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Heart of Asia

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**Uzbekistan asks
Afghanistan to
ensure security of
Uzbek companies'
personnel**

Uzbekistan has asked Afghanistan to strengthen security protection for the personnel of Uzbek companies operating in Afghanistan following an armed attack in Balkh Province, the Uzbek Foreign Ministry said, Trend reports citing Kabar. Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov and his Afghan counterpart Mohammad Hanif Atmar discussed over the phone an armed attack on an Uzbek railway company near Hairaton railway station in Afghanistan that occurred on Thursday, the statement said.

Uzbekistan's state railway company said in a separate statement that during the attack by unidentified gunmen, an Afghan soldier guarding the railway was killed, and an Uzbek railway specialist was wounded and taken to the hospital. In response, Atmar said that ... **P2**



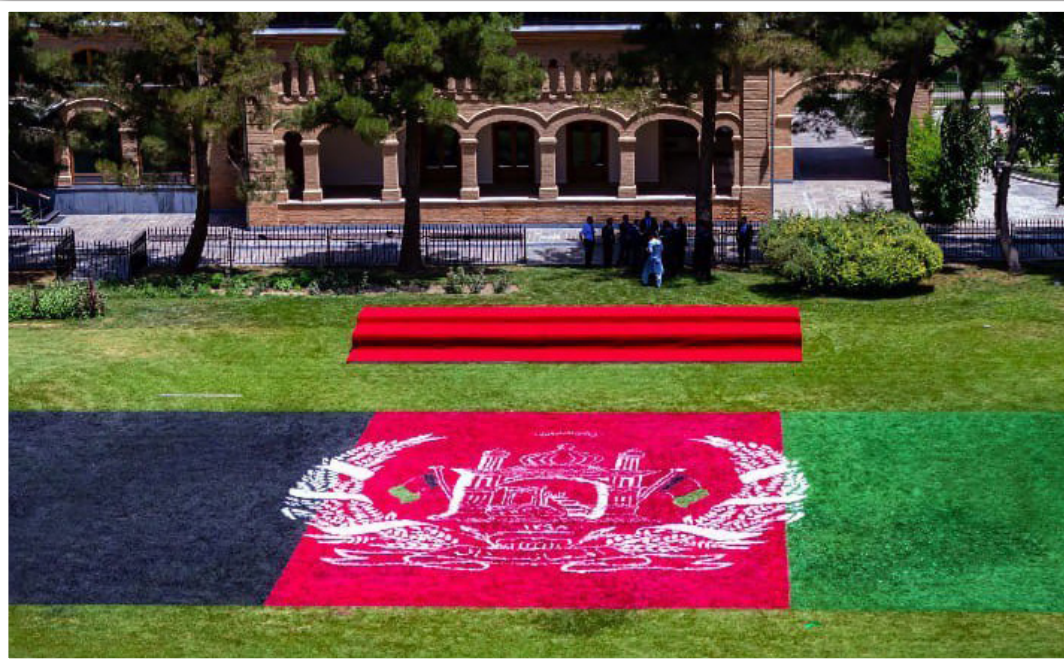
**Iran Reiterates
Preparedness to
Cooperate with
Afghanistan in
Peace Talks**

Iran's Special Envoy on Afghanistan Mohammad Ebrahim Taherian Fard voiced concern about increased insecurities in Afghanistan, after the Saturday blasts in Kabul, stressing Tehran's readiness to help the country in holding intra-Afghan talks.

"Establishment of peace and stability not only is the general demand of people, government and different Afghan streams but also is considered as a need on the path of development of regional cooperation and collective security," Taherian said.

He referred to the recent approvals of the Loya Jirga (the grand tribal council) in Afghanistan to establish peace, and underlined the necessity for paving the ground for holding Afghan-Afghan talks with the aim of reaching an agreement. Taherian reiterated the Islamic Republic of Iran's preparedness for cooperation in holding the intra-Afghan talks. Kabul witnessed four explosions ... **P3**

Afghan govt assessing Pakistan curbs on Taliban



The Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Sunday said it was assessing Pakistan's order of imposing sanctions on Taliban leaders.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Gran Hiwad said in a statement that the Afghan government would clarify its position after an assessment in this regard.

