



Page 2 | NATIONAL
Talking peace while waging war in Afghanistan

Will burqas make a comeback in Afghanistan?

Last May, when militants in Afghanistan killed new mothers and their babies in a Kabul maternity hospital, the world's women ...

Page 2 | NATIONAL

Page 3 | ECONOMY

259 Public Works Projects Awarded to Private Firms



Kabul
24 / 13



Herat
26 / 9



Nangarhar
32 / 21



Balkh
26 / 14



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10 afs



Dr Abdullah to Visit Pakistan Today

The head of High Council for National Reconciliation Abdullah Abdullah is set to visit Pakistan today (Sep. 28), according to reports. Leading a high-level delegation, Dr Abdullah Abdullah will meet Pakistan dignitaries to discuss the peace process. Mr Abdullah said on Sunday morning that he has discussed the latest progress about the intra-Afghan talks with the Afghan government's delegation in Doha. "we reviewed and assessed the latest progress with intra-Afghan talks. I reiterated our full commitment to a just, durable and dignified peace," he added. Abdullah's visit to Pakistan comes as the Pakistani PM Imran Khan has recently spoke with President Ashraf Ghani about the peace process in telephonic conversation. ... **P2**



NATO-EU Affirms Continued Cooperation to Afghanistan 'Long-Term Stability'

Representatives of the European Union and NATO have assured of continued cooperation "in support to Afghanistan's long-term stability." NATO and the European Union are working together to establish lasting peace and "long-term stability" in Afghanistan, said NATO's Senior Civilian Representative to Afghanistan Ambassador Stefano Pontecorvo, in a tweet Sunday. Meanwhile, EU Ambassador to Kabul Van Brandt reaffirmed his support for the Afghan peace process, saying he was working with the Afghan government to establish "a strong civilian police close to citizenry in Afghanistan." The remarks came at a time, the Afghan and Taliban representative in Doha are negotiating conditions for intra-Afghan talks that will determine a political settlement in Afghanistan, including achievements of the past 20 years. The talks seemingly have faced a deadlock, as both parties could not come to an agreement on procedural outline of the talks.

Doha talks: No agreement yet on 2 sticking points



Calling Afghanistan's turmoil as Jihad instead of conflict and making Hanafi School of Jurisprudence (Fiqh) as a guide to all aspects of terms and conditions of intra-Afghan talks in Doha remain the two major contradictory points, a well-placed source said Sunday. A member of the Afghan government-backed negotiating team, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the Taliban wanted to describe the past

20 years of turmoil in Afghanistan as Jihad and insisted on Hanafi Fiqh to serve as a guide to resolving religious issues but the government team did not agree with this. A third contradictory issue surfaced in the talks when a Taliban negotiating team member Mullah Khairullah Khairkhwā said the Feb 29 agreement between the Taliban and the US should be included as part of the text in the terms and condition of the

intra-Afghan talks. The source claimed the Afghan government team was intentionally delaying the talks and wanted to sabotage the process. The Afghan government side insists the US-Taliban talks were separate and the intra-Afghan talks would be a different discussion. According to Khairkhwā, the Taliban wanted the Hanafi Fiqh to serve as a guide to resolving religious issues

but Shia members in the Afghan team stressed on inclusion of Jaafariya Fiqh as well. He said if discussion on the Constitution begins in future, the issue of Jaafariya Fiqh and other sectarian groups could be discussed there. The Afghan government and its negotiating team did not react to the Taliban's assertion. But Najia Anwari, spokesperson for the State Ministry for Peace Affairs, said that reaching an agreement would take time and added that talks were moving ahead. Presidential Advisor Shah Hussain Murtazavi said that the US and the Taliban agreement on troops withdrawal took 18 months while there were several issues between the Afghan government and Taliban to discuss, which may take years. Earlier, Head of High National Reconciliation Council (HNRC) Abdullah Abdullah discussed recent development in the ongoing peace talks with the government team in Doha through a video conference. "You have been in Doha on a big national mission and we reached there with the message of peace. The government and the people of Afghanistan fully support you," ... **P2**

