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Afghan peace talks team briefs Ghani ahead of historic meeting with Taliban

President Ashraf Ghani met with the Afghan government's negotiating team on Tuesday to discuss the upcoming peace talks with the Taliban which are expected to start on Sunday in Doha. In a statement released on Tuesday, the Presidential Palace (ARG) said Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai briefed Ghani on the team's activities and preparations following the Loya Jirga's decision in favor of the release of the final 400 Taliban prisoners - which had been a stumbling block in the way of kickstarting negotiations. Stanekzai stated they will sit around the negotiating table with the Taliban as a united team in favor of "the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan" and they will consider the interests of the people. Meanwhile, Ghani said the Loya Jirga drew a peace roadmap ... **P2**



Stoltenberg says NATO 'adjusting' its presence to support Afghan peace process

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg on Tuesday said he welcomes the planned peace talks between the government and the Taliban and said NATO is adjusting its presence to support the peace initiative. Taking to Twitter, Stoltenberg said: "I spoke to President Ashraf Ghani and Dr Abdullah (Abdullah) to welcome the upcoming start of intra-Afghan talks. All parties should seize this historic moment for peace. NATO stand with Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism, as we adjust our presence to support the peace process. This comes after Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on Monday signed a decree to release the final 400 prisoners in order to pave the way for intra-Afghan peace talks. The Presidential Palace (ARG) confirmed on Monday evening on Twitter that the decree had been signed at a ceremony attended by senior Afghan leaders. ... **P3**

Afghan Govt Opposes Fence Along Durand Line



The Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Tuesday reacted to reports that Pakistani military forces were conducting illegal fencing along the Durand Line - the de facto border between Afghanistan and Pakistan--saying Afghanistan has already shared its grievances and has protested the

move through through diplomatic channels. "In this regard, any action which has been taken by Pakistan, the Foreign Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has recorded its protest regarding the issue through the Afghan embassy in Islamabad to Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign

Affairs and the Pakistani Embassy in Kabul," said Geran Hewad, a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Local officials in Kunar have also confirmed the move by Pakistani military forces. "They (Pakistan) started putting up fencing in a shifty way. They also

want to take over some important areas, in response, we have also taken over some important areas, sometimes, tensions erupt, but sometimes, we both sit under the flags and move forward with harmony," said Gul Mohammad Bedar, the deputy governor of Kunar.

Critics meanwhile have blasted the Afghan government's inaction toward Pakistan, saying that the Afghan government has failed to protect the country's territorial integrity.

"One, is the issue of the Durand Line...they (Pakistan) have moved forward from the zero point. Regarding this issue, the government has so far failed to prove that it has the ability to defend Afghanistan's territorial integrity. It would have been better if these gentlemen had raised this issue in the recent Loya Jirga," said Rahmatullah Nabil.

Over the past few days, residents in some remote regions of Kunar in phone calls to media have also complained against the hostile move by the Pakistani ... **P3**

Nearly 99b AFG revenue collected this fiscal year

The Ministry of Finance (MoF) on Tuesday announced collecting more than 98.9 billion afghanis revenue in the current fiscal year, with more than five billion afghanis between the third and the 16th of this month. In a statement, the MoF said that five billion and 133 million afghanis had been collected from the country's revenue from the 3rd to 16 of this month in current fiscal year. According to the statement, out of this revenue, 273 million afghanis were collected from customs departments, 1 billion and 308 million from tax revenues, 1 billion and 428 million from non-tax revenues and 2 billion and 123 million afghanis from country's customs. The ministry did not provide further details regarding most collected revenue within 13 days.



David Petraeus demands UK gives urgent sanctuary to Afghan translators

A former top US general last night demanded Britain speed up its efforts to give Afghan interpreters sanctuary. David Petraeus called on Home Secretary Priti Patel to follow America's swift actions or risk them being targeted by the Taliban. The former director of the CIA said the US and UK owed a moral obligation to translators, adding: "Each of us witnessed their service first hand." Gen Petraeus served as commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan from 2010 to 2011. His scorching comments came after senior British military figures General Lord Richards and General Lord Dannatt urged ministers to 'do the right thing' and give interpreters sanctuary. Gen Petraeus said: 'I agree with



my old friends Richard Dannatt and David Richards that we owe a considerable debt to the host nation translators who served alongside our soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. "We know the hardships they shared with our men and women on the ground as well as the risks their service with our forces incurred for them and their families.'