Pakistan issued the order in 'a

statutory notification' and placed it on the website of the Foreign Office in Islamabad late Friday.

It called for strict enforcement of assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo on the Afghan militant movement.

Section 10 of the SRO explained the purpose of issuance of the new order, which said: "In exercise of the powers

conferred by Section 2 of the United Nations' (Security Council) Act, 1948, (XIV of 1948), the federal government is pleased to order that the Resolution 2255 (2015) be fully implemented with respect to Taliban leaders and affiliated entities..."

Gran said the MoFA would share its information with the media after completing its assessment.

Pakistan has ordered full compliance with the United Nations' Security Council sanctions against Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network. The Taliban have not yet commented in this regard.

Pakistan has issued sweeping financial sanctions against Afghanistan's Taliban, just as the insurgent group is in the midst of the US-led peace process in the neighbouring country. The orders, which were made public late on Friday, identified dozens of individuals, including the Taliban's chief peace negotiator Abdul Ghani Baradar and several members of the Haqqani family, including Sirajuddin, the current head of the Haqqani network and deputy head of the Taliban.

The list of sanctioned groups included others besides the Taliban and were in keeping with a five-year-old United Nations resolution sanctioning the Afghan group and freezing their assets.

Pakistan trying to get off grey list The orders were issued as part of Pakistan's efforts to avoid being blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which monitors money laundering and tracks terrorist groups' activities, ... **P2**

Jawzjan disabled distributed Turkey- funded wheelchairs

Some disabled people, who received wheelchairs in northern Jawzjan province, said on Saturday they would be able to continue their studies with the help of wheelchairs and become effective members of society.

At least 57 disabled persons were distributed wheelchairs by Qoyash Development and Welfare Organisation in Jawzjan on Saturday.

Nasrullah, a disabled person, said he lost his leg as a result of a blast while hurling his cattle five years ago. "My hairs were burnt and I lost two legs as a result of the blast," He said.

Nasrullah added after the incident he was unable to work. ... **P2**



Reconciliation council chooses six deputies and over 40 members

Spokesman for the High Council for National Reconciliation Fraidoon Khwazoon confirmed Saturday that six deputies and more than 40 members have been appointed to the body that was established in May.

Sources said the newly-appointed deputies are council head Abdullah Abdullah's election campaign running mates Enayatullah Babur Farahmand and Asadullah Saadati; State Minister for Peace Affairs Abdul Salam Rahimi, as well as Ata-ur-Rahman Saleem and Din Mohammad, two members of the now defunct High Peace Council, and a woman who would be introduced by the Presidential Palace.

"More than 40 people have been introduced. The list was finalized and is waiting for the Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation to officially announce the structure," Fraidoon Khwazoon



said. This development comes three months after the council was established following a power-sharing agreement between political rivals Abdullah and President Ashraf Ghani following months of post-election discord.

In addition to the six deputies, an additional 40-plus members were selected for the leadership committee of the council which is tasked with pursuing issues around the peace process.

While names have not yet been released, sources indicate all those appointed are prominent members of society and are all proponents of peace.

This comes after the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad called on the Afghan government and the Taliban this week to immediately start intra-Afghan negotiations; aimed at finding a political settlement to end the long-term conflict in the war-weary ... **P3**

Afghan govt...

according to security officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the media. Last year the Paris-based group put Islamabad on a grey list. Until now only Iran and North Korea are blacklisted, which severely restricts a country's international borrowing capabilities. Pakistan is trying to get off the grey list, said the officials. There was no immediate response from the Afghan Taliban, but many of the group's leaders are known to own businesses and property in Pakistan.

Uzbekistan asks...

Afghan authorities will conduct a thorough investigation of the incident and bring those involved to justice. Uzbekistan shares a border with Afghanistan in the south, and has been participating in the socio-economic revival of the war-torn country through regional infrastructure projects, including building railways and electricity lines.

Jawzjan disabled...

"From the past two years, I have been studying and I hope to complete my education and have a bright future." Habiba Noorzad, another disabled person who also got a wheelchair, said "The lack of wheelchair made it difficult for me to study. Today I am happy that wheelchairs from friendly country Turkey will help me continue my studies." Noor Mohammad Qoyash, head of the Qoyash Welfare Organization said: "Well-off people in Turkey purchased these wheelchairs and sent to us, which are distributed to 57 disabled people." Those who received the wheelchairs are people affected by the ongoing war, he added. He said candidates for the wheelchairs were identified earlier through a survey.