500,000 Afghans Have Returned from Iran, Pakistan in 2020

The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations (MoRR) said 500,000 Afghans have returned to their homeland since January 2020. MoRR said a majority, 480,000 were from Iran alone. In the past month alone, over 8,000 Afghan refugees have returned from Iran. Abdul Basit Ansari, media adviser for the MoRR, said that they are talking to the Iranian authorities to resolve the problems faced by Afghans living there. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) also said 549,769 undocumented Afghans from Iran and Pakistan have returned, of which 349,932 were spontaneous returnees while 195,067 were deported.



Imran Khan warns against hasty international withdrawal from Afghanistan

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has warned against hasty withdrawal of foreign powers from Afghanistan, according to media reports. "All those who have invested in the Afghan peace process should resist the temptation for setting unrealistic timelines. A hasty international withdrawal from Afghanistan would be unwise," The Express Tribune quoted Khan as saying in an opinion piece published in The Washington Post on Saturday. "We should also guard against regional spoilers who are not invested in peace and see instability in Afghanistan as advantageous for their own geopolitical ends," he added. The premier said the rare moment of hope for Afghanistan and the entire region has arrived, recalling that on September 12, delegations from the Afghan government and the Taliban finally held talks in Doha to bring the war in Afghanistan to an end.



With the exception of the resilient Afghans themselves, no people have paid a higher price for the conflict in Afghanistan than the people of Pakistan, he said in the article. "Through decades of conflict, Pakistan has dealt with the responsibility of taking care of more than four million Afghan refugees. Guns and drugs have also flowed into our country. "The wars have disrupted our economic trajectory and radicalised fringes of our own society..." he

added. Khan further said that "only an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led reconciliation process, which recognises Afghanistan's political realities and diversity, could produce lasting peace". In the article, Khan also recalled that in 2018 Pakistan had assured the US of its all-out support when President Donald Trump had sought Islamabad's assistance to achieve a negotiated political settlement in Afghanistan. ... **P3**

Doha talks: No...

Abdullah told the negotiating team members. According to the HNRC statement, Afghan Chief Negotiator Masoum Stanikzai briefed Abdullah on peace talks and development that took place during the talks. After hearing from Stanikzai, Abdullah shared his views and renewed his commitment to ending the conflict and establishing durable peace in the country.

Dr Abdullah to...

The High National Reconciliation Council (HNRC) chairman has discussed recent developments in the ongoing peace talks in Doha through a video conference. A statement from the council said on Sunday, Abdullah told the government's chief negotiator: "You have been in Doha on a big national mission, with a message of peace. The government and the people of Afghanistan fully support you." According to the HNRC statement Massoum Stanikzai briefed Abdullah on the peace talks and recent developments. After hearing from Stanikzai, Abdullah shared his views and renewed his commitment to ending the conflict and establishing durable peace in the country.

Yemen, Houthi...

and sparked what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. The conflict is widely seen in the region as a proxy war between rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran. Riyadh launched informal talks for a ceasefire with the Houthis late last year as it seeks to exit a costly war.

By FAZELMINALLAH QAZIZAI

Talking peace while waging war in Afghanistan

As the Afghan government and rebel Taliban engage in peace talks in Doha, Qatar, hopes for a breakthrough are still constrained by myriad sticking points as civil war violence continues apace.

While Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani's government negotiation team has insisted on a battlefield ceasefire before entering substantive talks, the Taliban has stood firm on discussing and agreeing on the causes of the war before quieting their guns.

The negotiations aim to end 19 years of fighting and establish a plan for post-war society, including a potential power-sharing arrangement. Talks to date have focused on setting agendas and how negotiations will be held.

The Taliban are demanding that the conflict be formally acknowledged as a "jihad", that negotiations are conducted under the so-called Hanafi school of thought, and that the US-Taliban agreement signed in February serves as a basis for the two sides' dialogue.

