelligence announced that it had found evidence that a

### Saudi Prince...

question about them. "These relations are historic, very important, excellent and will remain excellent. There should be no doubt of this. Nobody can doubt the centrality of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia

to the Islamic world," Iftikhar stressed.

But ties have been strained with Saudi Arabia which appears to have led to Pakistan turning to China last month to borrow \$1 billion to repay part of a \$3 billion loan from Saudi Arabia – which

Russian unit offered bounties to Taliban-linked militants to US-led coalition troops in Afghanistan, The New York Times reported. The report said that the alleged bounties gave incentives to the insurgents to target US forces. This comes amid efforts by US President Donald Trump to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan.

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# U.S. action against Chinese companies hegemonic: Beijing

Beijing on Tuesday said Washington's action against Chinese companies was "hegemonic," a day after the US imposed further sanctions on technology company Huawei.

Addressing a news conference in the capital, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said: "China will take necessary measures to safeguard the legitimate rights of Chinese companies... such behavior is hegemonic."

The US has expanded restrictions on Huawei over the company's alleged ties with the Chinese Communist Party.

Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said its access to semiconductor chips is banned, and new limitations will further prevent it from getting around the bar.

"On May 20, we issued an order that prevented American technology from being used in Huawei-

designed chips. That led them to do some evasive measures. They were going through third parties," he said. "The new rule makes it clear that any use of American software or American fabrication equipment to produce things for Huawei is banned and requires a license."

Many other states, including the UK, have also expressed concerns, fearing Huawei's devices and equipment could be used to spy on other countries and companies. China has repeatedly dismissed these claims.

'Taiwan inalienable part of China'

Meanwhile, the spokesperson said Taiwan's "desperate move conducting separatist activities are doomed to fail."

He was referring to the opening of a Taiwan Representative Office in Somaliland in East Africa. "There is only one China in the world and ... P2



### A look at the world

#### Saudi Prince met with Bajwa during army chief's visit to Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's Deputy Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud met on Monday with Pakistan's army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa in Riyadh to discuss a number of issues including that of military cooperation and regional stability.

According to the Saudi Press Agency, they reviewed bilateral relations, especially on the military and defense side, and sought to enhance joint cooperation to maintain security and stability, in addition to issues of common concern.

This comes during a time of strained relations between the two longtime allies and although the official line was that the visit was "pre-planned," many reports indicate it was an attempt to ease Riyadh's displeasure over rare criticism from Islamabad of the Kingdom's lukewarm reaction to the situation in disputed



Jammu and Kashmir.

Earlier this month, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi asked the Jeddah-based Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to convene a meeting over the issue.

However, Saudi has failed to do so, which prompted a harsh response from Islamabad. Qureshi warned that if the OIC failed to assist, Pakistan would call its own meeting of Muslim countries "which want to support us on the Kashmir issue."

According to him, Pakistan had skipped a summit in Malaysia last year with a "heavy heart" because of Saudi Arabia's reservations. Very few details have however been released over Bajwa's visit to the Kingdom but diplomatic sources said the general was accompanied by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief Lt Gen Faiz Hameed and that the two are expected to hold high-level meetings.

Speaking to journalists ahead of Bajwa's departure on Monday, Major General Babar Iftikhar, the Pakistani army's spokesman, said: "There is no need to read too much into it. Thank God, everything is fine,"

Iftikhar stated Pakistan and its people "are proud of their relations" with Saudi Arabia, and that there was no need to raise any ... P3

#### Kuwaiti lawmakers call on gov't to reject UAE-Israel deal



Thirty-seven Kuwaiti lawmakers on Tuesday called on their government to reject a normalization deal between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

In a statement, the members of parliament affirmed their solidarity with the Palestinian people, "recalling the parliament's stable and continuous position against normalization [with Israel] in all its forms".

"The crimes of the Zionist occupation cannot be removed by normalization from the souls of our children," the statement said.

The statement referred to the incursions of Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa Mosque and Israeli attempts to judize the holy city.

The Kuwaiti government has maintained silence regarding the UAE-Israel normalization deal.

Last week, Israel and the UAE announced establishing full diplomatic relations in a US-brokered deal that will see the Jewish state postpone plans for annexation of land it illegally occupies in the West Bank that is sought by the Palestinians for their future state.

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

However, Tunisia's parliament on Monday condemned an agreement between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel to normalize relations, regarding it as an infringement of the Palestinian people's rights as well as a threat against the Arab and Islamic position which rejects normalization.

#### Washington governor criticizes Trump's threats on vote-by-mail and postal service

The governor of the US state of Washington issued a statement on Monday criticizing President Donald Trump administration's move to limit the ability of the US Postal Service (USPS) to process vote-by-mail ballots.

Governor Jay Inslee expressed his anger and objection against "the Trump administration's efforts to suppress the votes of the American people," arguing that the U.S. Postal Service is a vital and trusted part of all communities. "Mail-in ballots are the easiest, safest, most reliable voting method there is and Washington's vote-by-mail system is proof of that. Our system has worked well for years without incident, and I am confident it will continue to ensure strong and dependable access to democracy for the people of our state," said Inslee.



"The USPS does not just deliver ballots but also medication, paychecks, supplies and other crucial lifelines. To cut back and restrict this service at any time is inexcusable, but during a pandemic it is downright abhorrent," Inslee noted, adding that "the president should be doing less to suppress our votes, and more to suppress the COVID-19 virus."

Inslee committed in the statement that he will do everything in his power to help ensure all people in the state have access to the full range of services offered by the USPS, especially their constitutional right to participate in state, local and federal elections.

U.S. House Oversight Committee on Sunday called for the chief of the country's postal service to testify before the panel about the cost-cutting overhaul to the agency, which lawmakers worried would sabotage the presidential election later this year with the expected surging of mail-in ballots due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Trump on Aug. 13 threatened to block the 25-billion-U.S.-dollar funding for the USPS supported by Democrats in a coronavirus relief bill passed in the House in May. Trump said the money would assist mail-in ballots, which he has repeatedly railed against and claimed the method would cause voting fraud.



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