By Inam Ul Haque

Afghanistan Papers: counter-narcotics and counterinsurgency

This is last in a series of columns derived from the "Afghanistan Papers", published in The Washington Post in December 2019, detailing causes of US failures in Afghanistan. The Afghanistan Papers were compiled from US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) interviews of over 400 — mainly insider — US, Afghan and UN officials. The previous four columns outlined strategic (mis)direction of Afghan war, response to Pakistan-specific accusations, corruption under US watch and the raising of Afghan security forces. This column would detail the US war on drugs. It was late 2017, when the US launched Operation IRON TEMPEST with massive aerial strikes to target clandestine opium production labs that ostensibly generated \$200 million annually in drug money for the Taliban war economy, mainly by taxing farmers and traffickers. Air Force Brig Gen Lance Bunch pronounced with a swagger, "This is a new war, and the gloves are off." Within 12 months, after over 200 airstrikes using advanced aircraft and laser-guided munitions, the Operation ran out of steam; as most suspected labs were empty, mud-walled compounds. The US/NATO war on drugs has repeatedly hit snags like the overall war effort, costing a whopping \$9 billion since 2001 alone. A former Afghan cabinet minister, Mohammed Ehsan Zia, attributed an inconsistent strategy, constantly changing policies and reliance on an army of expensive consultants, unschooled in Afghan environment for this failure. "Foreigners read 'Kite Runner' on [the] plane and believe they are an expert on Afghanistan and then never listen." He lamented. Despite efforts, Afghan opium production skyrocketed to over four times, accounting for 82% of the world's supply during the 18-year war. The boom in drug related businesses seeped into the Afghan economy. It corrupted Afghan officials affecting governance and provided Taliban with stable revenue. At the operational level, the US and UK tried bribing farmers; hiring mercenaries to destroy

poppy fields; and urged spraying defoliants... to no visible effect. The operation was led by the State Department and Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) with military remaining inconsistently involved in these opium wars. Generals during George W Bush's administration (2001-2009), avoided involvement seeing it as a distraction from fighting terrorism. During Obama years (2009-2017), generals began to realise opium as a military threat. However, aggressive action would alienate poppy farmers — a large segment of Afghan population — besides US-aligned warlords who profited from opium trafficking. Bureaucratic infighting is also blamed for many problems; "There was violent competition in Washington not only within Congress, between the Hill and the administration but also between different parts of the administration," a US official told SIGAR interviewers in May 2016. The push and pull between the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) and Pentagon resulted in bureaucratic dysfunction. Poppy cultivation remains cultural to Afghanistan since generations, especially in the insurgency-hit southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar. Afghan opium resin once harvested is processed into morphine and heroin in drug labs and shipped to Europe, Iran and elsewhere in Asia. Ironically, it was the Taliban who crippled the Afghan drug industry, when Mullah Mohammad Omar, the Taliban leader, outlawed growing poppies and opium production as un-Islamic in July 2000. Consequently, poppy cultivation dropped by 90% during 2000-2001. The Taliban edict elicited envy. Afghan farmers resumed sowing poppy after the US military toppled the Taliban in 2001. In spring 2002, British officials — keen on performance — offered to pay Afghan poppy farmers \$700 an acre to destroy their crops. This \$30 million programme resulted in poppy-growing frenzy, with farmers offering part of their produce to the British and selling the rest in the open