The US deal paves the way for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan by May 2021. Differences over a prisoner exchange agreed to in the US-Taliban deal delayed the start of the talks.

The intra-Afghan talks began on September 12 and were marked by an historical opening ceremony in Doha, with speeches by top diplomats and international community representatives carried virtually due to Covid-19 restrictions.

The two Afghan teams have been meeting daily since, in meetings that have so far highlighted sticking points rather than common ground. Meanwhile, clashes continue on the battlefield as recriminations fly in the media.

The Taliban have deployed their heavy guns to the talks in hard-core leader and

Islamic scholar Sheikh Abdul Hakim Haqqani.

Sheikh Haqqani, who is serving as the Taliban's chief negotiator, is known to be a key figure in the Taliban movement and is the author of several high-level Islamic books on the judiciary and Islamic Hadiths.

He also leads a madrassa in Ishaqabad in Quetta, Pakistan known for graduating many hard-line Taliban military commanders.

Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, son of deceased former Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar and current chief of the military commission, is among his former students, says an ex-student of the madrassa who wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

Sheikh Haqqani was also known to be a close religious and political aide to movement Mullah Mohammad Omar, the Taliban's founder in 1994, and was reportedly among the first to receive news of his death from tuberculosis in 2013.

According to a well-informed source, it was Haqqani's idea to keep the news a secret until it was officially announced in 2015, when he appointed Mullah Akhter Mohammad Mansour as the new Taliban leader in 2015.

His key role in the Taliban's political and military strategy are a testament to the continuity of the struggle which in its early years started in defense of Islamic ideology.

He has also been instrumental in the Taliban's transformation from an indigenous to a global actor in this Islamic commitment. Sheikh Haqqani is also known to be highly regarded as a religious mentor by local commanders and neighboring Islamic groups alike.

"He calls all the Muslims of the region as brothers," adds the former student



of the Sheikh. "For him, Afghans, Pakistanis, Iranian Sunni, and others are all the same."

It's all significant considering many of the issues in dispute in Doha are scholarly and political at their root.

One concerns full adherence to the Hanafi school of thought, which is one of the four principal Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence, largely followed in the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia and Turkey.

The controversy centers on whether to maintain the Shiite Ja'fari school as a source of law in the Afghan legal system. The Ja'fari school differs from Sunni jurisprudence on matters of inheritance, religious taxes, commerce, personal status, and the allowing of temporary marriage or mut'a. It was introduced in Afghanistan only during the post-2001 reconstruction reforms.

Both teams confirm that talks are ongoing, but the issue increasingly seems to be used as a stalling mechanism to delay broad and meaningful talks.

Mujiburahman Lemar, a member of the Afghan government's technical team in Doha says, "Progress has been made and Taliban are now discussing with their leadership about the alternatives we proposed. We are waiting. Soon they will get back to us."

However, critics believe no substantive agreement can be reached by the current Afghan government team, which is widely perceived to lack strong politicians or influential figures with the authority to be effective.

"The republic team is formed of several different sides, it lacks unity of thought, action and views with tiny authority and zero power," comments Nasratullah Haqqal, a Kabul-based political analyst. Other observers view the Taliban's hard-line views and strategy as a threat to the country's young and fragile democracy, including progress made in the past decades regarding women's and civil rights.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's battlefields continue to be a bloodbath. More than 11 civilians were killed by an airstrike carried out by the Afghan forces in Kunduz province on September 19.

The Taliban claims that the airstrike killed 23 people, including women and children, and injured 17 others.

The highways that connect Afghanistan's provinces and districts, already on the edge of danger for common travelers, are now filled with Taliban checkpoints looking for members of Afghan security forces to exact revenge.

News reports said the Taliban later launched a wave of attacks on security checkpoints in southern ...

P3

By Elayne Clift

Will burqas make a comeback in Afghanistan?

Last May, when militants in Afghanistan killed new mothers and their babies in a Kabul maternity hospital, the world's women shuddered. Afghan women mourned, wept, and worried. Women in Afghanistan have borne the brunt of that country's brutality in ways few people can imagine. Now worries about what comes next in the face of an incomplete, drawn out peace agreement loom large for the females who live there.