He said the US had resettled their translators through a special immigrant visa scheme and non-profit organisation No One Left Behind. Gen Petraeus added: 'I would hope that the Home Office will expedite approval for visas for wartime translators, just as our State Department has, so their fate is not decided by the Taliban or Isis.' No One Left Behind is a ... **P3**

Afghan peace...

for government, and that they are “committed to the implementation of that.”

“We are committed to peace, the goal is to end the war in a fundamental way,” Ghani added.

He said the peace talks team will negotiate a suitable and fair peace deal with the Taliban as it is in the best interests of the people.

“After the decree pardoning 400 Taliban prisoners was signed, the people expect that there will be no more obstacles and excuses for the commencement of the negotiations between the Taliban and the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,” Ghani said.

The latest developments on the political front have been welcomed by global leaders and many have hailed the decisions as an historic opportunity to bring peace to the war-torn country.

Afghans themselves have also welcomed the developments and the business community has said peace will undoubtedly help boost the country’s economy and create much-needed jobs.

WHO cautions...

we have doses that could be equitably distributed in 2021,” he said.

Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resources Center said Tuesday that the world has 20,113,592 confirmed COVID-19 cases, with 737,022 deaths recorded and more than 12 million recoveries. With 895,691 cases, Russia has the world’s fourth-highest COVID-19 case tally.

By DANIEL DEPETRIS

It’s time to leave Afghanistan

It took six months of jockeying, but the Afghan government and Taliban negotiators are finally making preparations for direct peace negotiations. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani’s decision to call a Loya Jirga on the contentious issue of prisoner releases appears to have paid off. On Aug. 8, the grand assembly approved Kabul’s request to release the final 400 Taliban prisoners from its custody. The result paved the way for formal talks between the two sides.

The intra-Afghan negotiations represent the first time since the conflict began that Afghans will sit down and discuss their considerable differences together. But it’s also an opportune time for Washington to do what it should have done years ago: extricate the U.S. military from the war.

Approximately 8,000 U.S. troops remain in Afghanistan — nearly 19 years after U.S. military operations against al Qaeda and the Taliban commenced. The American people have been asking themselves the same question throughout that long period: when will Americans in uniform finally pull out of a conflict that has lost its purpose?

According to a March 2020 Economist/YouGov poll, 44 percent of Americans surveyed believe sending U.S. troops into Afghanistan was a mistake. An April 2020 poll commissioned by the Concerned Veterans of America found 73 percent of veterans and 69 percent of military households support the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan — a 13-percentage point increase compared to the year prior. The Charles Koch Foundation has found that nearly three-quarters of Americans support bringing U.S. troops home from both Iraq and Afghanistan. If the American people had their way, the U.S. military would have been out of Afghanistan years ago.

U.S. policymakers would be making a mistake if they discounted these

figures. The American people are entirely justified in heaping skepticism on Washington’s policy in Afghanistan. The U.S. mission, after all, long ago transformed into a collection of expensive, tedious, impractical tasks totally beyond the U.S. military’s capacity to achieve.

The original U.S. national security objective in Afghanistan was both simple and defensible: to eliminate al Qaeda’s terrorist infrastructure and punish the Taliban for harboring the group. This objective was accomplished with remarkable speed during the early months of the campaign. By the winter of 2002, the job was essentially over. Al Qaeda’s training camps were wiped out, and thousands of the network’s fighters were killed. Al Qaeda chief Osama Bin Laden was running for his life. And members of the Taliban, a movement that once controlled 90 percent of Afghanistan, were in hiding or begging to become part of the new order.