market. This programme expectedly failed as Afghans cunningly duped the authorities given their transient presence. The cultivation spikes in subsequent years, after the money dried up, resulted in over production of drugs. French defense minister Michèle Alliot-Marie in as early as 2001 alerted US officials about the opium trade getting out of control, urging action "to avoid having a situation where drug money elects the Afghan Parliament." The then-US ambassador, Ronald Neumann, in September 2005, warned his government about the narcotics sector spinning Afghan corruption out of control and "... strangle the legitimate Afghan state in its cradle" with the sheer mass of illegal money. The Bush administration failed to chalk an agreeable course of action. Destroying poppies, alienating poor farmers, winning hearts and minds, and providing alternative income remained elusive contradictory goals. Meanwhile the Taliban benefited from this catch-22 situation. Narcotics were fueling their insurgency. Initial unwillingness to deal with narcotics, resulted in a situation where the US/NATO were unable to deal with it. When prodded by Congress in 2004 the INL hired some 1,200 security contractors to eradicate poppy. This small army included South African mercenaries, veterans of Balkan wars and Gurkha soldiers from Nepal, as per Ronald McMullen, INL director for Afghanistan-Pakistan (2006 to 2007). In systematic over-reporting during 2005 to 2007, the US, British and UN officials would exaggerate by reporting more poppy destroyed than was actually done, to show performance. Many US lawmakers and Bush administration officials favoured an aggressive approach like "Plan Colombia", where cancer-causing herbicides were aurally sprayed in Colombia to combat cocaine production. Afghan president Karzai, the British and some Bush administration officials opposed and ultimately rejected aerial spraying. This proposal made Karzai more suspicious of US motives. ...

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By Azhar Azam

India should clearly support the Afghan peace process

Once Afghan President Ashraf Ghani crossed the last barrier to the long-delayed peace talks with the Afghan Taliban in Doha and signed off a ruling to allow the release of the final bunch prisoners, a new wave of violence and terrorist incidents rocked Afghanistan. After a swarm of rockets jarred Kabul and took three lives with one of the projectiles slammed into Arg presidential palace, housing several embassies and NATO headquarters, at least 14 pro-government "Public Uprising Forces" were also killed on August 20 in Takhar province. The Taliban have yet to comment on the attack. Earlier, a top-ranking government employee Abdul Baqi Amin, who was part of Afghan delegation that held several rounds of talks with Taliban in Qatari capital on reducing violence and women rights, was snuffed out in a car blast. Amin's killing followed an assassination attempt on Fawzia Koofi, another member of the Afghan negotiating team.

While experts linked the recent attacks as an attempt to sabotage the Afghan peace process and Taliban leaders condemned the assaults on peace and rights activists, it is important that both the warring parties keep their head cool and do not deflect the attention from crucial peace consultations. It is, nevertheless, equally essential for the deal brokers, particularly the U.S., to closely observe the proceedings and scrutinize regional elements that feel themselves isolated from the positive developments in Afghanistan, believing that that the actualization of intra-Afghan dialogue could stymie their strategic regional objectives. New Delhi gained phenomenal clout after 9/11 through three billion U.S. dollars of investments but its indecision to respond on Washington suggestion to engage with Taliban makes it at odds with its ally. The U.S. Special Representative to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad in his brief visit to India in May said that

such an engagement would be "appropriate" for India. Indian defense experts have warned that the return of Taliban and Afghan peace process would affect New Delhi interests and weaken its position in Kabul given the alleged Islamabad influence on the armed faction, latter's role in future security arrangements, broadening of Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and growing Iran-China-Pakistan axis in Afghanistan. The cautious support for the reconciliation exercise cast a pall over India's determination for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned intra-Afghan dialogue, seen vital by all the stakeholders and global powers for a sustainable peace and stability in the graveyard of empires, region and the world over. New Delhi's wariness toward the Taliban has pushed it to denounce India for playing a negative role in Afghanistan and supporting terrorists. Pakistan too has also long indicted its rival for launching terrorist ...

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Iran's annual export to Afghanistan predicted to hit \$3b by next March

The value of Iran's exports to Afghanistan is anticipated to reach \$3 billion in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2021), according to the chairman of Iran-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce. Referring to Iran's rising trend of exports to its neighbor Afghanistan in recent months, Hossein Salimi said that based on the studies, the country's expected value of exports to Afghanistan will be materialized this year, Mehr news agency reported. He further pointed to the problem of transferring goods via Milak border and said, "This problem has been removed and commodities are currently transported via Milak and Dogharoon borders without any problem." He explained that there was a problem with fueling trucks at Milak border, but this problem has been resolved and the transfer of goods is now underway at this border. About the decrease in the exports of Iranian products to Afghanistan in the first two months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-May 22) due to the coronavirus pandemic, the chairman of Iran-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce said, "Trend of Iranian products export to Afghanistan has been accelerated in a way that the country is