The U.S. and the notorious Taliban signed a preliminary peace agreement in February that aimed at ending two decades of war, but things have not gone smoothly. Insurgent activity added to problems related to power-sharing between the Afghan government and the Taliban, with the Taliban demanding release of thousands of prisoners as part of the deal. For women fears of what might happen emanate from

memories of what life was like during the Taliban rule, when art, culture, education and women suffered from horrific repression. Now the Taliban is asserting again that girls' education must end at 6th grade, with one leader stating, according to The New York Times, that "until an Islamic system is established our jihad will continue till doomsday." It wasn't always like this in Afghanistan. In the 1920s things looked hopeful for women there. The king and his wife worked hard to improve women's lives, advocating against the veil and for greater freedom for females. Conservatives pushed back but things were relatively good. In 1964 the constitution gave women the right to vote and to enter politics.

All that came to a halt when the Taliban gained power in 1996, enforcing the brutal oppression of women symbolized by blue burqas and stoning deaths. While

some rights for women were achieved after the Taliban defeat in 2001, Afghan women worry now that the peace talks will bargain away many of those rights, which included girls' education and women's right to work. Post-Taliban, a 2015 National Action Plan offered soothing rhetorical assurances that went nowhere given the commitment to "maintain cultural and religious codes." As Guardian reporter Emma Graham-Harrison wrote last year, "A generation of women have grown up in Afghanistan since the Taliban were toppled. But many of those who have guided the country through profound change ... are haunted by memories of their brutal, misogynist rule." Those groundbreaking women included educators, journalists and politicians, many of whom suffered hideous physical and emotional abuse. One of the most ...

P3

Remembering Fall of Kabul to Taliban 24 Years Ago



24 years ago on September 27 (or 6th Meezan 1375 in the solar year) the Taliban entered the capital city of Kabul, just two years after the group was formally founded.

Kabul at the time was under the control of the Afghan mujahideen, but disagreements between mujahideen factions created an opportunity for the Taliban to take control of territory very easily.

The Afghan mujahideen factions evacuated Kabul and the Taliban regime lasted for five years.

At the time, the Afghan people were tired of the civil war that had gripped their country following the victory of the mujahideen over the Soviet-backed government of Najibullah, and many Afghans expected that the Taliban would rebuild their country and that peace would prevail despite the very restrictive

Taliban laws.

Meanwhile, for many Afghan girls and women, the group's domination of the country's major cities meant the end of their dreams and aspirations.

Shahnaz Ghawsi is a member of the Afghan parliament who during the Taliban regime witnessed the beating of girls and women who were accused of violating the Taliban's rules. But the hardship seen by Afghan women such as Shahnaz Ghawsi has made them more resilient in the face of current difficulties in the country, Ghawsi says.

"We are among those who worked alongside our brothers over the past 20 years, we served and struggled, today we have the right to work, today we have the right to be present in the society," said Ghawsi.

"There was a situation in which ...

P3

259 Public Works Projects Awarded to Private Firms

The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) on Saturday announced that it has awarded 259 public projects to private companies. According to MRRD officials, the projects will cost over 2 billion Afs. Out of the total number of 259 projects, 107 projects will cover the Kochis (nomads) in different parts of the country, said the officials. Meanwhile, representatives of the Kochis have said that implementation of these projects will help them to develop their economies. The projects include 61 to provide clean drinking water and canals. 107 development projects have gone to Kochis in 17 provinces of the country.

40 of them are transportation projects and 75 are retaining wall projects. "Based on the recommendations of residents in the villages, these projects were prioritized," said Mujiburrahman Karimi, the acting Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. "It has major significance for the economies of the Kochis," said Nangyalai Long, a member of parliament. According to MRRD, the implementation of these projects in 32 provinces of the country will create thousands of jobs. "Our livestock were dying, we don't have health clinics," said Sher Mohammad, a representative of Kochis



in Kunduz. The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development has said that from the total of 259 projects, 12 projects will be funded by the aid which will be given by the Asian Development Bank and 11 projects will be funded by German aid.