Rather than declaring victory, however, Washington made a huge mistake—it changed the mission to counterinsurgency and nation-building. U.S. officials deliberately put themselves in the position of constructing a brand new state from scratch. Since 2002, the U.S. has appropriated more than \$86 billion on the development of the Afghan national security forces, a force plagued by systemic corruption to this day — meritless promotions of senior commanders, the pocketing of salaries, the re-selling of weapons and fuel for profit on the black-market and lax vetting of army recruits who then go on to attack U.S. soldiers.

Courtesy of the U.S. taxpayer, nearly \$36 billion has been devoted to Afghanistan’s governance and development since the war began. The government in Kabul, however, can best be described as inept and dysfunctional, with senior Afghan politicians often more interested in fighting each other for power and



prestige than they are in fighting for their constituents. Despite constant warnings from U.S. officials about the need for Afghanistan’s governing class to take anti-corruption initiatives seriously, the country ranks 173rd out of 180 countries on Transparency International’s corruption perceptions index.

Nor have U.S.-funded counternarcotics programs been particularly successful. Afghanistan continues to hold the title of the world’s largest producer of opium. The Taliban, ready to exploit every opportunity, has made it a practice of taxing the production of opium to rake in much-needed resources to fund operations against the Afghan government.

This should be a wake-up call to U.S. officials, past, present, and future: think long and hard before you allow yourself to be tempted by hubris. The result could very well be a multi-decade, \$2 trillion disappointment that ties down U.S. resources and distracts Washington from higher priorities.

This past February, the United States, and the Taliban signed an agreement that not only begins drawing down U.S. troop levels but provides Afghan stakeholders with an opening to sit down and discuss their nation’s future.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke with Taliban deputy chief Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar via video chat on Aug. 3, where he encouraged the Taliban to begin intra-Afghan negotiations as soon as possible.

The conclusion of a peace deal in Afghanistan, however, will take years — assuming a deal is ever signed. Once the process begins, Kabul and the Taliban will engage in contentious diplomacy on some of the same controversial topics — the role of Islam in Afghan society; revisions to the Afghan constitution; the composition of an interim national unity government; how to incorporate Taliban fighters into the Afghan security forces. None of these conversations will be easy. Yet all of them are necessary if the Afghan people are to see a chance of peace in their lifetimes.

The U.S. military has done everything it has been asked to do by Washington. But they shouldn’t be asked to stay in a holding pattern until tranquility blossoms throughout Afghanistan. It is time for a U.S. troop withdrawal and Afghans to determine their future.

Daniel R. DePetris is a fellow at Defense Priorities, an organization that informs citizens, thought leaders, and policymakers about the importance of a robust and dynamic military.

By Michelle Grattan

Government bracing for damning report on alleged Special Forces’ incidents in Afghanistan

The government and the Australian Defence Force are bracing for reputational damage to the military from damning findings in an imminent report on Australian Special Forces’ behaviour in Afghanistan.

The report, expected within a month, is from a long-running inquiry by Justice Paul Brereton. Earlier this year the inspector-general of the ADF noted the inquiry was examining 55 separate incidents or issues.

They include allegations of killings of unarmed civilians and insurgents who had surrendered. Some such alleged atrocities have been aired publicly by the ABC, including helmet-camera footage taken at the time.

The government and the ADF will argue action has been taken to address the culture and circumstances behind the various incidents examined by Brereton, which mostly took

place between 2007-13.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison gives the military a special status on public occasions — when he makes speeches, he pays tribute to them after he acknowledges the local Indigenous people.

Last week, Defence Minister Linda Reynolds was blunt about what the Brereton inquiry would find, although she said she hadn’t seen the report.

“I think that will make some very significant findings — ones that I’m certain will make many Australians uncomfortable and also dismayed.

“So I think we do need to prepare ourselves for that,” she said.

But she went on to say that since the alleged incidents, the army and particularly the Special Forces had engaged in “self reflection” about the conduct of soldiers in Afghanistan and what was needed to prevent any

repetition.

She also stressed the past behaviour “in no way reflects on our current serving men and women both here and overseas who are doing an extraordinary job for our nation.”