compensating its export decline to this country." The Milak border crossing between Iran and Afghanistan in Iran's southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan was reopened on August 14 following the signing of a border agreement between the two neighbors, the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said. The mentioned border crossing was closed and reopened several times in the past few weeks due to a strike by Afghan truckers and their blockade of the return route of Iranian trucks and the Iranian retaliation. According to Ruhollah Latifi, the signing ceremony was attended by officials from both sides including the Acting Deputy Governor of Sistan-Baluchestan Province for Economic Affairs Madana Zanganeh, and the head of Milak Customs. Milak border terminal was first reopened earlier this month after a week of closure and over 70 Iranian truckers returned to the country, however, Afghan truck drivers once again closed the crossing in Afghanistan's Nimruz Province and Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan Province, only a couple of days after it was reopened. Milak is a village in Jahanabad Rural District, in the central district of Hirmad County, Sistan-Baluchestan Province.

Canal garden to produce 6 tons of dates this year

Date harvest at the canal's garden in eastern Nangarhar province is estimated to reach six tons --- four times up compared to last year's yield, an official said Sunday.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has planted around 2,800 trees in the garden by 10 years back and it was expected that the trees would start yielding dates within four years.

However, the garden started producing dates later than expected and the yield increased last year.

Sayed Hamayoon Gharibmal, the canal's spokesman, said the garden would produce six tons of dates, which would be four times higher compared to last year's.

He linked the increase in yield to timely technical activities such as spraying, fertilizing, pruning and softening of



the soil.

The garden director Abdul Qaium Atrafi told Pajhwok Afghan News that 150 plants in the garden produced two tons of dates last year but 300 plants would

produce six tons of dates this year.

He said the lack of a surrounding wall and processing issues had been shared with the authorities concerned and if these issues were addressed, they

could export the dates abroad as well.

He said the UAE envoy in Kabul had assured them the creation of more gardens on 90 acres of land and further cooperation in this regard.

Afghanistan Papers:...

Flawed eradication programmes, driven by Congress as late as 2015 missed the fact that successful counter-narcotics effort depended upon "... massive rural development effort." In a major policy shift, Richard Holbrooke — after appointment as the State Department's special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2009 — brought eradication to a standstill, shifting the US focus "to programmes that tried to persuade Afghan poppy farmers to switch to other crops or adopt other livelihoods."

Even these efforts backfired. In Helmand, amidst the poppy belt, funding for digging and lining water channels to improve irrigation not only benefited fruit orchards; but irrigated poppies also, lucrative for being more profitable. In Helmand, USAID enticed farmers to grow wheat. It did increase wheat production, but farmers relocated poppy fields to other areas; resultantly between 2010-2014, poppy cultivation across the country almost doubled.

Some US officials attributed eradication failure to a fundamental misunderstanding of Afghanistan as an agricultural country and opium just another crop. Barnett Rubin, an academician and senior adviser to Holbrooke is quoted; "the largest industry [in Afghanistan] is war, then drugs then services. Agriculture is down in fourth or fifth place." US military commanders were relieved once the Obama administration abandoned eradication programmes that they thought were pushing rural Afghans towards the Taliban.

When the generals wanted to wed their law enforcement, drug interdiction and economic development programmes with their counterinsurgency strategy, they "never received clear marching orders from the Obama administration" as there was no civilian counter-narcotics strategy.

In the long list of US/NATO failures in Afghanistan, counter-narcotics and counterinsurgency strategies never complemented each other, resulting in corruption and drug proliferation. Afghanistan is left to suffer the consequences.

India should...

activities on its soil from Afghanistan, urging the international community "to be watchful of the role and machination of spoilers working against establishment of lasting peace in Afghanistan."

Two Indian analysts wrote in Foreign Policy that "India's Afghanistan policy is not driven by ideological or humanitarian concerns" but by a desire to limit Islamabad's influence. It denotes that New Delhi's economic and military assistance to Kabul was harbored by an underlying cause to erode Islamabad's security, raise the roof between the two nations and disrupt China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) expansion to the neighborhood.