Talking peace while...

Afghanistan, killing a total of 28 Afghan policemen. Zalgai Ebadi, a spokesman for the Uruzgan governor, said Taliban fighters offered 28 local and national police officials a chance to go home if they surrendered on September 22, "but after taking their guns, the Taliban killed them all." Negotiators are not allowing the violence to scupper the talks, at least not yet. "Expecting to end 20 years of war in two days is neither practical nor logical," says Naeem Wardak, a Taliban political spokesperson. "There is a need of time, talks, and discussions. What matters though is determination and willing to start discussion. We have them both." Other influential actors are so far staying on the sidelines. Among them are former president Hamid Karzai and ex-mujahideen leader and founder of the powerful Hezb-e-Islami party Gulbdeen Hekmatyar. Both have refused to join the High Council for National Reconciliation and have kept their distance from the team announced in a decree by President Ghani. Karzai announced in a statement that he will continue his personal efforts for peace but will not serve any government institution. Hekmatyar, who returned to the Afghan political scene after the peace deal between Hezb-e-Islami and the government signed in 2016 called the mujahideen's membership and political leaders in the council "symbolic and ineffective." Whether there is any progress towards peace will depend on the willingness of all actors to compromise and find common ground. While Ghani's government and the Taliban are now engaged in talks, the clouds have not yet begun to clear over Afghanistan's future.

Imran Khan warns...

"Thus began arduous rounds of talks between the US and the Taliban, which culminated in the February US-Taliban peace agreement. This agreement, in turn, has laid the groundwork for talks between the Afghan leadership and the Taliban." The premier added that despite hurdles, the peace talks remained successful due to the courage and flexibility displayed by all sides. But Khan noted that the intra-Afghan negotiations were likely to be even more difficult, requiring patience and compromise from all sides. In conclusion, he reiterated that Pakistan will continue to support the Afghan people in their quest for a unified, independent and sovereign country that is at peace with itself and its neighbours.

Will burqas...

pressing issues for women leaders in Afghanistan now is that women will not have a legitimate seat at the tables of decision-making, and that only selective women will be half-heartedly consulted. At a conference attended by 700 women in Kabul last year representing 34 provinces, fears were expressed about the Taliban being brought back into government, renewing the oppression of women and girls. Afghan's first lady Rula Ghani urged the women to express their views publicly, but her husband's speech didn't address the issue of women's rights under a new government. According to a report in Pass Blue, a blog offering independent coverage of the United Nations, "the participation of Afghan women without methodical, sustained and substantive engagement in a peace settlement has the potential to harm them, not help them." As one Afghan woman put it, "we've seen firsthand how well-intentioned efforts sometimes promote

progress for Afghan women while quietly failing them." For example, a multi-year U.S.-funded program to teach computer programming to women in Afghan villages ended without funds and no real opportunities having been provided, confirming for village men that educating women was useless. Intra-Afghan peace talks a year ago included women and received accolades from international media, but Afghan women were not impressed. "It was mere tokenism," a woman who participated said. "Women on the delegation were called two days beforehand, leaving women to appear unorganized and unprepared." As Afghan journalist Mariam Atahi told Pass Blue, "There have been lots of conferences across Afghanistan to see what women wanted in rural and urban areas ... Women have worked to form the narrative on women's right, including efforts to change the interpretation of Islamic law implemented by the Taliban in rural areas they control, but these activists

were sidelined from the peace negotiations." Najia Nasim, executive director of Women for Afghan Women, the largest women's rights organization in Afghanistan, told me recently that "Afghan women insist on an inclusive intra-Afghan process where we can meaningfully participate to address institutional mechanisms of peace and amplify the diverse voices of women from around the country." Women's omission from the peace process, she said, "inhibits our ability to convey our unique experiences, grievances, priorities, and hopes for Afghanistan's future, and to shape post-conflict institutions and broader society." Afghan women need to be assured a seat at the table where they can participate substantively in political discourse, monitor problems and progress, and ensure accountability on behalf of the country's women. Nothing less than that is acceptable in an environment where the Taliban may well be at the table with them.