Chief of Defence Force Angus Campbell has now appointed Tom Frame, a UNSW professor and former Anglican Bishop to the Defence Force in 2001-07, to write an “independent academic study of Australian Special Forces in Afghanistan”.

The Defence department said the book would “aim to provide an understanding of Australia’s Special Forces, including consideration of the ethical standards and command culture of Special Operations Command and its people on operations from 1999 until the present day, with a focus on service in Afghanistan”.

“It is expected that ...

P3

Critics Blame Ghani for Delaying Release of Prisoners

A day after President Ashraf Ghani signed a decree to release the last batch of Taliban prisoners ahead of the intra-Afghan negotiations, critics blamed him for delaying the process, saying that it could have been done earlier and that many casualties could have been prevented, considering the Taliban had pledged to reduce violence after the start of the talks.

President Ghani’s position was originally against the release of Taliban prisoners, which are a pre-condition for the start of direct talks with the Taliban, according to the US-Taliban agreement signed on Feb. 29. Afghan critics said that the prisoner release process in particular and the peace process in general, have been delayed by the president to continue his time in office until at least after the US election.

The former head of the National Directorate of Security, Rahmatullah Nabil, who has been a strong critic of Ghani on the peace process, said the president has sidelined Afghanistan’s national interests when it comes to the release of Taliban prisoners. He added that the Afghan people will be harmed again if Ghani applies the same approach to the negotiations with the Taliban.

“The decision to delay the release of the 500 prisoners was based on personal interest rather than serving the national

interest,” Nabil said. “Because according to our information, one of the conditions for (Ghani’s) inauguration was that we (US) will give international recognition to your inauguration if you (Ghani) release the 5,000 prisoners.”

He added: “They are also waiting for the US Election to see if the results are changed or at least the present system (Trump administration) remains in power—perhaps they will change their mind and we complete our five-year term.”

“It was a display of power by the Afghan government in which they tried to show to the world that they still have control, still have power,” said Sayed Eshaq Gailani, of the National Solidarity Movement of Afghanistan.

Analysts in peace affairs said that Ghani is trying to deliberately slow down the peace process.

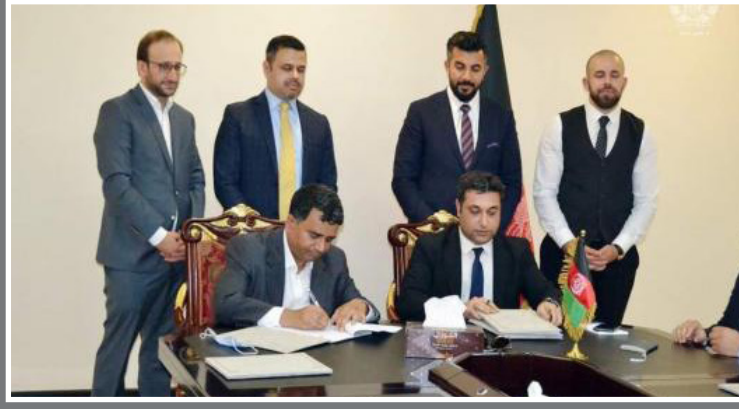
“The government has identified the weak points of its rivals and has strengthened its position in the peace process as one of the main sides in the talks and prevented dangers facing the government,” said Bashir Hatif, a political analyst in Kabul.

Some Kabul residents also criticized the delay in the release of prisoners and said it could have been done earlier if the government wanted to.

UAE firm to invest in 3,000MW solar power project

A UAE company would invest in a solar power project to produce 3,000MW of electricity under an agreement signed on Tuesday. The agreement was signed between Mohammad Zafar, head of the PAL 4 SOLAR ENERGY LLC and on Afghanistan side Attaullah Naseb, head of the Presidential Administrative Affairs Investment Facilitation Department, and Dawod Noorzai, head of the Afghanistan Breshna Shirkat in

Abud Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirate (UAE). The signing event was held in the Afghanistan Embassy in Abu Dhabi in which Kabir Esakhel, presidential senior advisor in legal Affairs, was present. According to the agreement the PAL 4 SOLAR ENERGY LLC would invest on purchase and installation of solar plates. The project would be executed nationwide.