Quick evacuation of four Indian citizens from Afghanistan following Pakistan, with China help, approached the United Nations Security Council with complete dossiers and overwhelming evidence about their involvement in terrorism. Heinous killing of 25 Sikhs

in March near the gate of crematorium in Kabul by an Indian national and New Delhi's failed lobbying to prevent the condemnation of terrorist attack on Pakistan Stock Exchange should sensitize the international peacemakers.

Prevalent poverty and endemic unemployment in Afghanistan is a seduction for India to exploit the vulnerable youth against Pakistan. As Islamabad and Beijing make efforts to integrate CPEC, a BRI limb, with Kabul to decompress stark domestic economic challenges - New Delhi's shot at the peace and prosperity of the battle-weary country would push it into an unprecedented syndrome.

India shouldn't paint CPEC or its roadmap of its mother plan a threat and must stop spreading myths about it. The project isn't designed militarily to circumscribe any country; it is purely an infrastructure blueprint that shaves off the risk of conflicts by strengthening bilateral cooperation, increasing trade, reducing transit time

and lowering logistic expenses, opening up new vistas of socio-economic development.

The operationalizing of the Gwadar port is providing a relief to Afghanistan by swiftly dispatching more than 10,000 food containers, stranded at Karachi ports over lockdowns and closure of the western border. With participation in BRI, Kabul would be able to create extinct jobs, channelize the ebullient youth energies in productive activities and improve its grim economic outlook.

As the whole world embraces the BRI and it opens gates of the landlocked Central Asia, Beijing-conceived wider connectivity program is becoming a global asset.

So, India needs to stop seeing China-Pakistan joint efforts to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan with conventional imprudence and should support any initiative that could pull back the grief-stricken state from pits of despair while returning to the process of dialogue to settle all the disputes.

Iran Reiterates...

on Saturday that killed at least one security force member and wounded six others--including a civilian--and an assault by gunmen on a vehicle killing an MoD official and his driver, amid hopes for potential peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

In relevant remarks in mid-July, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi had also underscored Tehran's commitment to help the Afghan government to establish peace in the war-hit country. Araqchi made the remarks in

a meeting with Afghanistan's Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Hanif Atmar in Kabul on July 15.

He reiterated Iran's support for the peace process in Afghanistan, led by its government, and expressed hope that the intra-Afghan talks would soon kick off with the participation of all political factions.

Araqchi also stressed that the Islamic Republic of Iran stands ready to assist the Afghan government with advancing the peace process given the mutual concerns and interests of the two neighboring countries.

He further said Iran attaches importance to preserving the achievements made by the Afghan people regarding the constitution and democratic structures of their country after four decades of war.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed bilateral ties, peace process in Afghanistan, regional and international issues, problems caused by the coronavirus pandemic, and economic cooperation.

They also agreed on a roadmap and the time schedule to finalize a comprehensive strategic cooperation deal.

Reconciliation...

country. Khalilzad said that there is no legitimate reason to delay the talks.

The Taliban, however, disputes this and has stated it will start negotiations once all the remaining 320 prisoners it has listed are released.

Although Ghani signed the release order of these prisoners

almost two weeks ago, the process has stalled after the government on Wednesday suspended the release process. Sediq Sediqqi, the Presidential spokesman, told Ariana News that the government will not release the remaining Taliban prisoners unless the group frees 22 Afghan security force members they are holding captive.

Meanwhile, Russian Foreign

Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that his country hoped that "these issues will not become new obstacles to the launch of peaceful dialogue and will be resolved in the near future."

She added that an early launch of intra-Afghan negotiations is in the interest of both the people of Afghanistan and the country's foreign partners.

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U.S.-led troops withdraw from Iraq's Taji base

United States-led international coalition troops withdrew from Iraq's Taji military base on Sunday and handed it over to Iraqi security forces, Reuters witnesses and the coalition said.

The base, 20 km (12 miles) north of Baghdad, had been the site of frequent rocket attacks by Iran-backed militias targeting U.S.-led troops in recent months.

"The movement of coalition military personnel is part of a long-range plan coordinated with the government of Iraq," the coalition said in a statement, adding that Camp Taji has historically held up to 2,000 coalition members, most of whom have departed this summer. Remaining coalition troops will depart in the coming days after finalising the handing over

of equipment to Iraqi security forces, it added. This was the eighth transfer of a coalition portion of an Iraqi base back to Iraqi forces, it said.