Remembering...

Afghanistan was under attack from all sides, all forces were fighting each other, and they failed to address the demands of the people," said Mohammad Musa Pakteen, an Afghan citizen. 24 years after the entry of the Taliban in Kabul, the United States signed a peace deal with the Taliban in Doha and the Afghan people hope there is a possibility for a political settlement to end the conflict. Assassination of President Najibullah After entering Kabul, the Taliban swiftly killed Dr. Najibullah and his brother Shahpor Ahmadzai and hung their bodies in Ariana Square in Kabul. Every year, Najibullah's supporters commemorate his death in Kabul and in the provinces. This year, Najibullah's supporters were expected to commemorate the anniversary of his death in the Loya Jirga hall, but the ceremony was cancelled. Najibullah's supporters say there are some circles who pressured the government to not allow the ceremony to take

place in the Loya Jirga hall. They said that such moves are against democratic values. Members of the Hizb-e-Watan party, for which Najibullah was chairman, have said that more than 10,000 people had registered their names to participate in the ceremony. "We received a message from the Presidential Palace that you can't organize the ceremony in the Loya Jirga Hall," said Shafiq, a supporter of Najibullah. In a letter purportedly issued by the Gulbuddin Hekmatyar-led Hizb-e-Islami party, the government was warned against allowing Najibullah's supporters to convene their ceremony in the Loya Jirga hall. On Friday, Hekmatyar himself asked Hizb-e-Islami supporters to stop the ceremony. "Siege the Loya Jirga on the day of commemoration of the killer Najibullah and close down all roads," said Hekmatyar. Meanwhile, Fatana Najibullah, the wife of Najibullah, in a message said that she and her children share the same pain other Afghans have today from war and bloodshed. "My children and myself have

experienced the biggest tragedy and its bitter implications and have paid the biggest price from the martyrdom of Dr. Najibullah and martyr Ahmadzai. We feel the burden of this national tragedy that is in the heart of every Afghan, we share a common pain with all families," said Fatana Najibullah. Shakar Dara protests Meanwhile, some families in Shakar Dara district of Kabul who lost their loved ones during the Taliban period said that they are prepared to pardon the Taliban if all layers of the society are included in the peace talks. They said that the Taliban committed major atrocities in the district 24 years ago. Kundil Quraishi is a resident of Shakar Dara who lost four of his family members in the Taliban's offensive on Shakar Dara. "Unforgeable crimes occurred, but we are ready to make peace for the future of our children," he said. Family members of war victims in the country expect that any agreement with the Taliban will take into account the rights of all people, especially those who have been victims of violence.

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French president says longtime Belarus leader 'must go'

France is stepping up the pressure on Belarus' longtime leader Alexander Lukashenko, with President Emmanuel Macron telling a prominent French weekly that "Lukashenko must go."

The European Union said Thursday it does not recognize Lukashenko as president of Belarus because of large-scale protests by Belarusians who question the results of last month's presidential election that Lukashenko claims he overwhelmingly won. Opposition members and some poll workers in Belarus say the vote was rigged.

Ahead of a trip Monday to Lithuania and Latvia, Macron was quoted in Sunday's Journal du Dimanche newspaper as saying "it's clear that Lukashenko must go."

"What's happening in Belarus is a crisis of power, an authoritarian power that can't manage to accept the logic of democracy and is clinging on by force," the newspaper quotes Macron as saying.

In a speech Saturday to the virtual UN General Assembly, Belarus' foreign minister warned Western nations against interfering or imposing sanctions over the country's disputed presidential election and the government's violent crackdown on protesters.

Thousands of Belarusian citizens have taken part in huge rallies since the Aug. 9 election, which they say was rigged in favor of Lukashenko, who has been in power for 26 years and just took a secretive oath of office for a new term.