Afghan Govt Opposes...

military forces in the province. "They are putting up fences in the daylight, the people raised their voice, but the same local administration suffocated their voice," said Tahzeebullah, a civil society activist in Kunar province. "We call on the government to remain strong in its position and raise its voice regarding this issue through the international platform to help control the deaths and injury of the people and also prove our genuine rights on the ground," said Qiam Khayam, a civil society activist in Kunar.

Last month, the Afghan border forces in Kunar said that they had tried to prevent such activities by the Pakistani military forces alongside the Durand Line, but later on they said that Pakistani military forces engaged in armed confrontation with the Afghan forces and started firing missiles on Kunar province.

On July 21, the Afghan National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib, during a visit to the eastern provinces on Tuesday said that the recent artillery attacks by the Pakistani military forces on Afghanistan's eastern Kunar province will not go without a response.

Mohib at the time said that over the past eighteen years attacks were launched on some regions of Kunar province without any legal justification which are aimed to expand the influence of the insurgents.

Reports show that several civilians have lost their lives as a result of mortar attacks by the Pakistani armed forces. At least eight civilians were killed and eleven others were wounded following the artillery attacks by Pakistani forces on the Sarkano district in Kunar, as well as Asadabad, the provincial capital, according to the local officials in the area

Stoltenberg says...

Ghani said on Sunday, after the Loya Jirga's resolution on the prisoner issue had been issued, that he would respect the decision of the Jirga and release the prisoners – some of whom have been accused of having masterminded some of the deadliest attacks in the country over the past 19 years.

Government sources said Monday that the Afghan peace negotiating team would leave Kabul on Wednesday for Doha, Qatar, and that talks with the Taliban would likely start on Sunday.

David Petraeus...

nationwide association of wartime allies in the US dedicated to ensuring America keeps its promise to interpreters in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The organisation's James Miervaldis, who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan as an army reserve and campaigned for his interpreter to be given a visa to the US, said: 'There is a sustained, systematic and targeted campaign by the Taliban to carry out retribution against interpreters who worked with US and UK forces.'

He said that since October 2001 several hundred translators and their relatives have been killed because of their work.

One victim and his family were beheaded while waiting for their American visas. Mr Miervaldis' comments back up the Mail's revelations of how interpreters have been targeted by the Taliban because of their work.

Government...

the publication will be used as an academic reference to guide our leaders in the years ahead and contribute to the professional development of the Australian Defence Force today and into the future," the department said. "The study is not a historical record of Australia's Special Forces or operations in Afghanistan, and is separate to the Australian Government Official History of Australian Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan project."

Over 3,000 people...

pressured to leave the country. In a separate statement, another iconic figure of the Belarusian opposition, Valery Tsepkalo, who fled to Russia to evade arrest before the election, said the opposition was going to lobby for the international community to recognize Tikhonovskaya as Belarus' rightful president. Europe condemns Belarus violence

The clashes in Belarus have provoked deep concern throughout Europe. On Tuesday, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called for the election results to be published, saying harassment and repression had no place in Europe.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said Belarusian authorities must respect citizens' right to express disapproval over the

forces have been given visas in the US. Some 445 Afghans, plus 872 family members, have been allowed to live in the UK – a total of 1,317

Parviz Khan, 33, who worked for frontline British forces for more than five years, said: 'The British approach to me was hugely disappointing and a complete contrast to what happened in the US, who were compassionate and recognised both my service and the very real threat. 'This is unlike the British, who did not want to know.'

He spent two months working with Prince Harry in 2008 at Base Dwyer in Gamrsir, Helmand. Khan produced medical records showing he had been shot three times near the UK's Camp Bastion base, claiming he was targeted because of his work for the British.