The withdrawal came days after U.S. President Donald Trump redoubled his promise to withdraw the few U.S. troops still in the country. The United States has had about 5,000 troops stationed in the country and coalition allies a further 2,500.

Iraq's parliament had voted this year for the departure of foreign troops from Iraq and U.S. and other coalition troops have been leaving as part of a drawdown.

The vote came after a U.S. air strike on Baghdad airport killed Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.



A look at the world

Italy tops 1,000 daily cases for first time since May

Italy on Saturday reported 1,071 more infections of the novel coronavirus, topping 1,000 daily cases for the first time since mid-May, new data by the Health Ministry showed.

The country has seen a constant surge in new cases over the past few weeks, with scientists blaming holiday goers coming back from high-risk destinations and large gatherings of people enjoying the nightlife at the peak of the summer season.

Italy has been one of the worst-hit countries globally -- with more than 35,400 fatalities -- but has managed to contain the outbreak thanks to strict lockdown measures that the government started easing only in May.



Experts noted that, despite the rise in new infections, the daily number of deaths remains low. On Saturday, Italy registered just three new victims, compared to nine a day before.

The higher infection numbers is also linked to an increase in tests performed daily, which is much higher than in the early stages of the outbreak.

On Saturday, the Lazio region -- which includes Rome -- registered the largest number of new cases, at 215. According to health authorities, around 60% of these may be related to people returning from vacation in Italy or abroad.

Italian authorities have been tightening restrictions again since mid-August amid the surge from a daily case number averages of 200-300 to around 600. The rise has since become exponential.

Scientists are now worried that a second wave of contagions could be sparked by the reopening of schools in mid-September.

WHO, UNICEF recommend face masks for children aged 12 and older



For children aged between six and 11, the decision on wearing masks depends on a number of factors, including "the ability of the child to safely and appropriately use a mask" and "potential impact of wearing a mask on learning and psychosocial development".

The World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) advise all children aged 12 and older to wear face masks due to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

"WHO and UNICEF advise that children aged 12 and over should wear a mask under the same conditions as adults, in particular when they cannot guarantee at least a 1-metre distance from others and there is widespread transmission in the area," reads a fact sheet posted on the WHO website.

For children aged between six and 11, the decision on wearing masks depends on a number of factors, including "the ability of the child to safely and appropriately use a mask" and "potential impact of wearing a mask on learning and psychosocial development."

Other factors to be taken into account is virus transmission in the area where the child resides and adequate adult supervision and instructions to the child on how to put on, take off and safely wear masks.

"Children aged 5 years and under should not be required to wear masks," the WHO and UNICEF said.

U.S. plan to restore anti-Iranian sanctions can erode Security Council's authority – Lavrov

The U.S. attempt to restore sanctions on Iran might trigger a serious scandal at the UN Security Council and eventually undermine its authority, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in an interview with the Rossiya-1 TV channel.

According to the transcript of the interview, posted on the Russian Foreign Ministry's website, Lavrov expects the United States to try to restore international binding sanctions against Iran "by using legalistic, quasi-judicial methods."

"We are working with our U.S. partners and other Security Council members in New York and in capitals. We understand that the vast majority of nations realize the incorrectness and counter-productivity of this attempt. It



will produce no result anyway, but it might eventually lead to a very serious scandal and a rift within the UN Security Council, and, in the final analysis, undermine its authority," Lavrov said.

Russia's top diplomat recalled that Washington withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear program by describing it as a 'bad deal.'

"The thing is that one of the states behind the consensus resolution on Iran's nuclear program announced that it would not comply with the obligations it had undertaken, but at the same time demanded that others follow its recommendations," Lavrov said.

"[They] announced that no one can stop the United States when it would decide to punish Iran for allegedly violating the agreement from which the U.S. had withdrawn. Sounds paradoxical and quite clumsy, but this is how it is," Lavrov said. "The U.S. declared that it would not comply with its obligations - not to impose new sanctions on Iran, to lift the existing restrictions and let the Islamic Republic of Iran to participate fully in international trade and economic exchanges. The United States said they were not going to do this and, what is more, will prohibit everyone else from doing this in relations with Iran."



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