A look at the world

Chinese FM to visit Japan next month, may meet PM Yoshihide Suga

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi may visit Japan as early as October, a government source said on Sunday, after the leaders of the two countries agreed to pursue high-level contacts to promote regional and international stability.

Wang would hold talks with his Japanese counterpart Toshimitsu Motegi and Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga during the trip, the source said.

The visit would come after Suga and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed during a phone conversation on Friday to have more high-level contacts.



Suga and Wang would likely agree to strengthen economic ties between the nations, said the source who declined to be named as the information is not public. The visit was earlier reported by public broadcaster NHK.

Suga, who became prime minister earlier this month, must manage relations with Japan's bigger neighbour as ties between China and the United States worsen amid the coronavirus pandemic and lingering trade friction.

Tokyo is also in a dispute with Beijing over ownership of islands in the East China Sea and has expressed concern about an uptick in Chinese military activity the region.

Separately, Suga plans to meet U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in early October, the government source said, as Pompeo will visit Tokyo for a meeting with his counterparts of Australia, India and Japan.

Suga is also considering having a telephone conversation with leaders of Russia, France and Italy, the source added.

Yemen, Houthi rebels agree to exchange 1,000 prisoners



Yemen's warring parties have agreed to exchange some 1,000 prisoners, including 19 Saudi soldiers, a partial implementation of trust-building measures agreed during peace talks held in Sweden at the end of 2018.

Sources familiar with the talks said the Yemeni government, backed by a Saudi-led military coalition, and the Iran-aligned Houthi group they have been battling for over five years have agreed on a list of 1,080 prisoners to be swapped in what would be the largest instalment yet.

The prisoner swap deal, which aimed for the release of some 15,000 detainees from the two sides, has been slowly and only partially implemented. The ICRC will oversee the return of detainees to their families.

UN envoy Martin Griffiths and an official from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) are due to hold a news briefing later on Sunday, at the end of a week-long meeting of the Yemen prisoners and detainee's committee.

"What matters to us is implementing the prisoners [exchange] and not just signing it," senior Houthi official Mohammed Ali al-Houthi tweeted early on Sunday.

In unilateral moves, the Houthis last year freed 290 prisoners and Saudi Arabia released 128, while a locally mediated swap in Taiz governorate saw dozens freed. In January this year, the ICRC facilitated the release of six Saudis held by the Houthis.

The latest talks that started in an undisclosed location in Switzerland on September 18 aimed at agreeing to the release of 1,420 prisoners. Among them is the brother of Yemeni President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. But the release of General Nasser Mansour Hadi from the hands of the rebels "has been postponed", according to a Yemeni government delegation member.

Yemen has been mired in conflict since the Houthis removed the internationally recognised government from power in the capital, Sanaa in late 2014, prompting the Saudi-led coalition to intervene in March 2015.

The conflict has killed tens of thousands of people, most of them civilians, ... **P2**

Armenian government introduces martial law, announces general mobilization

The Armenian government imposed martial law in the country in connection with the escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh and announced a general mobilization, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan wrote on his Facebook page on Sunday.

"Dear compatriots, now, by the decision of the government, martial law and general mobilization are declared in Armenia. I urge all personnel to come to recruitment offices," he said.

Earlier, President of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Arayik Harutyunyan announced martial law



in the country due to the escalation of the situation on the line of contact with Azerbaijan.

On Sunday morning, Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan said that Armenia began intensive shelling on the positions of the Azerbaijani army and settlements, with reported casualties and wounded among the civilian population. In turn, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced that the Azerbaijani armed forces launched an offensive in the direction of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The conflict between Baku and Yerevan began in February 1988, when the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region announced its secession from the Azerbaijan SSR. During the conflict of 1992-1994, Azerbaijan lost control over Nagorno-Karabakh and seven adjacent regions. Since 1992, negotiations have been held on a peaceful settlement of the conflict within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group, chaired by Russia, the United States, and France.



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