Translators said at least four colleagues who worked with UK

Frame's book will be published in 2022. As the Brereton inquiry has progressed, the alleged Afghanistan incidents have become a highly charged public debate. One of those interviewed by the inquiry was VC recipient Ben Roberts-Smith, who has brought defamation action after allegations reported in the media – which he denied – concerning his behaviour in Afghanistan.

Neil James, executive director of the lobby group the Australia Defence Association, wrote last year in an article about Special

election results. He called for the release of detained protesters and said the EU could even reinstate the sanctions it recently lifted from Belarus.

Other EU countries also expressed support for the demonstrators, with neighboring Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky saying that doubts over the election were "a direct road to violence, conflict and growing public outcry."

Britain also called on the Belarus government to "refrain from further acts of violence following the seriously flawed Presidential elections."

"The violence and the attempts by Belarusian authorities to suppress protests are completely unacceptable," James Duddridge, parliamentary undersecretary of state in the Foreign and Commonwealth

Office, said in a statement. "Throughout this election campaign we have witnessed the demands of the Belarusian people for democracy, for fundamental freedoms and for the right to determine their futures in an independent, sovereign Belarus."

He added: "The UK, along with our international partners, calls on the Government of Belarus to fulfil its international commitments and the aspirations of its people."

Latvia's Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics, in a statement on behalf of his counterparts from Estonia, Finland, and Poland, said all four countries "completely support" Warsaw's proposal to call a meeting of the foreign ministers' council to discuss and formulate "a joint, united position" with regard to Belarus.

There are believed to be around 150 more translators still desperate to come to Britain.

The Daily Mail's Betrayal of the Brave campaign is pressing for them to be given sanctuary.

We revealed last month how ministers promised 50 would be allowed into the UK under a new scheme, but only two came in two years. A Government spokesman said: 'The Home Secretary and Defence Secretary remain committed to ensuring a fair system for the resettlement of Afghan interpreters and met last week to resolve outstanding issues.'

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Trump: If Biden wins, Americans will have to learn Chinese

If you've been wondering how to fill your spare time in quarantine, might we suggest taking up Chinese — because according to President Trump, there's a chance you'll have to learn it come November.

In an interview with conservative talk-show host Hugh Hewitt, Trump repeatedly blasted China, saying the country is pulling for a win from former Vice President Joe Biden.

"If I don't win the election, China will own the United States," Trump claimed. "You're gonna have to learn to speak Chinese."

Trump, who once had a self-described "great" relationship with Chinese President Xi Jinping, said he is "no longer very good" with the leader "because of what they did with the China virus," by which he means the coronavirus. The president also asserted

China has had "the worst year in 67 years" because the U.S. "tariffed the hell out of them."

U.S. intelligence officials did say last week that Russia and China have lined up on opposite sides of the upcoming presidential election, with the latter reportedly hoping "that President Trump — whom Beijing sees as unpredictable — does not win re-election."

On the flip side, Russia is reportedly using a "range of measures" to take down Biden. Luckily, Duolingo carries Russian, too.

The rest of the interview contained similar grumbling, with the president bashing the "nasty" NBA, baselessly claiming we're "getting to an end" on coronavirus, and suggesting Biden is the "dumbest" U.S. senator.



A look at the world

Over 3,000 people detained in Belarus election protests

More than 3,000 people have been arrested in Belarus as protests continued for a second day after incumbent Alexander Lukashenko was declared the winner of Sunday's presidential election.

The largest protests were in the capital Minsk, Brest, Mogilev, and Novopolotsk, Interior Ministry spokeswoman Olga Chemodanova told reporters on Tuesday.

She said a man died on Monday after an explosive device, which he was trying to throw at security forces, detonated in his hand.

"During the confrontation with the special forces, one of the protesters tried to throw an unidentified explosive device into the ranks of law enforcement officers. It exploded in his hand and his injuries proved fatal," she said.



According to Chemodanova, 39 security personnel and more than 50 civilians were injured in the demonstrations as protesters used stones, smoke bombs, and Molotov cocktails.

In a separate statement, the Health Ministry said over 200 people have been hospitalized with injuries of varying severity.

With protests expected to continue, the government increased deployment of troops and anti-riot forces in Minsk and other big cities on Tuesday.

Opposition leader flees to Lithuania
Opposition candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, who has disputed the election results and said the polls were rigged, posted a video announcing that she has voluntarily left Belarus for Lithuania.

In the video, she thanked people for supporting her presidential bid and urged protesters to respect the law and shun violence.

"The people of Belarus have made their choice. With gratitude and warmth, I appeal to all the citizens who have supported me all this time. Belarusians, I urge you to be reasonable and respect the law. I don't want blood and violence," she said. "I ask you not to stand up to the police, not to go out on the square, so as not to put your lives in danger. Take care of yourself and your loved ones."

Tikhanovskaya's video, her hasty departure, and changed stance on the election result have sparked speculation that she was ... **P3**

Iran-Russia Cargo Shipping Route to Open in Weeks



Iran and Russia are going to launch a permanent shipping route in the Caspian Sea for trade with container ships, an official said.

Member of Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce Jalil Jalaifar said the Caspian shipping route will come into operation as early as September.

Iran has been unable to raise the level of exports of agricultural products and foodstuff to Russia via the Caspian Sea for years due to the lack of container ships, he noted, saying the new shipping route will include cargo ships capable of carrying refrigerated containers.

Jalaifar added that according to a decision made by the North-South corridor joint taskforce, two container ships will begin carrying goods between Russia's port of Astrakhan and two Iranian ports of 'Caspian' and 'Qazian' at Bandar-e Anzali, north of Iran.

Iranian and Russian officials have already agreed to hold the 16th session of the Joint Economic Cooperation Commission in September.

In a telephone conversation in April, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin discussed ways to maintain and expand trade ties amid the outbreak of the coronavirus and promote mutual cooperation in the fight against the disease.

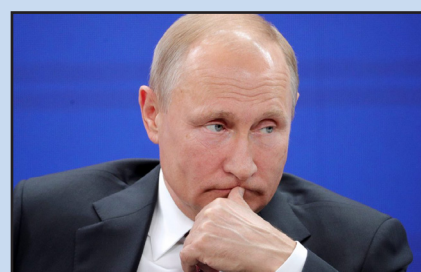
Highlighting the close and strategic relations between Iran and Russia in recent years, Rouhani stressed the need to develop bilateral relations and cooperation, especially in the fields of trade, economy, science and medicine. **P2**

WHO cautions Russia on COVID-19 vaccine

The World Health Organization (WHO) said Tuesday it is following Russia's progress in developing a COVID-19 vaccine, but cautioned that progress in fight against the virus should not compromise on safety.

Commenting on Russian President Vladimir Putin's earlier announcement that Russia had registered the world's first coronavirus vaccine at a UN press briefing, a WHO spokesman said the "pandemic is threatening lives and economies."

"It's vital that we apply all public health measures that we know are working, and we need to continue to invest in and accelerate the development of safe and effective treatments and vaccines that will help us



reduce disease transmission in the future," said spokesman Tarik Jasarevic in answer to a question by Anadolu Agency.

The vaccine, developed by the Gamaleya National Research Center, has officially been registered with Russia's Health Ministry, Putin told a meeting of members of the government in Moscow.

"We are in close contact with the Russian health authorities, and discussions are going on with respect to possible pre-qualification of the vaccine," he noted, adding pre-qualification of any vaccine needs rigorous review and assessment.

He said as soon as the "absolutely essential clinical trial data" is available, national regulatory bodies need to be ready to review the safety and efficacy data before using it.

"We are following the progress in the development of COVID-19 vaccines, and we maintain the draft landscape of candidate vaccines, which is updated every week on our website," said the spokesman. "WHO lists 25 candidate vaccines in clinical evaluation and 139 in a pre-clinical evaluation."

Jasarevic said the WHO has its accelerator program seeking to speed up research for an effective vaccine for all countries. "At the same time, we are supporting the building of manufacturing capabilities and buying supplies ahead of time so that ... **P2**



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